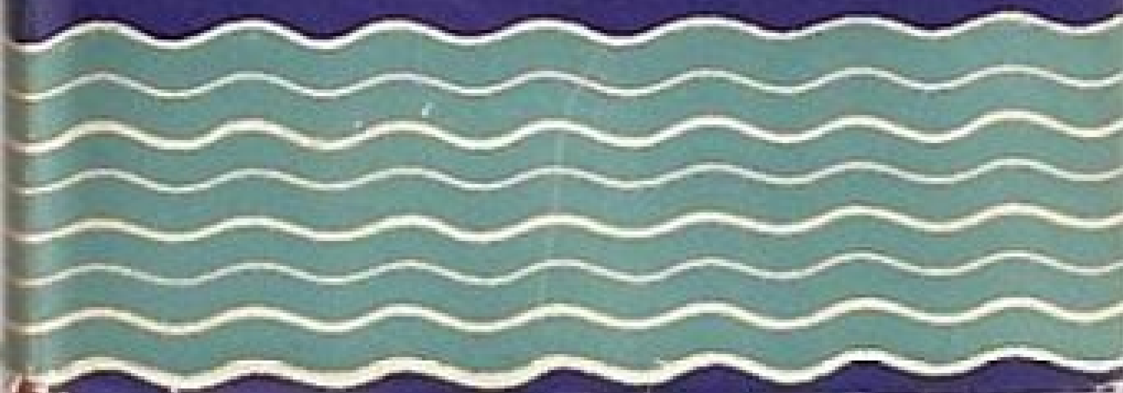
Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

Q's Shorter Stories



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SHORTER STORIES

Arthur Quiller-Couch

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INTRODUCTION

Only a few months before his death 'Q' proposed the publication of this collection of his shorter stories. He selected the candidates himself, and arranged them in the order in which they are printed in this book, under the three headings of stories, fantasias, and drolls. He did not live to read the proofs, and this part of the work has been undertaken by his widow.

No one could have been more modest than 'Q' about his original work—though he could be brought to admit occasionally that he had written a few decent short stories—and it is therefore significant that the supervision of this volume has been one of his last literary acts. He was as critical of his own work as he was of every one else's, and the frequent temporary success of inferior work only served to strengthen his faith that 'all good writing has a mysterious way of arriving, soon or late, at its own.' The recent popular demand from the fighting forces and elsewhere for his stories of thirty and forty years ago is the best tribute to him, indeed the only one he would value.

E. F. B.

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THE SPINSTER'S MAYING

The fields breathe sweet, the daisies kiss our feet,
Young lovers meet, old wives a-sunning sit;
In every street these tunes our ears do greet—
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-wee, to-witta-woo!
Spring, the sweet Spring.

At two o'clock on May morning, a fishing-boat with a small row-boat in tow stole up the harbour between the lights of the vessels that lay at anchor. She came on a soundless tide, with her sprit-mainsail wide and drawing, and her foresail flapping idle; and although her cuddy-top and gunwale glistened wet with a recent shower, the man who steered her looked over his shoulder at the waning moon and decided that the dawn would be a fine one. A furlong below the Town Quay he left the tiller and lowered sail: two furlongs above, he dropped anchor: then, having made all shipshape, he lit a pipe and pulled an enormous watch from his fob. The vessels he had passed since entering the harbour's mouth seemed one and all asleep. But a din of horns, kettles, and tea-trays, and a wild tattoo of door-knockers, sounded along the streets behind the stores and houses that lined the water-side. Already the town-boys were ushering in the month of May.

The man waited until the half-hour chimed over the longshore roofs from the church tower up the hill; set his watch with care; and sat down to wait for the sun. Upon the wooded cliff that faces the town the birds were waking; and by and by, from the three small quays came the sound of voices laughing, and then a boat or two stealing out of the shadow, each crowded with boys and maidens. Before the dawn grew grey red above the cliff where the birds sang, a dozen boats had gone by him on their way up the river, the chatter and broken laughter returning down its dim reaches long after the rowers had passed out of sight.

For some moments longer he watched the broadening daylight; till the sun, mounting above the cliff, blazed on the watch he had again pulled out and now shut with a brisk snap. His round, shaven face, still boyish in middle age, wore the shadow of a solemn responsibility. He clambered out into the small boat astern, and, casting loose, pulled towards a bright patch of colour in the grey shore wall: a blue quay-door overhung with ivy. The upper windows of the cottage behind it were draped with snowy muslin, and its walls, coated with recent whitewash, shamed its neighbours to right and left.

As the boat dropped under this blue quay-door, its upper flap opened softly, and a voice as softly said:

‘Thank you kindly, John. And how d’ye do this May morning?’

‘Charming,’ the man answered frankly. ‘Handsome weather ’tis, to be sure.’

He looked up and smiled at her, like a lover.

‘I needn’t to ask how *you* be; for you’m looking sweet as blossom,’ he went on.

And yet the woman that smiled down on him was fifty years old at least. Her hair, which usually lay in two flat bands, closely drawn over the temples, had for this occasion been worked into waves by curling-papers, and twisted in front of either ear, into that particular ringlet locally called a kiss-me-quick. But it was streaked with grey, and the pinched features wore the tint of pale ivory.

‘D’ye think you can clamber down the ladder, Sarah? The tide’s fairly high.’

‘I’m afraid I’ll be showing my ankles.’

‘I was hoping so. Wunnerful ankles you’ve a-got, Sarah, and a wunnerful cage o’ teeth. Such extremities’d well beseem a king’s daughter, all glorious within!’

Sarah Blewitt pulled upon the lower flap of the door and set her foot on the ladder. She wore a white print gown beneath her cloak, and a small bonnet of black straw decorated with sham cowslips. The cloak, hitching for a moment on the ladder’s side, revealed a beaded reticule that hung from her waist, and clinked as she descended.

‘I reckon there’s scarce an inch of paint left on my front door,’ she observed, as the man steadied her with an arm round her waist, and settled her comfortably in the stern-sheets.

He unshipped his oars and began to pull.

‘Aye. I heard ’em whackin’ the door with a deal o’ tow-row. They was going it like billy-O when I came past the Town Quay. But one mustn’ complain, May-mornin’s.’

‘I wasn’ complaining,’ said the woman; ‘I was just remarking. How’s Maria?’

‘She’s nicely, thank you.’

‘And the children?’

‘Brave.’

‘I’ve put up sixpennyworth of nicey in four packets—that’s one apiece—and I’ve written the name on each, for you to take home to ’en.’

She fumbled in her reticule and produced the packets. The peppermint-drops and brandy-balls were wrapped in clean white paper, and the names written in a thin Italian hand. John thanked her and stowed them in his trousers pockets.

‘You’ll give my love to Maria? I take it very kindly her letting you come for me like this.’

‘Oh, as for that——’ began John, and broke off; ‘I don’t call to mind that ever I saw a more handsome morning for the time o’ year.’

They had made this expedition together more than a score of times, and always found the same difficulty in conversing. The boat moved easily past the town, the jetties above it, and the vessels that lay off them awaiting their cargo; it turned the corner and glided by woods where the larches were green, the sycamores dusted with bronze, the wild cherry-trees white with blossom, and all voluble. Every little bird seemed ready to burst his throat that morning with the deal he had to say. But these two—the man especially—had nothing to say, yet ached for words.

‘Nance Treweek’s married,’ the woman managed to tell him at last.

‘I was thinking it likely, by the way she was carrying on last Maying.’

‘That wasn’ the man. She’ve kept company with two since him, and mated with a fourth man altogether—quite a different sort, in the commercial traveller line.’

‘Did he wear a seal weskit?’

‘Well, he might have; but not to my knowledge. What makes you ask?’

‘Because I used to know a Johnny Fortnight that wore one in these parts; and I thought it might be he, belike.’

‘Jim had a greater gift o’ speech than you can make pretence to,’ said the woman abruptly. ‘I often wonder that of two twin-brothers one should be so glib and t’other so mumchance.’

‘ ’Tis the Lord’s ways,’ the man answered, resting on his oars. ‘Will you be dabblin’ your feet as usual, Sarah?’

‘Why not?’

He turned the boat’s nose to a small landing-stage cut in the solid rock, where a straight pathway dived between hazel-bushes and appeared again twenty feet above, winding inland around the knap of a green hill. Here he helped her to disembark, and waited with his back to the shore. The spinster behind the hazel screen pulled off shoes and stockings, and paddled about for a minute in the dewy grass that fringed the meadow’s lower slope. Then, drawing a saucer from her reticule, she wrung some dew into it and bathed her face. Ten minutes later she reappeared on the river’s bank.

‘A happy May, John!’

‘A happy May to *you*, Sarah!’

John stepped out beside her, and making his boat fast, followed her up the narrow path and around the shoulder of the steep meadow. They overed a stile, then a second, and were among pink slopes of orchards in bloom. Ahead of them a church tower rose out of soft billows of apple-blossom, and above the

tower a lark was singing. A child came along the footpath from the village with two garlands mounted cross-wise on a pole and looped together with strings of painted birds' eggs. John gave him a penny for his show.

'Here's luck to your maid!' said the wise child.

Sarah was pleased, and added a second penny from her reticule. The boy spat on it for luck, slipped it into his breeches pocket, and went his way skipping.

They stood still and looked after him for some moments, out of pure pleasure in his good humour; then descended among the orchards to the village. Half-way up the street stood the inn, the 'Flowing Source,' with whitewashed front and fuchsia-trees that reached to the first-floor windows; and before it a well enclosed with a round stone wall, over which the toad-flax spread in a tangle. Around the well, in the sunshine, were set a dozen or more small tables, covered with white cloths, and two score at least of young people eating bread and cream and laughing. The landlady, a broad woman in a blue print gown and large apron, came forward.

'Why, Miss Sarah, I'd nigh 'pon given you up. Your table's been spread this hour, an' at last I was forced to ask some o' the young folk if you was dead or no.'

'Why should I be dead more than another?'

'Well, well—in the midst o' life, we're told. 'Tisn' only the ripe apples that the wind scatters. He that comes by your side to-day is but twin-brother to him that came wi' you the first time I mind 'ee, seemin' but yesterday. Eh, Miss Sarah, but I envied 'ee then, sittin' wi' hand in hand, an' but one bite taken out o' your bread and cream; but I was just husband-high myself i' those days and couldn't make the men believe it.'

'Mary Ann Jacobs,' Miss Sarah broke out, 'if 'twas not for the quality of your cream, I'd go a-mayin' elsewhere, for I can truly say I hate your way of talkin' from the bottom of my soul.'

'Sarah,' said John, wiping his mouth as he finished his bread and cream, 'I'm a glum man, as you well know; an' why Providence drowned poor Jim, when it might have taken his twin-image that hadn' half his mouth-speech, is past findin' out. But 'tis generally allowed that the grip o' my hand is uncommon like what Jim's used to be; an' when I gets home to-night, the first thing my old woman'll be sure to ask is: "Did 'ee give Sarah poor Jim's hand-clasp?"—an' what to say I shan't know, unless you honours me so far.'

' 'Tis uncommon good of Maria,' said the woman simply, and stole her thin hand into his horny palm. She had done so, in answer to the same speech, more than twenty times.

‘Not at all,’ said John.

His fingers closed over hers, and rested so. All but a few of the Mayers had risen from the table, and were romping and chasing each other back to the boats; for the majority were shop-girls and apprentices, and must be back in time for business. But Miss Sarah was in no hurry.

‘Not yet,’ she entreated, as John’s grasp began to relax. He tightened it again and waited, while she leant back, breathing short, with half-closed eyes.

At length she said he might release her.

‘I’m sure ’tis uncommon kind of Maria,’ she repeated.

‘I don’t see where the kindness comes in. Maria can have as good any day o’ the year, an’ don’t appear to value it to that extent.’

They walked back through the orchards in silence. At Miss Sarah’s quay-door they parted, and John hoisted sail for his home around the corner of the coast.

THE CONSPIRACY ABOARD THE ‘MIDAS’

‘ARE you going home to England? So am I. I’m Johnny; and I’ve never been to England before, but I know all about it. There’s great palaces of gold and ivory—that’s for the lords and bishops—and there’s Windsor Castle, the biggest of all, carved out of a single diamond—that’s for the queen. And she’s the most beautiful lady in the whole world, and feeds her peacocks and birds of paradise out of a ruby cup. And there the sun is always shining, so that nobody wants any candles. O, words would fail me if I endeavoured to convey to you one-half of the splendours of that enchanted realm!’

This last sentence tumbled so oddly from the childish lips, that I could not hide a smile as I looked down on my visitor. He stood just outside my cabin-door—a small serious boy of about eight, with long flaxen curls hardly dry from his morning bath. In the pauses of conversation he rubbed his head with a large bath-towel. His legs and feet were bare, and he wore only a little shirt and velveteen breeches, with scarlet ribbons hanging untied at the knees.

‘You’re laughing!’

I stifled the smile.

‘What are you laughing at?’

‘Why, you’re wrong, little man, on just one or two points,’ I answered evasively.

‘Which?’

‘Well, about the sunshine in England. The sun is not always shining there, by any means.’

‘I’m afraid you know very little about it,’ said the boy, shaking his head.

'Johnny! Johnny!' a voice called down the companion-ladder at this moment. It was followed by a thin, weary-looking man, dressed in carpet slippers and a suit of seedy black. I guessed his age at fifty, but suspect now that the lines about his somewhat prim mouth were traced there by sorrows rather than by years. He bowed to me shyly, and addressed the boy.

'Johnny, what are you doing here? in bare feet!'

'Father, here is a man who says the sun doesn't always shine in England.'

The man gave me a fleeting embarrassed glance, and echoed, as if to shirk answering:

'In bare feet!'

'But it does, doesn't it! Tell him that it does,' the child insisted.

Driven thus into a corner, the father turned his profile, avoiding my eyes, and said dully:

'The sun is always shining in England.'

'Go on, father; tell him the rest.'

'—and the use of candles, except as a luxury, is consequently unknown to the denizens of that favoured clime,' he wound up, in the tone of a man who repeats an old, old lecture.

Johnny was turning to me triumphantly, when his father caught him by the hand and led him back to his dressing. The movement was hasty, almost rough. I stood at the cabin-door and looked after them for a few moments.

We were fellow-passengers aboard the *Midas*, a merchant barque of near on a thousand tons, homeward bound from Cape Town; and we had lost sight of Table Mountain and its 'table-cloth' just twelve hours before. It was the first week of the new year, and all day long a fiery sun made life below deck insupportable. Nevertheless, though we three were the only passengers on board, and lived constantly in sight of each other, it was many days before I made any further acquaintance with Johnny and his father. The sad-faced man clearly desired to avoid me, answering my nod with a cold embarrassment, and clutching Johnny's hand whenever the child called 'Good-morning!' to me cordially. I fancied him ashamed of his foolish falsehood; and I, on my side, was angry because of it. The pair were for ever strolling backwards and forwards on deck, or resting beneath the awning on the poop, and talking—always talking. I fancied the boy was delicate; he certainly had a bad cough during the first few days. But this went away as our voyage proceeded, and his colour was rich and rosy.

One afternoon I caught a fragment of their talk as they passed, Johnny brightly dressed and smiling, his father looking even more shabby and weary than usual. The man was speaking.

'And Queen Victoria rides once a year through the streets of London on her milk-white courser, to hear the nightingales sing in the Tower. For when

she came to the throne the Tower was full of prisoners, but with a stroke of her sceptre she changed them all into song-birds. Every year she releases fifty; and that is why they sing so rapturously, because each one hopes his turn has come at last.'

I turned away. It was unconscionable to cram the child's mind with these preposterous fables. I pictured the poor little chap's disappointment when the bleak reality came to stare him in the face. To my mind, his father was worse than an idiot, and I could hardly bring myself to greet him next morning, when we met.

My disgust did not seem to trouble him. In a timid way, even, his eyes expressed satisfaction. For a week or two I left him alone, and then was forced to speak.

It happened in this way. We had spun merrily along the tail of the S.E. trades and glided slowly to a standstill on a glassy ocean, and beneath a sun that at noon left us shadowless. A fluke or two of wind had helped us across the line; but now, in 2° 7′ north latitude, the *Midas* slept like a turtle on the greasy sea. The heat of the near African coast seemed to beat like steam against our faces. The pitch bubbled like caviare in the seams of the white deck, and the shrouds and ratlines ran with tears of tar. To touch the brass rail of the poop was to blister the hand, to catch a whiff from the cook's galley was to feel sick for ten minutes. The hens in their coops lay with eyes glazed, and gasped for air. If you hung forward over the bulwarks you stared down into your own face. The sailors grumbled and cursed and panted as they huddled under a second awning that was rigged up to give shade rather than coolness; for coolness was not to be had.

On the second afternoon of the calm I happened to pass this awning, and glanced in. Pretty well all the men were there, lounging, with shirts open and chests streaming with sweat; and in their midst, on a barrel, sat Johnny, with a flushed face.

The boatswain—Gibbings by name—was speaking. I heard him say: 'An' the Lord Mayor'll be down to meet us, sonny, at the docks, wi' his five-an'-fifty black boys all a-blowin' Hallelujarum on their silver key-bugles. An' we'll be took in tow to the Mansh'n 'Ouse an' fed——' Here he broke off and passed the back of his hand across his mouth, with a glance at the ship's cook, who had been driven from his galley by the heat. But the cook had no suggestions to make. His soul was still sick with the reek of the boiled pork and pease pudding he had cooked two hours before under a torrid and vertical sun.

'We'll put it at hokey-pokey, nothin' a lump, if you *don't* mind, sonny,' the boatswain went on; 'in a nice airy parlour painted white, with a gilt chandelier an' gilt coamings to the wainscot.' His picture of the Mansion House, as he

proceeded, was drawn from his reading in the Book of Revelation and his own recollections of Thames-side gin-palaces and the saloons of passenger steamers, and gave the impression of a virtuous gambling-hell. The whole crew listened admiringly, and it seemed they were all in the stupid conspiracy. I resolved, for Johnny's sake, to protest, and that very evening drew Gibbings aside and expostulated with him.

'Why,' I asked, 'lay up this cruel, this certain disappointment for the little chap? Why yarn to him as if he were bound for the New Jerusalem?'

The boatswain stared at me point-blank, at first incredulously, then with something like pity.

'Why, sir, don't you know? Can't you see for yoursel'? It's because he *is* bound for the New Jeroosalem; because—bless his tender soul!—that's all the land he'll ever touch.'

'Good Lord!' I cried. 'Nonsense! His cough's better; and look at his cheeks.'

'Aye—we knows that colour on this line. His cough's better, you say; and I say this weather's killing him. You just wait for the nor'-east trades.'

I left Gibbings, and, after pacing up and down the deck a few times, stepped to the bulwarks, where a dark figure was leaning and gazing out over the black waters.

Johnny was in bed; and a great shame swept over me as I noted the appealing wretchedness of this lonely form.

I stepped up and touched him softly on the arm.

'Sir, I am come to beg your forgiveness.'

Next morning I joined the conspiracy.

After his father, I became Johnny's most constant companion. 'Father disliked you at first,' was the child's frank comment; 'he said you told fibs, but now he wants us to be friends.' And we were excellent friends. I lied from morning to night—lied glibly, grandly. Sometimes, indeed, as I lay awake in my berth, a horror took me lest the springs of my imagination should run dry. But they never did. As a liar, I outclassed every man on board.

But by and by, as we caught the first draught of the trades, the boy began to punctuate my fables with that hateful cough. This went on for a week; and one day, in the midst of our short stroll, his legs gave way under him. As I caught him in my arms, he looked up with a smile.

'I'm very weak, you know. But it'll be all right when I get to England.'

But it was not till we had passed well beyond the equatorial belt that Johnny grew visibly worse. In a week he had to lie still on his couch beneath the awning, and the patter of his feet ceased on the deck. The captain, who was a bit of a doctor, said to me one day:

'He will never live to see England.'

But he did.

It was a soft spring afternoon when the *Midas* sighted the Lizard, and Johnny was still with us, lying on his couch, though almost too weak to move a limb. As the day wore on we lifted him up once or twice to look.

‘Can you see them quite plain?’ he asked; ‘and the precious stones hanging on the trees? And the palaces—and the white elephants?’

I stared through my glass at the serpentine rocks and whitewashed lighthouse above them, all powdered with bronze and gold by the sinking sun, and answered:

‘Yes, they are all there.’

All that afternoon we were beside him, looking out and peopling the shores of home with all manner of vain shows and pageants; and when one man broke down another took his place.

As the sun fell, and twilight drew on, the bright revolving lights on the two towers suddenly flashed out their greeting. We were about to carry the child below, for the air was chilly; but he saw the flash, and held up a feeble hand.

‘What is that?’

‘Those two lights,’ I answered, telling my final lie, ‘are the lanterns of Cormelian and Cormoran, the two Cornish giants. They’ll be standing on the shore to welcome us. See—each swings his lantern round, and then for a moment it is dark; now wait a moment, and you’ll see the light again.’

‘Ah!’ said the child, with a smile and a little sigh, ‘it is good to be—home!’

And with that word on his lips, as we waited for the next flash, Johnny stretched himself and died.

PIPES IN ARCADY

I HARDLY can bring myself to part with this story, it has been such a private joy to me. Moreover, that I have lain awake in the night to laugh over it is no guarantee of your being passably amused. Yourselves, I dare say, have known what it is to awake in irrepressible mirth from a dream which next morning proved to be flat and unconvincing. Well, this my pet story has some of the qualities of a dream; being absurd, for instance, and almost incredible, and even a trifle inhuman. After all, I had better change my mind, and tell you another——

But no; I will risk it, and you shall have it, just as it befel.

. . . . .

I had taken an afternoon's holiday to make a pilgrimage: my goal being a small parish church that lies remote from the railway, five good miles from the tiniest of country stations; my purpose to inspect—or say, rather, to contemplate—a Norman porch, for which it ought to be widely famous. (Here let me say that I have an unlearned passion for Norman architecture—to enjoy it merely, not to write about it.)

To carry me on my first stage I had taken a crawling local train that dodged its way somehow between the regular expresses and the 'excursions' that invade our Delectable Duchy from June to October. The season was high midsummer, the afternoon hot and drowsy with scents of mown hay; and between the rattle of the fast trains it seemed that we, native denizens of the Duchy, careless of observation or applause, were executing a *tour de force* in that fine indolence which has been charged as a fault against us. That we halted at every station goes without saying. Few sidings—however inconsiderable or, as it might seem, fortuitous—escaped the flattery of our prolonged sojourn. We ambled, we paused, almost we dallied with the butterflies lazily afloat over the meadow-sweet and cow-parsley beside the line; we exchanged gossip with station-masters, and received the congratulations of signalmen on the extraordinary spell of fine weather. It did not matter. Three market-women, a pedlar, and a local policeman made up with me the train's complement of passengers. I gathered that their business could wait; and as for mine—well, a Norman porch is by this time accustomed to waiting.

I will not deny that in the end I dozed at intervals in my empty smoking compartment; but wish to make it clear that I came on the Vision (as I will call it) with eyes open, and that it left me staring, wide-awake as Macbeth.

Let me describe the scene. To the left of the line as you travel westward there lies a long grassy meadow on a gentle acclivity, set with three or four umbrageous oaks and backed by a steep plantation of oak saplings. At the foot of the meadow, close alongside the line, runs a brook, which is met at the meadow's end by a second brook which crosses under the permanent way through a culvert. The united waters continue the course of the first brook, beside the line, and maybe for half a mile farther; but, a few yards below their junction, are partly dammed by the masonry of a bridge over which a country lane crosses the railway; and this obstacle spreads them into a pool some fifteen or twenty feet wide, overgrown with the leaves of the arrowhead, and fringed with water-flags and the flowering rush.

Now I seldom pass this spot without sparing a glance for it; first because of the pool's still beauty, and secondly because many rabbits infest the meadow below the coppice, and among them for two or three years was a black fellow whom I took an idle delight in recognizing. (He is gone now, and his place

knows him no more; yet I continue to hope for sight of a black rabbit just there.) But this afternoon I looked out with special interest because, happening to pass down the line two days before, I had noted a gang of navvies at work on the culvert; and among them, as they stood aside to let the train pass, I had recognized my friend Joby Tucker, their ganger, and an excellent fellow to boot.

Therefore my eyes were alert as we approached the curve that opens the meadow into view, and—as I am a Christian man, living in the twentieth century—I saw this Vision: I beheld beneath the shade of the midmost oak eight men sitting stark naked, whereof one blew on a flute, one played a concertina, and the rest beat their palms together, marking the time; while before them, in couples on the sward, my gang of navvies rotated in a clumsy waltz watched by a ring of solemn ruminant kine!

I saw it. The whole scene, barring the concertina and the navvies' clothes, might have been transformed straight from a Greek vase of the best period. Here, in this green corner of rural England on a workaday afternoon (a Wednesday, to be precise), in full sunlight, I saw this company of the early gods sitting, naked and unabashed, and piping, while twelve British navvies danced to their music. . . . I saw it; and a derisive whistle from the engine told me that driver and stoker saw it too. I was not dreaming, then. But what on earth could it mean? For fifteen seconds or so I stared at the Vision . . . and so the train joggled past it and rapt it from my eyes.

I can understand now the ancient stories of men who, having by hap surprised the goddesses bathing, never recovered from the shock but thereafter ran wild in the woods with their memories.

At the next station I alighted. It chanced to be the station for which I had taken my ticket; but anyhow I should have alighted there. The spell of the vision was upon me. The Norman porch might wait. It is (as I have said) used to waiting, and in fact it has waited. I have not yet made another holiday to visit it. Whether or no the market-women and the local policeman had beheld, I know not. I hope not, but now shall never know. . . . The engine-driver, leaning in converse with the station-master, and jerking a thumb backward, had certainly beheld. But I passed him with averted eyes, gave up my ticket, and struck straight across country for the spot.

I came to it, as my watch told me, at twenty minutes after five. The afternoon sunlight still lay broad on the meadow. The place was unchanged save for a lengthening of its oak-tree shadows. But the persons of my Vision—naked gods and navvies—had vanished. Only the cattle stood, knee-deep in the pool, lazily swishing their tails in protest against the flies; and the cattle could tell me nothing.

. . . . .

Just a fortnight later, as I spent at St. Blazey junction the forty odd minutes of repentance ever thoughtfully provided by our railway company for those who, living in Troy, are foolish enough to travel, I spied at some distance below the station a gang of men engaged in unloading rubble to construct a new siding for the clay-traffic, and at their head my friend Mr. Joby Tucker. The railway company was consuming so much of my time that I felt no qualms in returning some part of the compliment, and strolled down the line to wish Mr. Tucker good day. 'And, by the bye,' I added, 'you owe me an explanation. What on earth were you doing in Treba meadow two Wednesdays ago—you and your naked friends?'

Joby leaned on his measuring rod and grinned from ear to ear.

'You see'd us?' he asked, and, letting his eyes travel along the line, he chuckled to himself softly and at length. 'Well, now, I'm glad o' that. 'Fact is, I've been savin' up to tell 'ee about it, but (thinks I) when I tells Mr. Q. he won't never believe.'

'I certainly saw you,' I answered; 'but as for believing——'

'Iss, iss,' he interrupted, with fresh chucklings; 'a fair knock-out, wasn' it? . . . You see, they was blind—poor fellas!'

'Drunk?'

'No, sir—blind—"pity the pore blind"; three-parts blind, anyways, an' undergoin' treatment for it.'

'Nice sort of treatment!'

'Eh? You don't understand. See'd us from the train, did 'ee? Which train?'

'The 1.35 ex Millbay.'

'Wish I'd a-knowed you was watchin' us. I'd ha' waved my hat as you went by, or maybe blawed 'ee a kiss—that bein' properer to the occasion, come to think.'

Joby paused, drew the back of a hand across his laughter-moistened eyes, and pulled himself together, steadying his voice for the story.

. . . . .

'I'll tell 'ee what happened, from the beginnin'. A gang of us had been sent down, two days before, to Treba meadow, to repair the culvert there. Soon as we started work we found the whole masonry fairly rotten, and spent the first afternoon (that was Monday) underpinnin', while I traced out the extent o' the damage. The farther I went, the worse I found it; the main mischief bein' a leak about midway in the culvert, on the down side; whereby the water, perc'latin' through, was unpackin' the soil, not only behind the masonry of the

culvert, but right away down for twenty yards and more behind the stone-facing where the line runs alongside the pool. All this we were forced to take down, shorein' as we went, till we cut back pretty close to the rails. The job, you see, had turned out more serious than reported; and havin' no one to consult, I kept the men at it.

'By Wednesday noon we had cut back so far as we needed, shorein' very careful as we went, and the men workin' away cheerful, with the footboards of the expresses whizzin' by close over their heads, so's it felt like havin' your hair brushed by machinery. By the time we knocked off for dinner I felt pretty easy in mind, knowin' we'd broke the back o' the job.

'Well, we touched pipe and started again. Bein' so close to the line I'd posted a fella with a flag—Bill Martin it was—to keep a look out for the down-trains; an' about three o'clock or a little after he whistled one comin'. I happened to be in the culvert at the time, but stepped out an' back across the brook, just to fling an eye along the embankment to see that all was clear. Clear it was, an' therefore it surprised me a bit, as the train hove in sight around the curve, to see that she had her brakes on, hard, and was slowin' down to stop. My first thought was that Bill Martin must have taken some scare an' showed her the red flag. But that was a mistake; besides she must have started the brakes before openin' sight on Bill.'

'Then why on earth was she pulling up?' I asked. 'It couldn't be signals.'

'There ain't no signal within a mile of Treba meadow, up or down. She was stoppin' because—but just you let me tell it in my own way. Along she came, draggin' hard on her brakes an' whistlin'. I knew her for an excursion, and as she passed I sized it up for a big school-treat. There was five coaches, mostly packed with children, an' on one o' the coaches was a board—"Exeter to Penzance." The four front coaches had corridors, the tail one just ord'nary compartments.

'Well, she dragged past us to dead-slow, an' came to a standstill with her tail coach about thirty yards beyond where I stood, and, as you might say, with its footboard right overhangin' the pool. You mayn't remember it, but the line just there curves pretty sharp to the right, and when she pulled up, the tail coach pretty well hid the rest o' the train from us. Five or six men, hearin' the brakes, had followed me out of the culvert and stood by me, wonderin' why the stoppage was. The rest were dotted about along the slope of th' embankment. And then the curiousest thing happened—about the curiousest thing I seen in all my years on the line. A door of the tail coach opened and a man stepped out. He didn't jump out, you understand, nor fling hisself out; he just stepped out into air, and with that his arms and legs cast themselves anyways an' he went down sprawlin' into the pool. It's easy to say we ought t' have run then an' there an' rescued him; but for the moment it stuck us up

starin' an',—Wait a bit! You han't heard the end.

'I hadn't fairly caught my breath, before another man stepped out! He put his foot down upon nothing, same as the first, overbalanced just the same, and shot after him base-over-top into the water.

'Close 'pon the second man's heels appeared a third. . . . Yes, sir, I know now what a woman feels like when she's goin' to have the scritches.[1] I'd have asked someone to pinch me in the fleshy part o' the leg, to make sure I was alive an' awake, but the power o' speech was taken from us. We just stuck an' stared.

'What beat everything was the behaviour of the train, so to say. There it stood, like as if it'd pulled up alongside the pool for the very purpose to unload these unfort'nit' men; an' yet takin' no notice whatever. Not a sign o' the guard—not a head poked out anywheres in the line o' windows—only the sun shinin', an' the steam escapin', an' out o' the rear compartment this procession droppin' out an' high-divin' one after another.

'Eight of 'em! Eight, as I am a truth-speakin' man—but there! you saw 'em with your own eyes. Eight! and the last of the eight scarce in the water afore the engine toots her whistle an' the train starts on again, round the curve an' out o' sight.

'She didn' leave us no time to doubt, neither, for there the poor fellas were, splashin' an' blowin', some of 'em bleatin' for help, an' gurglin', an' for aught we know drownin' in three-to-four feet o' water. So we pulled ourselves together an' ran to give 'em first aid.

'It didn' take us long to haul the whole lot out and ashore; and, as Providence would have it, not a bone broken in the party. One or two were sufferin' from sprains, and all of 'em from shock (but so were we, for that matter), and between 'em they must ha' swallowed a bra' few pints o' water, an' muddy water at that. I can't tell ezackly when or how we discovered they was all blind, or near-upon blind. It may ha' been from the unhandiness of their movements an' the way they clutched at us an' at one another as we pulled 'em ashore. Hows'ever, blind they were; an' I don't remember that it struck us as anyways singular, after what we'd been through a'ready. We fished out a concertina, too, an' a silver-mounted flute that was bobbin' among the weeds.

'The man the concertina belonged to—a tall fresh-complexioned young fella he was, an' very mild of manner—turned out to be a sort o' leader o' the party; an' he was the first to talk any sense. "Th-thank you," he said. "They told us Penzance was the next stop."

' "Hey?" says I.

' "They told us," he says again, plaintive-like, feelin' for his spectacles an' not finding 'em, "that Penzance was the next stop."

‘ “Bound for Penzance, was you?” I asks.

‘ “For the Land’s End,” says he, his teeth chatterin’. I set it down the man had a stammer, but ’twas only the shock an’ the chill of his duckin’.

‘ “Well,” says I, “this ain’t the Land’s End, though I dessay it feels a bit like it. Then you wasn’ *thrown* out?” I says.

‘ “Th-thrown out?” says he. “N-no. They told us Penzance was the next stop.”

‘ “Then,” says I, “if you got out accidental you’ve had a most providential escape, an’ me an’ my mates don’t deserve less than to hear about it. There’s bound to be inquiries after you when the guard finds your compartment empty an’ the door open. Maybe the train’ll put back; more likely they’ll send a search-party; but anyways you’re all wet through, an’ the best thing for health is to off wi’ your clothes an’ dry ’em, this warm afternoon.”

‘ “I dessay,” says he, “you’ll have noticed that our eyesight is affected.”

‘ “All the better if you’re anyways modest,” says I. “You couldn’ find a retirededer place than this—not if you searched: an’ *we* don’t mind.”

‘Well, sir, the end was we stripped ’em naked as Adam, an’ spread their clothes to dry ’pon the grass. While we tended on ’em the mild young man told us how it had happened. It seems they’d come by excursion from Exeter. There’s a blind home at Exeter, an’ likewise a cathedral choir, an’ Sunday school, an’ a boys’ brigade, with other sundries; an’ this year the good people financin’ half a dozen o’ these shows had discovered that by clubbin’ two sixpences together a shillin’ could be made to go as far as eighteenpence; and how, doin’ it on the co-op, instead of an afternoon treat for each, they could manage a two days’ outin’ for all—Exeter to Penzance an’ the Land’s End, sleepin’ one night at Penzance, an’ back to Exeter at some ungodly hour the next. It’s no use your askin’ me why a man three-parts blind should want to visit the Land’s End. There’s an attraction about that place, an’ that’s all you can say. Everybody knows as ’tisn’ worth seein’, an’ yet everybody wants to see it. So why not a blind man?

‘Well, this Happy Holiday Committee (as they called themselves) got the Company to fix them up with a special excursion; an’ our blind friends—bein’ sensitive, or maybe a touch above mixin’ wi’ the schoolchildren an’ infants—had packed themselves into this rear compartment separate from the others. One of ’em had brought his concertina, an’ another his flute, and what with these an’ other ways of passin’ the time they got along pretty comfortable till they came to Gwinear Road: an’ there for some reason they were held up an’ had to show their tickets. Anyways, the staff at Gwinear Road went along the train collectin’ the halves o’ their return tickets. “What’s the name o’ this station?” asks my blind friend, very mild an’ polite. “Gwinear Road,” answers the porter; “Penzance next stop.” Somehow this gave him the notion that they

were nearly arrived, an' so, you see, when the train slowed down a few minutes later an' came to a stop, he took the porter at his word, an' stepped out. Simple, wasn't it? But in my experience the curiousest things in life are the simplest of all, once you come to inquire into 'em.'

'What I don't understand,' said I, 'is how the train came to stop just there.'

Mr. Tucker gazed at me rather in sorrow than in anger. 'I thought,' said he, ' 'twas agreed I should tell the story in my own way. Well, as I was saying, we got those poor fellas there, all as naked as Adam, an' we was helpin' them all we could—some of us wringin' out their underlinen an' spreading it to dry, others collectin' their hats, an' tryin' which fitted which, an' others even dredgin' the pool for their handbags an' spectacles an' other small articles, an' in the middle of it someone started to laugh. You'll scarce believe it, but up to that moment there hadn't been so much as a smile to hand round; an' to this day I don't know the man's name that started it—for all I can tell you, I did it myself. But this I do know, that it set off the whole gang like a motor-engine. There was a sort of "click," an' the next moment——

'Laugh? I never heard men laugh like it in my born days. Sort of recoil, I s'pose it must ha' been, after the shock. Laugh? There was men staggerin' drunk with it and there was men rollin' on the turf with it; an' there was men cryin' with it, holdin' on to a stitch in their sides an' beseechin' every one also to hold hard. The blind men took a bit longer to get going; but by gosh, sir! once started they laughed to do your heart good. O Lord, O Lord! I wish you could ha' see that mild-mannered spokesman. Somebody had fished out his spectacles for 'en, and that was all the clothing he stood in—that, an' a grin. He fairly beamed; an' the more he beamed the more we rocked, callin' on 'en to take pity an' stop it.

'Soon as I could catch a bit o' breath, "Land's End next stop!" gasped I. "O, but this *is* the Land's End! This is what the Land's End oughter been all the time, an' never was yet. O, for the Lord's sake," says I, "stop beamin', and pick up your concertina an' pitch us a tune!"

'Well, he did too. He played us "Home, sweet home" first of all—'mid pleasures an' palaces—an' the rest o' the young men sat around 'en an' started clappin' their hands to the tune; an' then some fool slipped an arm round my waist. I'm only thankful he didn't kiss me. Didn't think of it, perhaps; couldn't ha' been that he wasn't capable. It must ha' been just then your train came along. An' about twenty minutes later, when we was gettin' our friends back into their outfits, we heard the search-engine about half a mile below, whistlin' an' feelin' its way up very cautious towards us.

'They was sun-dried an' jolly as sandhoppers—all the eight of 'em—as we helped 'em on board an' wished 'em ta-ta! The search-party couldn' understand at all what had happened—in so short a time, too—to make us so

cordial; an' somehow we didn' explain—neither we nor the blind men. I reckon the whole business had been so loonatic we felt it kind of holy. But the pore fellas kept wavin' back to us as they went out o' sight around the curve, an' maybe for a mile beyond. I never heard,' Mr. Tucker wound up meditatively, 'if they ever reached the Land's End. I wonder?'

'But, excuse me once more,' said I. 'How came the train to stop as it did?'

'To be sure. I said just now that the curiousest things in life were, gen'rally speakin', the simplest. One o' the schoolchildren in the fore part of the train—a small nipper of nine—had put his head out o' the carriage window and got his cap blown away. That's all. Bein' a nipper of some resource, he wasted no time, but touched off the communicatin' button an' fetched the whole train to a standstill. George Simmons, the guard, told me all about it last week, when I happened across him an' asked the same question you've been askin'. George was huntin' through the corridors to find out what had gone wrong; that's how the blind men stepped out without his noticin'. He pretended to be pretty angry wi' the young tacker. "Do 'ee know," says George, "it's a five pound fine if you stop a train without good reason?" "But I *had* a good reason," says the child. "My mother gave 'levenpence for that cap, an' 'tis a bran' new one." '

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[1] Hysterics.

THE PAUPERS

οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρεῖσσον καὶ ἄρειον,
ἢ ὅθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχητον
ἀνὴρ ἠδὲ γυνή.

I

ROUND the skirts of the plantation, and half-way down the hill, there runs a thick fringe of wild cherry-trees. Their white blossom makes, for three weeks in the year, a pretty contrast with the larches and Scotch firs that serrate the long ridge above; and close under their branches runs the line of oak rails that marks off the plantation from the meadow.

A labouring man came deliberately round the slope, as if following this line of rails. As a matter of fact, he was treading the little-used footpath that here runs close alongside the fence for fifty yards before diverging downhill towards the village. So narrow is this path that the man's boots were powdered to a rich gold by the buttercups they had brushed aside.

By and by he came to a standstill, looked over the fence, and listened. Up among the larches a faint chopping sound could just be heard, irregular but persistent. The man put a hand to his mouth, and hailed:

‘Hi-i-i! Knock off! Stable clock’s gone noo-oon!’

Came back no answer. But the chopping ceased at once; and this apparently satisfied the man, who leaned against the rail and waited, chewing a spear of brome-grass, and staring steadily, but incuriously, at his boots. Two minutes passed without stir or sound in this corner of the land. The human figure was motionless. The birds in the plantation were taking their noonday siesta. A brown butterfly rested, with spread wings, on the rail—so quietly, he might have been pinned there.

A cracked voice was suddenly lifted a dozen yards off, and within the plantation:

‘Such a man as I be to work! Never heard a note o’ that blessed clock, if you’ll believe me. Ab-sorbed, I s’pose.’

A thin withered man in a smock-frock emerged from among the cherry-trees with a bill-hook in his hand, and stooped to pass under the rail.

‘Ewgh! The pains I suffer in that old back of mine you’ll never believe, my son, not till the appointed time when you come to suffer ’em yousel’. Well-a-well! Says I just now, up among the larches, “Heigh, my sonny-boys. I can crow over you, anyways; for I was a man grown when Squire planted ye; and here I be, a lusty gaffer, markin’ ye down for destruction.” But hullo! where’s the dinner?’

‘There bain’t none.’

‘Hey?’

‘There bain’t none.’

‘How’s that? Damme! William Henry, dinner’s dinner, an’ don’t you joke about it. Once you begin to make fun o’ sacred things like meals and vittles ——’

‘And don’t you flare up like that, at your time o’ life. We’re fashionists to-day: dining out. ’Quarter after nine this morning I was passing by the Green wi’ the straw-cart, when old Jan Trueman calls after me, “Have ’ee heard the news?” “What news?” says I. “Why,” says he, “me an’ my missus be going into the House this afternoon—can’t manage to pull along by ourselves no more,” he says; “an’ we wants you an’ your father to drop in soon after noon an’ take a bite wi’ us, for old sake’s sake. ’Tis our last taste o’ free life, and we’m going to do the thing fittywise,” he says.’

The old man bent a meditative look on the village roofs below.

‘We’ll pleasure ’en, of course,’ he said slowly. ‘So ’tis come round to Jan’s turn? But a’ was born in the year of Waterloo victory, ten year’ afore me, so I s’pose he’ve kept his doom off longer than most.’

The two set off down the footpath. There is a stile at the foot of the meadow, and as he climbed it painfully, the old man spoke again.

'And his doorway, I reckon, 'll be locked for a little while, an' then opened by strangers; an' his nimble youth be forgot like a flower o' the field; an' fare thee well, Jan Trueman! Maria, too—I can mind her well as a nursing mother—a comely woman in her day. I'd no notion they'd got this in their mind.'

'Far as I can gather, they've been minded that way ever since their daughter Jane died, last fall.'

From the stile where they stood they could look down into the village street. And old Jan Trueman was plain to see, in clean linen and his Sunday suit, standing in the doorway and welcoming his guests.

'Come ye in—come ye in, good friends,' he called, as they approached. 'There's cold bekkon, an' cold sheep's liver, an' Dutch cheese, besides bread, an' a thimbleful o' gin-an'-water for every soul among ye, to make it a day of note in the parish.'

He looked back over his shoulder into the kitchen. A dozen men and women, all elderly, were already gathered there. They had brought their own chairs. Jan's wife wore her bonnet and shawl, ready to start at a moment's notice. Her luggage in a blue handkerchief lay on the table. As she moved about and supplied her guests, her old lips twitched nervously; but when she spoke it was with no unusual tremor of the voice.

'I wish, friends, I could ha' cooked ye a little something hot; but there'd be no time for the washing-up, an' I've ordained to leave the place tidy.'

One of the old women answered:

'There's nought to be pardoned, I'm sure. Never do I mind such a gay set-off for the journey. For the gin-an'-water is a little addition beyond experience. The vittles, no doubt, you begged up at the Vicarage, sayin' you'd been a peck o' trouble to the family, but this was going to be the last time.'

'I did, I did,' assented Mr. Trueman.

'But the gin-an'-water—how on airth you contrived it is a riddle!'

The old man rubbed his hands together and looked around with genuine pride.

'There was old Miss Scantlebury,' said another guest, a smock-frocked gaffer of seventy, with a grizzled shock of hair. 'You remember Miss Scantlebury?'

'O' course, o' course.'

'Well, she did it better'n anybody I've heard tell of. When she fell into redooced circumstances she sold the eight-day clock that was the only thing o' value she had left. Brown o' Tregarrick made it, with a very curious brass dial, whereon he carved a full-rigged ship that rocked like a cradle, an' went down stern foremost when the hour struck. 'Twas worth walking a mile to see.

Brown's grandson bought it off Miss Scantlebury for two guineas, he being proud of his grandfather's skill; an' the old lady drove into Tregarrick Work'us behind a pair o' greys wi' the proceeds. Over and above the carriage hire, she'd enough left to adorn the horse wi' white favours an' give the rider a crown, large as my lord. Aye, an' at the Work'us door she said to the fellow, said she, "All my life I've longed to ride in a bridal chariot; an' though my only lover died of a decline when I was scarce twenty-one, I've done it at last," said she; "an' now heaven an' airth can't undo it!" '

A heavy silence followed this anecdote, and then one or two of the women vented small disapproving coughs. The reason was the speaker's loud mention of the Workhouse. A week, a day, a few hours before, its name might have been spoken in Mr. and Mrs. Trueman's presence. But now they had entered its shadow; they were 'going'—whether to the dim vale of Avilion, or with chariot and horses of fire to heaven, let nobody too curiously ask. If Mr. and Mrs. Trueman chose to speak definitely, it was another matter.

Old Jan bore no malice, however, but answered, 'That beats me, I own. Yet we shall drive, though it be upon two wheels an' behind a single horse. For Farmer Lear's driving into Tregarrick in an hour's time, an' he've a-promised us a lift.'

'But about that gin-an'-water? For real gin-an'-water it is, to sight an' taste.'

'Well, friends, I'll tell ye: for the trick may serve one of ye in the days when you come to follow me, tho' the new relieving officer may have learnt wisdom before then. You must know we've been considering of this step for some while; but hearing that old Jacobs was going to retire soon, I says to Maria, "We'll bide till the new officer comes, and if he's a green hand, we'll diddle 'en." Day before yesterday, as you know, was his first round at the work; so I goes up an' draws out my ha'af-crown same as usual, an' walks straight off for the "Four Lords" for a ha'af-crown's worth o' gin. Then back I goes, an' demands an admission order for me an' the missus. "Why, where's your ha'af-crown?" says he. "Gone in drink," says I. "Old man," says he, "you'm a scandal, an' the sooner you're put out o' the way o' drink, the better for you an' your poor wife." "Right you are," I says; an' I got my order. But there, I'm wasting time; for to be sure you've most of ye got kith or kin in the place where we'm going, and'll be wanting to send 'em a word by us.'

It was less than an hour before Farmer Lear pulled up to the door in his red-wheeled spring-cart.

'Now, friends,' said Mrs. Trueman, as her ears caught the rattle of the wheels, 'I must trouble ye to step outside while I tidy up the floor.'

The women offered their help, but she declined it. Alone she put the small kitchen to rights, while they waited outside around the door. Then she stepped out with her bundle, locked the door after her, and slipped the key under an old flower-pot on the window-ledge. Her eyes were dry.

'Come'st along, Jan.'

There was a brief hand-shaking, and the paupers climbed up beside Farmer Lear.

'I've made a sort o' little plan in my head,' said old Jan at parting, 'of the order in which I shall see ye again, one by one. 'Twill be a great amusement to me, friends, to see how the fact fits in wi' my little plan.'

The guests raised three feeble cheers as the cart drove away, and hung about for several minutes after it had passed out of sight, gazing along the road as wistfully as more prosperous men look in through churchyard gates at the acres where their kinsfolk lie buried.

II

The first building passed by the westerly road as it descends into Tregarrick is a sombre pile of some eminence, having a gateway and lodge before it, and a high encircling wall. The sun lay warm on its long roof, and the slates flashed gaily there, as Farmer Lear came over the knap of the hill and looked down on it. He withdrew his eyes nervously to glance at the old couple beside him. At the same moment he reined up his dun-coloured mare.

'I reckoned,' he said timidly, 'I reckoned you'd be for stopping hereabouts an' getting down. You'd think it more seemly—that's what I reckoned: an' 'tis all downhill now.'

For ten seconds and more neither the man nor the woman gave a sign of having heard him. The spring-cart's oscillatory motion seemed to have entered into their spinal joints; and now that they were come to a halt, their heads continued to wag forward and back as they contemplated the haze of smoke spread, like a blue scarf, over the town, and the one long slate roof that rose from it as if to meet them. At length the old woman spoke, and with some viciousness, though her face remained as blank as the Workhouse door.

'The next time I go back up this hill, if ever I do, I'll be carried up feet first.'

'Maria,' said her husband, feebly reproachful, 'you tempt the Lord, that you do.'

'Thank 'ee, Farmer Lear,' she went on, paying no heed; 'you shall help us down, if you've a mind to, an' drive on. We'll make shift to trickly 'way down so far as the gate; for I'd be main vexed if anybody that had known me in life should see us creep in. Come'st along, Jan.'

Farmer Lear alighted, and helped them out carefully. He was a clumsy man, but did his best to handle them gently. When they were set on their feet, side by side on the high road, he climbed back, and fell to arranging the reins, while he cast about for something to say.

'Well, folks, I s'pose I must be wishing 'ee good-bye.' He meant to speak cheerfully, but overacted, and was hilarious instead. Recognizing this, he blushed.

'We'll meet in heaven, I dare say,' the woman answered. 'I put the door-key, as you saw, under the empty geranium-pot 'pon the window-ledge; an' whoever the new tenant's wife may be, she can eat off the floor, if she's minded. Now drive along, that's a good soul, and leave us to fend for ourselves.'

They watched him out of sight before either stirred. The last decisive step, the step across the Workhouse threshold, must be taken with none to witness. If they could not pass out of their small world by the more reputable mode of dying, they would at least depart with this amount of mystery. They had left the village in Farmer Lear's cart, and Farmer Lear had left them in the high road; and after that, nothing should be known.

'Shall we be moving on?' Jan asked at length. There was a gate beside the road just there, with a small triangle of green before it, and a granite roller half-buried in dock leaves. Without making any answer, the woman seated herself on this, and pulling a handful of the leaves, dusted her shoes and skirt.

'Maria, you'll take a chill that'll carry you off, sitting 'pon that cold stone.'

'I don't care. 'Twon't carry me off afore I get inside; an' I'm going in decent, or not at all. Come here, an' let me tittivate you.'

He sat down on the stone beside her, and submitted to be dusted.

'You'd as lief lower me as not in their eyes, I verily believe.'

'I always was one to gather dust.'

'An' a fresh spot o' bacon-fat 'pon your weskit, that I've kept the moths from since goodness knows when!'

Old Jan looked down over his waistcoat. It was of good West-of-England broadcloth, and he had worn it on the day when he married the woman at his side.

'I'm thinking——' he began, nervously.

'Hey?'

'I'm thinking I'll find it hard to make friends in—in there. 'Tis such a pity, to my thinking, that by reggilations we'll be parted as soon as we get inside. You've a-got so used to my little ways an' cornders, an' we've a-got so many little secrets together an' old-fash'ned odds an' ends o' knowledge, that you can take my meaning almost afore I start to speak. An' that's a great comfort to a man o' my age. It'll be terrible hard, when I wants to talk, to begin at the

beginning every time. There's that old yarn o' mine about Hambly's cow an' the lawn-mowing machine—I doubt that anybody'll enjoy it so much as you always do; an' I've so got out o' the way o' telling the beginning—which bain't extra funny, though needful to a stranger's understanding the whole joke—that I 'most forgets how it goes.'

'We'll see one another now an' then, they tell me. The sexes meet for Chris'mas-trees an' such-like.'

'I'm jealous that 'twon't be the same. You can't hold your triflin' confabs with a great Chris'mas-tree blazin' away in your face as important as a town afire.'

'Well, I'm going to start along,' the old woman decided, getting on her feet; 'or else someone'll be driving by and seeing us.'

Jan, too, stood up.

'We may so well make our congees here,' she went on, 'as under the porter's nose.'

An awkward silence fell between them for a minute, and these two old creatures, who for more than fifty years had felt no constraint in each other's presence, now looked into each other's eyes with a fearful diffidence. Jan cleared his throat, much as if he had to make a public speech.

'Maria,' he began in an unnatural voice, 'we're bound for to part, and I can trewly swear, on leaving ye, that——'

'——that for two score year and twelve it's never entered your head to consider whether I've made 'ee a good wife or a bad. Kiss me, my old man; for I tell 'ee I wouldn' ha' wished it other. An' thank 'ee for trying to make that speech. What did it feel like?'

'Why, 't reminded me o' the time when I offered 'ee marriage.'

'It reminded me o' that, too,' the woman answered. 'Come'st along.'

They tottered down the hill towards the Workhouse gate. When they were but ten yards from it, however, they heard the sound of wheels on the road behind them, and walked bravely past, pretending to have no business at that portal. They had descended a good thirty yards beyond (such haste was put into them by dread of having their purpose guessed) before the vehicle overtook them—a four-wheeled dog-cart carrying a commercial traveller, who pulled up ind offered them a lift into the town.

They declined.

Then, as soon as he passed out of sight, they turned, and began painfully to climb back towards the gate. Of the two, the woman had shown the less emotion. But all the way her lips were at work, and as she went she was praying a prayer. It was the only one she used night and morning, and she had never changed a word since she learned it as a chit of a child. Down to her seventieth year she had never found it absurd to beseech God to make her 'a

good girl'; nor did she find it so as the Workhouse gate opened, and she began a new life.

OLD AESON

JUDGE between me and my guest, the stranger within my gates, the man whom in his extremity I clothed and fed.

I remember well the time of his coming: for it happened at the end of five days and nights during which the year passed from strength to age; in the interval between the swallow's departure and the redwing's coming; when the tortoise in my garden crept into his winter quarters, and the equinox was on us, with an east wind that parched the blood in the trees, so that their leaves for once knew no gradations of red and yellow, but turned at a stroke to brown, and crackled like tin-foil.

At five o'clock in the morning of the sixth day I looked out. The wind whistled across the sky, but now without the obstruction of any cloud. Full in front of my window Sirius flashed with a whiteness that pierced the eye. A little to the right, the whole constellation of Orion was suspended, clear over a wedge-like gap in the coast, wherein the sea could be guessed rather than seen. And, travelling yet farther, the eye fell on two brilliant lights, the one set high above the other—the one steady and a fiery red, the other yellow and blazing intermittently—the one Aldebaran, the other revolving on the lighthouse top, fifteen miles away.

Half-way up the east, the moon, now in her last quarter and decrepit, climbed with the dawn close at her heels. And at this hour they brought in the Stranger, asking if my pleasure were to give him clothing and hospitality.

Nobody knew whence he came—except that it was from the wind and the night—seeing that he spoke in a strange tongue, moaning and making a sound like the twittering of birds in a chimney. But his journey must have been long and painful; for his legs bent under him, and he could not stand when they lifted him. So, finding it useless to question him for the time, I learnt from the servants all they had to tell—namely, that they had come upon him, but a few minutes before, lying on his face within my grounds, without staff or scrip, bareheaded, spent, and crying feebly for succour in his foreign tongue; and that in pity they had carried him in and brought him to me.

Now for the look of this man, he seemed a century old, being bald, extremely wrinkled, with wide hollows where the teeth should be, and the

flesh hanging loose and flaccid on his cheek-bones; and what colour he had could have come only from exposure to that bitter night. But his eyes chiefly spoke of his extreme age. They were blue and deep, and filled with the wisdom of years; and when he turned them in my direction they appeared to look through me, beyond me, and back upon centuries of sorrow and the slow endurance of man, as if his immediate misfortune were but an inconsiderable item in a long list. They frightened me. Perhaps they conveyed a warning of that which I was to endure at their owner's hands. From compassion, I ordered the servants to take him to my wife, with word that I wished her to set food before him, and see that it passed his lips.

So much I did for this Stranger. Now learn how he rewarded me.

He has taken my youth from me, and the most of my substance, and the love of my wife.

From the hour when he tasted food in my house, he sat there without hint of going. Whether from design, or because age and his sufferings had really palsied him, he came back tediously to life and warmth, nor for many days professed himself able to stand erect. Meanwhile he lived on the best of our hospitality. My wife tended him, and my servants ran at his bidding; for he managed early to make them understand scraps of his language, though slow in acquiring ours—I believe out of calculation, lest someone should inquire his business (which was a mystery) or hint at his departure. I myself often visited the room he had appropriated, and would sit for an hour watching those fathomless eyes while I tried to make head or tail of his discourse. When we were alone, my wife and I used to speculate at times on his probable profession. Was he a merchant?—an aged mariner?—a tinker, tailor, beggarman, thief? We could never decide, and he never disclosed.

Then the awakening came. I sat one day in the chair beside his, wondering as usual. I had felt heavy of late, with a soreness and languor in my bones, as if a dead weight hung continually on my shoulders, and another rested on my heart. A warmer colour in the Stranger's cheek caught my attention; and I bent forward, peering under the pendulous lids. His eyes were livelier and less profound. The melancholy was passing from them as breath fades off a pane of glass. *He was growing younger.* Starting up, I ran across the room, to the mirror.

There were two white hairs in my forelock; and, at the corner of either eye, half a dozen radiating lines. I was an old man.

Turning, I regarded the Stranger. He sat phlegmatic as an Indian idol; and in my fancy I felt the young blood draining from my own heart, and saw it mantling in his cheeks. Minute by minute I watched the slow miracle—the old

man beautified. As buds unfold, he put on a lovely youthfulness; and, drop by drop, left me winter.

I hurried from the room, and seeking my wife, laid the case before her. 'This is a ghoul,' I said, 'that we harbour: he is sucking my best blood, and the household is clean bewitched.' She laid aside the book in which she read, and laughed at me. Now my wife was well-looking, and her eyes were the light of my soul. Consider, then, how I felt as she laughed, taking the Stranger's part against me. When I left her, it was with a new suspicion in my heart. 'How shall it be,' I thought, 'if after stealing my youth, he go on to take the one thing that is better?'

In my room, day by day, I brooded upon this—hating my own alteration, and fearing worse. With the Stranger there was no longer any disguise. His head blossomed in curls; white teeth filled the hollows of his mouth; the pits in his cheeks were heaped full with roses, glowing under a transparent skin. It was Aeson renewed and thankless; and he sat on, devouring my substance.

Now, having probed my weakness, and being satisfied that I no longer dared to turn him out, he, who had half-imposed his native tongue upon us, constraining the household to a hideous jargon, the bastard growth of two languages, condescended to jerk us back rudely into our own speech once more, mastering it with a readiness that proved his former dissimulation, and using it henceforward as the sole vehicle of his wishes. On his past life he remained silent; but took occasion to confide in me that he proposed embracing a military career, as soon as he should tire of the shelter of my roof.

And I groaned in my chamber; for that which I feared had come to pass. He was making open love to my wife. And the eyes with which he looked at her, and the lips with which he coaxed her, had been mine; and I was an old man. Judge now between me and this guest.

One morning I went to my wife; for the burden was past bearing, and I must satisfy myself. I found her tending the plants on her window-ledge; and when she turned, I saw that years had not taken from her comeliness one jot. And I was old.

So I taxed her on the matter of this Stranger, saying this and that, and how I had cause to believe he loved her.

'That is beyond doubt,' she answered, and smiled.

'By my head, I believe his fancy is returned!' I blurted out.

And her smile grew radiant, as, looking me in the face, she answered, 'By my soul, husband, it is.'

Then I went from her, down into my garden, where the day grew hot and the flowers were beginning to droop. I stared upon them and could find no solution to the problem that worked in my heart. And then I glanced up, eastward, to the sun above the privet-hedge, and saw *him* coming across the

flower-beds, treading them down in wantonness. He came with a light step and a smile, and I waited for him, leaning heavily on my stick.

'Give me your watch!' he called out, as he drew near.

'Why should I give you my watch?' I asked, while something worked in my throat.

'Because I wish it; because it is gold; because you are too old, and won't want it much longer.'

'Take it,' I cried, pulling the watch out and thrusting it into his hand. 'Take it—you who have taken all that is better! Strip me, spoil me——'

A soft laugh sounded above, and I turned. My wife was looking down on us from the window, and her eyes were both moist and glad.

'Pardon me,' she said, 'it is you who are spoiling the child.'

THE SMALL PEOPLE

To a Lady who had asked
for a Fairy Tale.

YOU thought it natural, my dear lady, to lay this command on me at the dance last night. We had parted, two months ago, in London, and we met, unexpectedly and to music, in this corner of the land where (they say) the piskies still keep. And certainly, when I led you out upon the balcony (that you might not see the new moon through glass and lose a lucky month), it was not hard to picture the Small People at their play on the turf, and among the dim flower-beds below us. But, as a matter of fact, they are dead, these Small People. They were the long-lived but not immortal spirits of the folk who inhabited Cornwall many thousands of years back—far beyond Christ's birth. They were 'poor innocents,' not good enough for heaven yet too good for eternal fires; and, when they first came, were of ordinary stature. But after Christ's birth they began to grow smaller and smaller, and at length turned into emmets and vanished from the earth.

The last I heard of them was a sad and serious little history, very different from the old legends. Part of it I was told by a hospital surgeon, of all people in the world. Part I learnt by looking at your beautiful gown last night, as you leant on the balcony-rail. You remember how heavy the dew was, and that I fetched a shawl for your shoulders. You did not wrap it so tightly round but that four marguerites in gold embroidery showed on the front of your bodice; and these come into the tale, the remainder of which I was taught this morning before breakfast, down among the cairns by the sea where the Small People's Gardens still remain—sheltered spots of green, with here and there some ferns and cliff-pinks left. For me they are libraries where sometimes I read for a

whole summer's day; and with the help of the hospital surgeon, I bring you from them a story about your ball-gown which is perfectly true.

Twenty years ago—before the fairies had dwindled into ants, and when wayfarers were still used to turn their coats inside out, after nightfall, for fear of being 'pisky-led'—there lived, down at the village, a girl who knew all the secrets of the Small People's Gardens. Where you and I discover sea-pinks only, and hear only the wash of the waves, she would go on midsummer nights and find flowers of every colour spread, and hundreds of little lights moving among them, and fountains and waterfalls and swarms of small ladies and gentlemen, dressed in green and gold, walking and sporting among them, or reposing on the turf and telling stories to the most ravishing soft music. This was as much as she would relate; but it is certain that the piskies were friends of hers. For, in spite of her nightly wanderings, her housework was always well and cleanly done before other girls were dressed—the morning milk fresh in the dairy, the step sanded, the fire lit and the scalding-pans warming over it. And as for her needlework, it was a wonder.

Some said she was a changeling; others that she had found the four-leaved clover or the fairy ointment, and rubbed her eyes with it. But it was her own secret; for whenever the people tried to follow her to the 'Gardens,' *whir! whir! whir!* buzzed in their ears, as if a flight of bees were passing, and every limb would feel as if stuck full of pins and pinched with tweezers, and they were rolled over and over, their tongues tied as if with cords, and at last, as soon as they could manage, they would pick themselves up, and hobble home for their lives.

Well, the history—which, I must remind you, is a true one—goes on to say that in time the girl grew ambitious, or fell in love (I cannot remember which), and went to London. In any case it must have been a strong call that took her: for there are no fairies in London. I regret that my researches do not allow me to tell you how the Small People at home took her departure; but we will suppose that it grieved them deeply. Nor can I say precisely how the girl fared for many years. I think her fortune contained both joy and sorrow for a while; and I suspect that many passages of her life would be sadly out of place in this story, even if they could be hunted out. Indeed, fairy-tales have to omit so much nowadays, and therefore seem so antiquated, that one marvels how they could ever have been in fashion.

But you may take it as sure that in the end this girl met with more sorrow than joy; for when next she comes into sight it is in London streets and she is in rags. Moreover, though she wears a flush on her cheeks, above the wrinkles, it does not come of health or high spirits, but perhaps from the fact that in the twenty years' interval she has seen millions of men and women, but not one single fairy.

In those latter days I met her many times. She passed under your windows shortly before dawn on the night that you gave your dance, early in the Season. You saw her, I think?—a woman who staggered a little, and had some words with the policeman at the corner: but, after all, a staggering woman in London is no such memorable sight. All day long she was seeking work, work, work; and after dark she sought forgetfulness. She found the one, in small quantities, and out of it she managed to buy the other, now and then, over the counter. But she had long given up looking for the fairies. The lights along the Embankment had ceased to remind her of those in the Small People's Gardens; nor did the noise bursting from music-hall doors as she passed recall the old sounds; and as for the scents, there were plenty in London, but none resembling that of the garden which you might smell a mile out at sea.

I told you that her needlework had been a marvel when she lived down at the village. Curiously enough, this was the one gift of the fairies that stayed by her, and it remained as wonderful as ever. Her most frequent employer was a flat-footed Jew with a large, fleshy face; and because she had a name for honesty, she was not seldom entrusted with costly pieces of stuff, and allowed to carry them home to turn into ball-dresses under the roof through the gaps of which, as she stitched, she could see the night pass from purple to black, and from black to the lilac of daybreak. There, with a hundred pounds' worth of silk and lace on her knee, she would sit and work a dozen hours to earn as many pence. With fingers weary and——But you know Hood's song, and no doubt have taken it to heart a dozen times.

It came to this, however, that one evening, when she had not eaten for forty hours, her employer gave her a piece of embroidery to work against time. The fact is, my dear lady, that you are very particular about having your commissions executed to the hour, and your dressmakers are anxious to oblige, knowing that you never squabble over the price. To be sure, you have never heard of the flat-footed Jew man—how should you? And we may believe that your dressmakers knew just as little of the poor woman who had used to be the friend of the Small People. But the truth remains that, in the press of your many pleasures, you were pardonably twenty-four hours late in ordering the gown in which you were to appear an angel.

Ah, madam! will it comfort you to hear that *you* were the one to reconcile the Small People with that poor sister of yours who had left them, twenty years before, and wanted them so sorely? The hospital doctor gave her complaint a long name, and I gather that it has a place by itself in books of pathology. But the woman's tale was that, after she had been stitching through the long night, the dawn came through the roof and found her with four marguerites still left to be embroidered in gold on the pieces of satin that lay in her lap. She threaded her needle afresh, rubbed her weary eyes, and began—when, lo! a

miracle.

Instead of one hand, there were four at work—four hands, four needles, four lines of thread. *The four marguerites were all being embroidered at the same time!* The piskies had forgiven, had remembered her at last, after these many years, and were coming to her help, as of old. Ah, madam, the tears of thankfulness that ran from her hot eyes and fell upon those golden marguerites of yours!

Of course her eyes were disordered. There was only one flower, really. There was only one embroidered in the morning, when they found her sobbing, with your bodice still in her lap, and took her to the hospital; and that is why the dressmakers failed to keep faith with you for once, and made you so angry.

Dear lady, the piskies are not easily summoned, in these days.

FORTUNIO

AT Tregarrick Fair they cook a goose in twenty-two different ways; and as no one who comes to the fair would dream of eating any other food, you may fancy what a reek of cooking fills the narrow grey street soon after midday.

As a boy, I was always given a holiday to go to the goose-fair; and it was on my way thither across the moors that I first made Fortunio's acquaintance. I wore a new pair of corduroys, that smelt outrageously—and squeaked, too, as I trotted briskly along the bleak high road; for I had a bright shilling to spend, and it burnt a hole in my pocket. I was planning my purchases, when I noticed, on a windy eminence of the road ahead, a man's figure sharply defined against the sky.

He was driving a flock of geese, so slowly that I soon caught him up; and such a man or such geese I had never seen. To begin with, his rags were worse than a scarecrow's. In one hand he carried a long staff; the other held a small book close under his nose, and his lean shoulders bent over as he read in it. It was clear, from the man's undecided gait, that all his eyes were for this book. Only he would look up when one of his birds strayed too far on the turf that lined the highway, and would guide it back to the stones again with his staff. As for the geese, they were utterly draggle-tailed and stained with travel, and waddled, every one, with so woebegone a limp that I had to laugh as I passed.

The man glanced up, set his forefinger between the pages of his book, and turned on me a long sallow face and a pair of the most beautiful brown eyes in the world.

'Little boy,' he said, in a quick foreign way—'rosy little boy. You laugh at

my geese, eh?’

No doubt I stared at him like a ninny, for he went on:

‘Little wide-mouthed Cupidon, how you gaze! Also, by the way, how you smell!’

‘It’s my corduroys,’ said I.

‘Then I discommend your corduroys. But I approve your laugh. Laugh again—only at the right matter: laugh at this——’

And, opening his book again, he read a long passage as I walked beside him; but I could make neither head nor tail of it.

‘That is from the *Sentimental Journey*, by Laurence Sterne, the most beautiful of your English wits. Ah, he is more than French! Laugh at it.’

It was rather hard to laugh thus to order; but suddenly he set me the example, showing two rows of very white teeth, and fetching from his hollow chest a sound of mirth so incongruous with the whole aspect of the man, that I began to grin too.

‘That’s right; but be louder. Make the sounds that you made just now——’

He broke off sharply, being seized with an ugly fit of coughing, that forced him to halt and lean on his staff for a while. When he recovered we walked on together after the geese, he talking all the way in high-flown sentences that were Greek to me, and I stealing a look every now and then at his olive face, and half inclined to take to my heels and run.

We came at length to the ridge where the road dives suddenly into Tregarrick. The town lies along a narrow vale, and looking down, we saw flags waving along the street and much smoke curling from the chimneys, and heard the church bells, the big drum, and the confused mutterings and hubbub of the fair. The sun—for the morning was still fresh—did not yet pierce to the bottom of the valley, but fell on the hill-side opposite, where cottage gardens in parallel strips climbed up from the town to the moorland beyond.

‘What is that?’ asked the goose-driver, touching my arm and pointing to a dazzling spot on the slope opposite.

‘That’s the sun on the windows of Gardener Tonken’s glass-house.’

‘Eh?—does he live there?’

‘He’s dead, and the garden’s “to let”; you can just see the board from here. But he didn’t live there, of course. People don’t live in glass-houses; only plants.’

‘That’s a pity, little boy, for their souls’ sakes. It reminds me of a story—by the way, do you know Latin? No? Well, listen to this: if I can sell my geese to-day, perhaps I will hire that glass-house, and you shall come there on half-holidays, and learn Latin. Now run ahead and spend your money.’

I was glad to escape, and in the bustle of the fair quickly forgot my friend. But late in the afternoon, as I had my eyes glued to a peep-show, I heard a

voice behind me cry ‘Little boy!’ and turning, saw him again. He was without his geese.

‘I have sold them,’ he said, ‘for £5; and I have taken the glass-house. The rent is only £3 a year, and I shan’t live longer, so that leaves me money to buy books. I shall feed on the snails in the garden, making soup of them, for there is a beautiful stove in the glass-house. When is your next half-holiday?’

‘On Saturday.’

‘Very well. I am going away to buy books; but I shall be back by Saturday, and then you are to come and learn Latin.’

It may have been fear or curiosity, certainly it was no desire for learning, that took me to Gardener Tonken’s glass-house next Saturday afternoon. The goose-driver was there to welcome me.

‘Ah, wide-mouth,’ he cried; ‘I knew you would be here. Come and see my library.’

He showed me a pile of dusty, tattered volumes, arranged on an old flower-stand.

‘See,’ said he, ‘no sorrowful books, only Aristophanes and Lucian, Horace, Rabelais, Molière, Voltaire’s novels, *Gil Blas*, *Don Quixote*, Fielding, a play or two of Shakespeare, a volume or so of Swift, Prior’s Poems, and Sterne—that divine Sterne! And a Latin Grammar and Virgil for you, little boy. First, eat some snails.’

But this I would not. So he pulled out two three-legged stools, and very soon I was trying to fix my wandering wits and decline *mensa*.

After this I came on every half-holiday for nearly a year. Of course the tenant of the glass-house was a nine days’ wonder in the town. A crowd of boys and even many grown men and women would assemble and stare into the glass-house while we worked; but Fortunio (he gave no other name) seemed rather to like it than not. Only when some wiseacres approached my parents with hints that my studies with a ragged man who lived on snails and garden-stuff were uncommonly like traffic with the devil, Fortunio, hearing the matter, walked over one morning to our home and had an interview with my mother. I don’t know what was said; but I know that afterwards no resistance was made to my visits to the glass-house.

They came to an end in the saddest and most natural way. One September afternoon I sat construing to Fortunio out of the first book of Virgil’s Aeneid—so far was I advanced; and coming to the passage:

‘Tum breviter Dido, vultum demissa, profatur . . .’

I had just rendered *vultum demissa* ‘with downcast eyes,’ when the book was snatched from me and hurled to the far end of the glass-house. Looking up, I

saw Fortunio in a transport of passion.

‘Fool—little fool! Will you be like all the commentators? Will you forget what Virgil has said and put your own nonsense into his golden mouth?’

He stepped across, picked up the book, found the passage, and then turning back a page or so, read out:

‘Saepta armis *solioque alte subnixa* resedit.’

‘*Alte! Alte!*’ he screamed: ‘Dido sat on high: Aeneas stood at the foot of her throne. Listen to this: “Then Dido, bending down her gaze . . .” ’

He went on translating. A rapture took him, and the sun beat in through the glass roof, and lit up his eyes. He was transfigured; his voice swelled and sank with passion, swelled again, and then, at the words:

‘Quae te tam laeta tulerunt
Saecula? Qui tanti talem genuere parentes?’

it broke, the Virgil dropped from his hand, and sinking down on his stool he broke into a wild fit of sobbing.

‘Oh, why did I read it? Why did I read this sorrowful book?’ And then checking his sobs, he put a handkerchief to his mouth, took it away, and looked up at me with dry eyes.

‘Go away, little one. Don’t come again: I am going to die very soon now.’

I stole out, awed and silent, and went home. But the picture of him kept me awake that night, and early in the morning I dressed and ran off to the glass-house.

He was still sitting as I had left him.

‘Why have you come?’ he asked, harshly. ‘I have been coughing. I am going to die.’

‘Then I’ll fetch a doctor.’

‘No.’

‘A clergyman?’

‘No.’

But I ran for the doctor.

Fortunio lived on for a week after this, and at length consented to see a clergyman. I brought the Vicar, and was told to leave them alone together and come back in an hour’s time.

When I returned, Fortunio was stretched quietly on the rough bed we had found for him, and the Vicar, who knelt beside it, was speaking softly in his ear.

As I entered on tiptoe, I heard:

‘. . . in that kingdom shall be no weeping——’

‘Oh, Parson,’ interrupted Fortunio, ‘that’s bad. I’m so bored with laughing that the good God might surely allow a few tears.’

The parish buried him, and his books went to pay for the funeral. But I kept the Virgil; and this, with the few memories that I impart to you, is all that remains to me of Fortunio.

THE MAYOR OF GANTICK

One of these days I hope to write a treatise on the Mayors of Cornwall—dignitaries whose pleasant fame is now night, remembered only in some neat by-word or saying of the country people. Thus you may hear, now and again, of ’the Mayor of Falmouth, who thanked God when the town jail was enlarged,’ ‘the Mayor of Market Jew, sitting in his own light,’ or ‘the Mayor of Calenick, who walked two miles to ride one.’ But the one whose history perplexed me most, till I heard the truth from an eye-witness, was ‘the mad Mayor of Gantick, who was wise for a long day, and then died of it.’

It was an old tin-streamer who told me—a thin fellow with a shrivelled mouth, and a back bent two-double. And I heard it on the very hearthstone of the Mayor’s cottage, one afternoon, as we sat and smoked in the shadow of the crumbling mud wall, with a square of blue sky for roof, and for carpet a tangle of brambles, nettles, and rank grass.

It seems that the village of Gantick, half a mile away, was used once in every year to purge itself of evil. To this end the villagers prepared a huge dragon of pasteboard and marched out with it to a sandy common, since cut up by tin-works, but still known as Dragon’s Moor. Here they would choose one of their number to be Mayor, and submit to him all questions of conscience, and such cases of notorious evil living as the law failed to provide for. Summary justice waited on all his decisions; and as the village wag was usually chosen for the post, you may guess that the horse-play was rough at times. When this was over, and the public conscience purified, the company fell on the pasteboard dragon with sticks and whacked him into small pieces, which they buried in a small hollow called Dragon Pit; and so returned gladly to their homes to start on another twelve months of sin.

This feast of purification fell always on the 12th of July; and in the hey-day of its celebration there lived in this cottage a widow-woman and her only son, a demented man about forty years old. There was no harm in the poor creature, who worked at the Lanihorne slate quarries, six miles off, as a ‘hollibubber’—that is to say, in carting away the refuse slate. Every morning he walked to his work, mumbling to himself as he went; and though the children followed him at times, hooting and flinging stones, they grew tired at last, finding that he

never resented it. His mother—a tall, silent woman with an inscrutable face—had supper ready for him when he returned, and often was forced to feed him, while he unlocked his tongue and babbled over the small adventures of the day. He was not one of those gifted idiots who hear voices in the wind and know the language of the wild birds. His talk was merely imbecile; and, for the rest, he had large grey eyes, features of that regularity which we call Greek, and stood six foot two in his shoes.

One hot morning—it was the 12th of July—he was starting for his work when an indescribable hubbub sounded up the road, and presently came by the whole rabble of Gantick with cow-horns and instruments of percussion, and in their midst the famous dragon—all green, with fiery, painted eyes, and a long tongue of red flannel. Behind it the prisoners were escorted—a pale woman or two with dazed, terrified eyes, an old man suspected of egg-stealing, a cow addicted to trespass, and so on.

The Mayor was not yet chosen, this ceremony being deferred by rule till the crowd reached Dragon's Moor. But drawing near the cottage door and catching sight of the half-witted man with his foot on the threshold, a village wit called out and proposed that they should take 'the Mounster' (as he was called) along with them for Mayor.

It hit the mob's humour, and they cheered. The Mounster's mother, standing in the doorway, went white as if painted.

'Man in the lump's a hateful animal,' she said to herself, hoarsely. 'Come indoors, Jonathan, an' let 'em go by.'

'Come an' rule over us,' the crowd invited him, and a gleam of proud delight woke in his silly face.

'The heat—his head won't stand it.' The woman looked up at the cloudless sky. 'For God's sake take your fun elsewhere!' she cried.

The women who were led to judgment looked at her stupidly. They too suffered, without understanding, the heavy sport of men. At last one said—

'Old woman, let him come. We'll have more mercy from a mazed man.'

'Sister, you've been loose, they tell me,' answered the old woman, 'an' must eat the bitter fruit o't. But my son's an innocent. Jonathan, they'll look for you at the works.'

'There's prouder work for me 'pon Dragon's Moor,' the Mounster decided, with smiling eyes. 'Come along, mother, an' see me exalted.'

The crowd bore him off at their head, and the din broke out again. The new Mayor strutted among them with lifted chin and a radiant face. He thought it glorious. His mother ran into the cottage, fetched a bottle, and followed after the dusty tail of the procession. Once, as they were passing a running stream, she halted and filled the bottle carefully, emptying it again and again until the film outside the glass was to her liking. Then she followed again, and came to

Dragon’s Moor.

They sat the Mayor on a mound, took off his hat, placed a crown on his head and a broom-stick in his hand, and brought him the cases to try.

The first was a grey mare, possessed (they alleged) with a devil. Her skin hung like a sack on her bones.

‘ ’Tis Eli Thorns’ mare. What’s to be done to cure her?’ they asked.

‘Let Eli Thorns buy a comb, an’ comb his mare’s tail while she eats her feed. So Eli’ll know if ’tis the devil or no that steals oats from his manger.’

They applauded his wisdom and brought forward the woman who had pleaded just now with his mother.

‘Who made her?’ he asked, having listened to the charge.

‘God, ’tis to be supposed.’

‘God makes no evil.’

‘The Devil, then.’

‘Then whack the Devil.’

They fell on the pasteboard dragon and belaboured him. The sun poured down on the Mayor’s throne; and his mother, who sat by his right hand wondering at his sense, gave him water to drink from the bottle. They brought a third case—a boy who had been caught torturing a cow. He had taken a saw, and tried to saw off one of her horns while she was tethered in her stall.

The Mayor leapt up from his seat.

‘Kill him!’ he shouted, ‘take him off and kill him!’ His face was twisted with passion, and he lifted his stick. The crowd fell back for a second, but the old woman leant forward and touched her son softly on the leg. He stopped short: the anger died out of his face, and he shivered.

‘No,’ he said, ‘I was wrong, naybours. The boy is mad, I think; an’ ’tis a terrible lot, to be mad. This is the Devil’s doing, out o’ doubt. Beat the Devil.’

‘Simme,’ said one in the crowd, ‘the sins o’ Gantick be wearin’ out the smoky man at a terrible rate.’

‘Aye,’ answered another, ‘His Naughtiness bain’t ekal to Gantick.’ And this observation was the original of a proverb, still repeated—‘As naughty as Gantick, where the Devil struck for shorter hours.’

There was no cruelty that day on Dragon’s Moor. All the afternoon the mad Mayor sat in the sun’s eye and gave judgment, while his mother from time to time wiped away the froth that gathered on his lips, and moistened them with water from her bottle. From first to last she never spoke a word, but sat with a horror in her eyes, and watched the flushed cheeks of this grown-up bearded son. And all the afternoon the men of Gantick brayed the Devil into shreds.

I said there was no cruelty on Dragon's Moor that day. But at sundown the Mayor turned to his mother and said:

'We've been over-hasty, mother. We ought to ha' found out who made the Devil what he is.'

At last the sun dropped; a shadow fell on the brown moors and crept up the mound where the mother and son sat. The brightness died out of the Mayor's face.

Three minutes after, he flung up his hands and cried, 'Mother—my head, my head!'

She rose, still without a word, pulled down his arms, slipped one within her own, and led him away to the road. The crowd did not interfere; they were burying the broken dragon, with shouts and rough play.

A woman followed them to the road, and tried to clasp the Mayor's knees as he staggered.

His mother beat her away.

'Off wi' you!' she cried; ' 'tis your reproach he's bearin'.'

She helped him slowly home. In the shadow of the cottage the inspired look that he had worn all day returned for a moment. Then a convulsion took him, casting him on the floor.

At nine o'clock he died, with his head on her lap.

She closed his eyes, smoothed the wrinkles on his tired face, and sat watching him for some time. At length she lifted and laid him on the deal table at full stretch, bolted the door, put the heavy shutter on the low window, and began to light the fire.

For fuel she had a heap of peat-turves and some sticks. Having lit it, she set a crock of water to warm, and undressed the man slowly. Then, the water being ready, she washed and laid him out, chafing his limbs and talking to herself all the while.

'Fair, straight legs,' she said; 'beautiful body that leapt in my side, forty years back, and thrilled me. How proud I was! Why did God make you beautiful?'

All night she sat caressing him. And the smoke of the peat-turves, finding no exit and no draught to carry them up the chimney, crept around and killed her quietly beside her son.

PSYCHE

'Among these million Suns how shall the strayed Soul find her way back to

earth?’

The man was an engine-driver, thick-set and heavy, with a short beard grizzled at the edge, and eyes perpetually screwed up, because his life had run for the most part in the teeth of the wind. The lashes, too, had been scorched off. If you penetrated the mask of oil and coal-dust that was part of his working suit, you found a reddish-brown phlegmatic face, and guessed its age at fifty. He brought the last down train into Lewminster station every night at 9.45, took her on five minutes later, and passed through Lewminster again at noon, on his way back with the Galloper, as the porters called it.

He had reached that point of skill at which a man knows every pound of metal in a locomotive; seemed to feel just what was in his engine the moment he took hold of the levers and started up; and was expecting promotion. While waiting for it, he hit on the idea of studying a more delicate machine, and married a wife. She was the daughter of a woman at whose house he lodged, and her age was less than half of his own. It is to be supposed he loved her.

A year after their marriage she fell into low health, and her husband took her off to Lewminster for fresher air. She was lodging alone at Lewminster, and the man was passing Lewminster station on his engine, twice a day, at the time when this tale begins.

People—especially those who live in the West of England—remember the great fire at the Lewminster Theatre; how, in the second Act of the *Colleen Bawn*, a tongue of light shot from the wings over the actors’ heads; how, even while the actors turned and ran, a sheet of fire swept out and on to the auditorium with a roaring wind, and the house was full of shrieks and blind death; how men and women were turned to a white ash as they rose from their seats, so fiercely the flames outstripped the smoke. These things were reported in the papers, with narratives and ghastly details, and for a week all England talked of Lewminster.

This engine-driver, as the 9.45 train neared Lewminster, saw the red in the sky. And when he rushed into the station and drew up, he saw that the country porters who stood about were white as corpses.

‘What fire is that?’ he asked one.

‘ ’Tis the theayter! There’s a hundred burnt a’ready, and the rest treadin’ each other’s lives out while we stand talkin’, to get ’pon the roof and pitch theirselves over!’

Now the engine-driver’s wife was going to the play that night, and he knew it. She had met him at the station, and told him so, at midday.

But there was nobody to take the train on, if he stepped off the engine; for his fireman was a young hand, and had been learning his trade for less than

three weeks.

So when the five minutes were up—or rather, ten, for the porters were bewildered that night—this man went on out of the station into the night. Just beyond the station the theatre was plain to see, above the hill on his left, and the flames were leaping from the roof; and he knew that his wife was there. But the train was never taken down more steadily, nor did a single passenger guess what manner of man was driving it.

At Drakeport, where his run ended, he stepped off the engine, walked from the railway-sheds to his mother-in-law's, where he still lodged, and went upstairs to his bed without alarming a soul.

In the morning, at the usual hour, he was down at the station again, washed and cleanly dressed. His fireman had the Galloper's engine polished, fired up, and ready to start.

'Mornin',' he nodded, and looking into his driver's eyes, dropped the handful of dirty lint with which he had been polishing. After shuffling from foot to foot for a minute, he ended by climbing down on the far side of the engine.

'Oldster,' he said, ' 'tis mutiny p'raps; but s' help me, if I ride a mile 'longside that new face o' your'n!'

'Maybe you're right,' his superior answered wearily. 'You'd best go up to the office, and get somebody sent down i' my place. And while you're there, you might get me a third-class for Lewminster.'

So this man travelled up to Lewminster as passenger, and found his young wife's body among the two score stretched in a stable-yard behind the smoking theatre, waiting to be claimed. And the day after the funeral he left the railway company's service. He had saved a bit, enough to rent a small cottage two miles from the cemetery where his wife lay. Here he settled and tilled a small garden beside the high road.

Nothing seemed to be wrong with the man until the late summer, when he stood before the Lewminster magistrates charged with a violent and curiously wanton assault.

It appeared that one dim evening, late in August, a mild gentleman, with Leghorn hat, spectacles, and a green gauze net, came sauntering by the garden where the ex-engine driver was pulling a basketful of scarlet runners: that the prisoner had suddenly dropped his beans, dashed out into the road, and catching the mild gentleman by the throat had wrenched the butterfly net from his hand and belaboured him with the handle till it broke.

There was no defence, nor any attempt at explanation. The mild gentleman was a stranger to the neighbourhood. The magistrates marvelled, and gave his

assailant two months.

At the end of that time the man came out of jail and went quietly back to his cottage.

Early in the following April he conceived a wish to build a small greenhouse at the foot of his garden, by the road, and spoke to the local mason about it. One Saturday afternoon the mason came over to look at the ground and discuss plans. It was bright weather, and while the two men talked a white butterfly floated past them—the first of the year.

Immediately the mason broke off his sentence and began to chase the butterfly round the garden: for in the West country there is a superstition that if a body neglect to kill the first butterfly he may see for the season, he will have ill luck throughout the year. So he dashed across the beds, hat in hand.

'I'll hat 'en—I'll hat 'en! No, fay! I'll miss 'en, I b'lieve. Shan't be able to kill'n if her's wunce beyond th' gaate—stiddy, my son! Wo-op!'

Thus he yelled, waving his soft hat: and the next minute was lying stunned across a carrot-bed, with eight fingers gripping the back of his neck and two thumbs squeezing on his windpipe.

There was another assault case heard by the Lewminster bench; and this time the ex-engine-driver received four months. As before, he offered no defence: and again the magistrates were possessed with wonder.

Now the explanation is quite simple. This man's wits were sound, save on one point. He believed—why, God alone knows, who enabled him to drive that horrible journey without a tremor of the hand—that his wife's soul haunted him in the form of a white butterfly or moth. The superstition that spirits take this shape is not unknown in the West; and I suppose that as he steered his train out of the station, this fancy, by some odd freak of memory, leaped into his brain, and held it, hour after hour, while he and his engine flew forward and the burning theatre fell farther and farther behind. The truth was known a fortnight after his return from prison, which happened about the time of barley harvest.

A harvest-thanksgiving was held in the parish where he lived; and he went to it, being always a religious man. There were sheaves and baskets of vegetables in the chancel; fruit and flowers on the communion-table, with twenty-one tall candles burning above them; a processional hymn; and a long sermon. During the sermon, as the weather was hot and close, someone opened the door at the west end.

And when the preacher was just making up his mind to close the discourse, a large white moth fluttered in at the west door.

There was much light throughout the church; but the great blaze came, of course, from the twenty-one candles upon the altar. And towards this the moth slowly drifted, as if the candles sucked her nearer and nearer, up between the pillars of the nave, on a level with their capitals. Few of the congregation noticed her, for the sermon was a stirring one; only one or two children, perhaps, were interested—and the man I write of. He saw her pass over his head and float up into the chancel. He half-rose from his chair.

'My brothers,' said the preacher, 'if two sparrows, that are sold for a farthing, are not too little for the care of this infinite Providence——'

A scream rang out and drowned the sentence. It was followed by a torrent of vile words, shouted by a man who had seen, now for the second time, the form that clothed his wife's soul shrivelled in unthinking flames. All that was left of the white moth lay on the altar-cloth among the fruit at the base of the tallest candlestick.

And because the man saw nothing but cruelty in the Providence of which the preacher spoke, he screamed and cursed, till they overpowered him and took him forth by the door. He was wholly mad from that hour.

BESIDE THE BEE-HIVES

On the outskirts of the village of Gantick stand two small semi-detached cottages, coloured with the same pale yellow wash, their front gardens descending to the high road in parallel lines, their back-gardens (which are somewhat longer) climbing to a little wood of secular elms, traditionally asserted to be the remnant of a mighty forest. The party-hedge is heightened by a thick screen of whitethorn on which the buds were just showing pink when I took up my lodging in the left-hand cottage (the 10th of May by my diary); and at the end of it are two small arbours, set back to back, their dilapidated sides and roofs bound together by clematis.

The night of my arrival, my landlady asked me to make the least possible noise in unpacking my portmanteau, because there was trouble next door, and the partitions were thin. Our neighbour's wife was down with inflammation, she explained—inflammation of the lungs, as I learnt by a question or two. It was a bad case. She was a wisht, ailing soul to begin with. Also the owls in the wood above had been hooting loudly, for nights past: and yesterday a hedge-sparrow lit on the sill of the sick-room window, two sure tokens of approaching death. The sick woman was being nursed by her elder sister, who had lived in the house for two years, and practically taken charge of it. 'Better the man had married *she*,' my landlady added, somewhat unfeelingly.

I saw the man in his garden early next morning: a tall fellow, hardly yet on

the wrong side of thirty, dressed in loose-fitting tweed coat and corduroys. A row of bee-hives stood along his side of the party-wall, and he had taken the farthest one, which was empty, off its stand, and was rubbing it on the inside with a handful of elder-flower buds, by way of preparation for a new swarm. Even from my bedroom window I remarked, as he turned his head occasionally, that he was singularly handsome. His movements were those of a lazy man in a hurry, though there seemed no reason for hurry in his task. But when it was done, and the hive replaced, his behaviour began to be so eccentric that I paused in the midst of my shaving, to watch.

He passed slowly down the line of bee-hives, halting beside each in turn, and bending his head down close to the orifice with the exact action of a man whispering a secret into another's ear. I believe he kept this attitude for a couple of minutes beside each hive—there were eight, besides the empty one. At the end of the row he lifted his head, straightened his shoulders, and cast a glance up at my window, where I kept well out of sight. A minute after, he entered his house by the back door, and did not reappear.

At breakfast I asked my landlady if our neighbour were wrong in his head at all. She looked astonished, and answered, 'No: he was a do-nothing fellow—unless you counted it hard work to drive a carrier's van thrice a week into Tregarrick, and home the same night. But he kept very steady, and had a name for good nature.'

Next day the man was in his garden at the same hour, and repeated the performance. Throughout the following night I was kept awake by a series of monotonous groans that reached me through the partition, and the murmur of voices speaking at intervals. It was horrible to lie within a few inches of the sick woman's head, to listen to her agony and be unable to help, unable even to see. Towards six in the morning, in bright daylight, I dropped off to sleep at last.

Two hours later the sound of voices came in at the open window and awoke me. I looked out into my neighbour's garden. He was standing, half-way up the path, in the sunshine, and engaged in a suppressed but furious altercation with a thin woman, somewhat above middle height. Both wore thick green veils over their faces and thick gloves on their hands. The woman carried a rusty tea-tray.

The man stood against her, motioning her back towards the house, I caught a sentence—'It'll be the death of her'; and the woman glanced back over her shoulder towards the window of the sick-room. She seemed about to reply, but shrugged her shoulders instead and went back into the house, carrying her tray. The man turned on his heel, walked hurriedly up the garden, and scrambled over its hedge into the wood. His veil and thick gloves were explained a couple of hours later, when I looked into the garden again and saw him hiving a

swarm of bees that he had captured, the first of the season.

That same afternoon, about four o'clock, I observed that every window in the next house stood wide open. My landlady was out in the garden, 'picking in' her week's washing from the thorn hedge where it had been suspended to dry; and I called her attention to this new freak of our neighbours.

'Ah, then, the poor soul must be nigh to her end,' said she. 'That's done to give her an easy death.'

The woman died at half-past seven. And next morning her husband hung a scrap of black crape to each of the bee-hives.

She was buried on Sunday afternoon. From behind the drawn blinds of my sitting-room window I saw the funeral leave the house and move down the front garden to the high road—the heads of the mourners, each with a white handkerchief pressed to its nose, appearing above the wall like the top of a procession in some Assyrian sculpture. The husband wore a ridiculously tall hat, and a hat-band with long tails. The whole affair had the appearance of an hysterical outrage on the afternoon sunshine. At the foot of the garden they struck up a 'burying tune,' and passed down the road, shouting it with all their lungs.

I caught up a book and rushed out into the back garden for fresh air. Even out of doors it was insufferably hot, and soon I flung myself down on the bench within the arbour and set myself to read. A plank behind me had started, and after a while the edge of it began to gall my shoulders as I leant back. I tried once or twice to push it into its place, without success, and then, in a moment of irritation, gave it a tug. It came away in my hand, and something rolled out on the bench before me, and broke in two.

I picked it up. It was a lump of dough, rudely moulded to the shape of a woman, with a rusty brass-headed nail stuck through the breast. Around the body was tied a lock of fine light-brown hair—a woman's, by its length.

After a careful examination, I untied the lock of hair, put the doll back in its place behind the plank, and returned to the house: for I had a question or two to put to my landlady.

'Was the dead woman at all like her elder sister?' I asked. 'Was she black-haired, for instance?'

'No,' answered my landlady; 'she was shorter and much fairer. You might almost call her a light-haired woman.'

I hoped she would pardon me for changing the subject abruptly and asking an apparently ridiculous question, but would she call a man mad if she found him whispering secrets into a bee-hive?

My landlady promptly replied that, on the contrary, she would think him extremely sensible; for that, unless bees were told of all that was happening in the household to which they belonged, they might consider themselves

neglected, and leave the place in wrath. She asserted this to be a notorious fact.

'I have one more question,' I said. 'Suppose that you found in your garden a lock of hair—a lock such as this, for instance—what would you do with it?'

She looked at it, and caught her breath sharply.

'I'm no meddler,' she said at last; 'I should burn it.'

'Why?'

'Because if 'twas left about, the birds might use it for their nests, and weave it in so tight that the owner couldn't rise on Judgment day.'

So I burnt the lock of hair in her presence; because I wanted its owner to rise on Judgment day and state a case which, after all, was no affair of mine.

THESE-AN'-THAT'S WIFE

In the matter of These-an'-That himself, public opinion in Troy is divided. To the great majority he appears scandalously careless of his honour; while there are just six or seven who fight with a suspicion that there dwells something divine in the man.

To reach the town from my cottage I have to cross the Passage Ferry, either in the smaller boat which Eli pulls single-handed, or (if a market-cart or donkey, or drove of cattle be waiting on the slip) I must hang about till Eli summons his boy to help him with the horse-boat. Then the gangway is lowered, the beasts are driven on board, the passengers follow at a convenient distance, and the long sweeps take us slowly across the tide. It was on such a voyage, a few weeks after I settled in the neighbourhood, that I first met These-an'-That.

I was leaning back against the chain, with my cap tilted forward to keep off the dazzle of the June sunshine on the water, and lazily watching Eli as he pushed his sweep. Suddenly I grew aware that by frequent winks and jerks of the head he wished to direct my attention to a passenger on my right—a short, round man in black, with a basket of eggs on his arm.

There was quite a remarkable dearth of feature on this passenger's face, which was large, soft, and unhealthy in colour: but what surprised me was to see, as he blinked in the sunlight, a couple of big tears trickle down his cheeks and splash among the eggs in his basket.

'There's trouble agen, up at Kit's,' remarked Eli, finishing his stroke with a jerk, and speaking for the general benefit, though the words were particularly addressed to a drover opposite.

'Ho?' said the drover: 'that woman agen?'

The passengers, one and all, bent their eyes on the man in black, who smeared his face with his cuff, and began weeping afresh, silently.

‘Beat ’en blue las’ night, an’ turned ’en to doors—the dirty trollop.’

‘Eli, don’t ’ee——’ put in the poor man, in a low, deprecating voice.

‘Iss, an’ no need to tell what for,’ exclaimed a red-faced woman who stood by the drover, with two baskets of poultry at her feet. ‘She’s a low lot; a low trapesin’ baggage. If These-an’-That, there, wasn’ but a poor, ha’f-baked shammick, he’d ha’ killed that wife o’ his afore this.’

‘Naybours, I’d as lief you didn’t mention it,’ appealed These-an’-That, huskily.

‘I’m afeared you’m o’ no account, These-an’-That: but sam-sodden, if I may say so,’ the drover observed.

‘Put in wi’ the bread, an’ took out wi’ the cakes,’ suggested Eli.

‘Wife!—a pretty loitch, she an’ the whole kit, up there!’ went on the market-woman. ‘If you durstn’t lay finger ’pon your wedded wife, These-an’-That, but let her an’ that long-legged gamekeeper turn ’ee to doors, you must be no better’n a worm,—that’s all I say.’

I saw the man’s face twitch as she spoke of the gamekeeper. But he only answered in the same dull way.

‘I’d as lief you didn’ mention it, friends—if ’tis all the same.’

His real name was Tom Warne, as I learnt from Eli afterwards; and he lived at St. Kit’s, a small fruit-growing hamlet two miles up the river, where his misery was the scandal of the place. The very children knew it, and would follow him in a crowd sometimes, pelting him with horrible taunts as he slouched along the road to the kitchen-garden out of which he made his living. He never struck one; never even answered; but avoided the schoolhouse as he would a plague; and if he saw the Parson coming would turn a mile out of his road.

The Parson had called at the cottage a score of times at least: for the business was quite intolerable. Two evenings out of the six, the long-legged gamekeeper, who was just a big, drunken bully, would swagger easily into These-an’-That’s kitchen and sit himself down without so much as ‘by your leave.’ ‘Good evenin’, gamekeeper,’ the husband would say in his dull, nerveless voice. Mostly he only got a jeer in reply. The fellow would sit drinking These-an’-That’s cider and laughing with These-an’-That’s wife, until the pair, very likely, took too much, and the woman without any cause broke into a passion, flew at the little man, and drove him out-of-doors, with broomstick or talons, while the gamekeeper hammered on the table and roared at the sport. His employer was an absentee who hated the Parson: so the Parson groaned in vain over the scandal.

Well, one Fair-day I crossed in Eli’s boat with the pair. The woman—a

dark gipsy creature—was tricked out in violet and yellow, with a sham gold watch-chain and great aluminium earrings: and the gamekeeper had driven her down in his spring-cart. As Eli pushed off, I saw a small boat coming down the river across our course. It was These-an'-That, pulling down with vegetables for the Fair. I cannot say if the two saw him: but he glanced up for a moment at the sound of their laughter, then bent his head and rowed past us a trifle more quickly. The distance was too great to let me see his face.

I was the last to step ashore. As I waited for Eli to change my sixpence, he nodded after the couple, who by this time had reached the top of the landing-stage, arm in arm.

'A bad day's work for *her*, I reckon.'

It struck me at the moment as a moral reflection of Eli's, and no more. Late in the afternoon, however, I was enlightened.

In the midst of the Fair, about four o'clock, a din of horns, beaten kettles, and hideous yelling broke out in Troy. I met the crowd in the main street, and for a moment felt afraid of it. They had seized the woman in the tap-room of the 'Man-o'-War'—where the gamekeeper was lying in a drunken sleep—and were hauling her along in a Ramriding. There is nothing so cruel as a crowd, and I have seen nothing in my life like the face of These-an'-That's wife. It was bleeding; it was framed in tangles of black, dishevelled hair; it was livid; but, above all, it was possessed with an awful fear—a horror it turned a man white to look on. Now and then she bit and fought like a cat: but the men around held her tight, and mostly had to drag her, her feet trailing, and the horns and kettles dinning in her wake.

There lay a rusty old ducking-cage among the lumber up at the town-hall; and some fellows had fetched this down, with the poles and chain, and planted it on the edge of the Town Quay, between the American Shooting Gallery and the World-Renowned Swing Boats. To this they dragged her, and strapped her fast.

There is no need to describe what followed. Even the virtuous women who stood and applauded would like to forget it, perhaps. At the third souse, the rusty pivot of the ducking-pole broke, and the cage, with the woman in it, plunged under water.

They dragged her ashore at the end of the pole in something less than a minute. They unstrapped and laid her gently down, and began to feel over her heart, to learn if it were still beating. And then the crowd parted, and These-an'-That came through it. His face wore no more expression than usual, but his lips were working in a queer way.

He went up to his wife, took off his hat, and producing an old red

handkerchief from the crown, wiped away some froth and green weed that hung about her mouth. Then he lifted her limp hand, and patting the back of it gently, turned on the crowd. His lips were still working. It was evident he was trying to say something.

'Naybours,' the words came at last, in the old dull tone; 'I'd as lief you hadn' thought o' this.'

He paused for a moment, gulped down something in his throat, and went on—

'I wudn' say you didn' mean it for the best, an' thankin' you kindly. But you didn' know her. Roughness, if I may say, was never no good wi' her. It must ha' been very hard for her to die like this, axin' your parden, for she wasn' one to bear pain.'

Another long pause.

'No, she cudn' bear pain. P'raps *he* might ha' stood it better—though o' course you acted for the best, an' thankin' you kindly. I'd as lief take her home now, naybours, if 'tis all the same.'

He lifted the body in his arms, and carried it pretty steadily down the quay steps to his market-boat, that was moored below. Two minutes later he had pushed off and was rowing it quietly homewards.

There is no more to say, except that the woman recovered. She had fainted, I suppose, as they pulled her out. Anyhow, These-an'-That restored her to life —and she ran away the very next week with the gamekeeper.

THE GIFTS OF FEODOR HIMKOFF

It is just six years ago that I first travelled the coast from Gorran Haven to Zoze Point.

Since then I have visited it in fair weather and foul; and in time, perhaps, shall rival the coastguardsmen, who can walk it blindfold. But to this day it remains in my recollection the coast I trod, without companion, during four dark days in December. It was a rude introduction. The wind blew in my face, with scuds of cold rain; a leaden mist hung low on the left, and rolled slowly up Channel. Now and then it thinned enough to reveal a white zigzag of breakers in front, and a blur of land; or, far below, a cluster of dripping rocks, with the sea crawling between and lifting their weed. But for the most part I saw only the furze-bushes beside the path, each powdered with fine raindrops, that in the aggregate resembled a coat of grey frieze, and the puffs of spray that shot up over the cliff's lip and drenched me.

Just beyond the Nare Head, where the path dipped steeply, a bright square disengaged itself from the mist as I passed, and, around it, the looming outline of a cottage, between the footpath and the sea. A habitation more desolate than this odd angle of the coast could hardly have been chosen; on the other hand, the glow of firelight within the kitchen window was almost an invitation. It seemed worth my while to ask for a drink of milk there, and find out what manner of folk were the inmates.

An old woman answered my knock. She was tall, with a slight stoop, and a tinge of yellow pervading her face, as if some of the complexion had run into her teeth and the whites of her eyes. A clean white cap, tied under the chin with tape, concealed all but the edge of her grey locks. She wore a violet turnover, a large wrapper, a brown stuff gown that hardly reached her ankles, and thick worsted stockings, but no shoes.

'A drink o' milk? Why not a dish o' tea?'

'That will be troubling you,' said I, a bit ashamed for feeling so little in want of sustenance.

'Few they be that troubles us, my dear. Too few by land, an' too many by sea, rest their dear souls! Step inside by the fire. There's only my old man here, an' you needn't stand 'pon ceremony wi' *he*: for he's stone-deaf an' totelin'. Isaac, you poor deaf haddock, here's a strange body for 'ee to look at; tho' you'm past all pomp but buryin', I reckon.' She sighed as I stepped past into the warmth.

The man she called Isaac was huddled and nodding in a chair, before the bluish blaze of a wreck-wood fire. He met me with an incurious stare, and began to doze again. He was clearly in the last decline of manhood, the stage of utter childishness and mere oblivion; and sat there with his faculties collapsed, waiting for release.

My mired boots played havoc with the neatly sanded floor; but the old woman dusted a chair for me as carefully as if I had worn robes of state, and set it on the other side of the hearth. Then she put the kettle to boil, and unhitching a cup from the dresser, took a key from it, and opened a small cupboard between the fireplace and the wall. That which she sought stood on the top shelf, and she had to climb on a chair to reach it. I offered my help; but no—she would get it herself. It proved to be a small green canister.

The tea that came from this canister I wish I could describe. No sooner did the boiling water touch it than the room was filled with fragrance. The dotard in the chair drew a long breath through his nostrils, as though the aroma touched some quick centre in his moribund brain. The woman poured out a cup, and I sipped it.

'Smuggled,' I thought to myself; for indeed you cannot get such tea in London if you pay fifty shillings a pound.

‘You like it?’ she asked. Before I could answer, a small table stood at my elbow, and she was loading it with delicacies from the cupboard. The contents of that cupboard! Caviare came from it, and a small ambrosial cheese; dried figs and guava jelly; olives, cherries in brandy, wonderful filberts glazed with sugar; biscuits and all manner of queer Russian sweets. I leant back with wide eyes.

‘Feodor sends us these,’ said the old woman, bringing a dish of Cornish cream and a home-made loaf to give the feast a basis.

‘Who’s Feodor?’

‘Feodor Himkoff.’ She paused a moment, and added: ‘He’s mate on a Russian vessel.’

‘A friend?’

The question went unnoticed. ‘Is there any you fancy?’ she asked. ‘Some o’t may be outlandish eatin’.’

‘Do *you* like these things?’ I looked from her to the caviare.

‘I don’t know. I never tried. We keeps ’em, my man an’ I, for all poor come-by-chance folks that knocks.’

‘But these are dainties for rich men’s tables.’

‘May be. I’ve never tasted—they’d stick in our ozels if we tried.’

I wanted to ask a dozen questions, but thought it politer to accept this strange hospitality in silence. Glancing up presently, however, I saw her eyes still fixed on me, and laid down my knife.

‘I can’t help it,’ I said, ‘I want to know about Feodor Himkoff.’

‘There’s no secret,’ she answered. ‘Leastways, there *was* one, but either God has condemned or forgiven afore now. Look at my man there; he’s done all the repentin’ he’s likely to do.’

After a few seconds’ hesitation she went on:

‘I had a boy, you must know—oh! a straight young man—that went for a soldier, an’ was killed at Inkerman by the Rooshians. Take another look at his father here; you think ’en a bundle o’ frailties, I dessay. Well, when the news was brought us, this poor old worm lifts his fist up to the sun an’ says, “God do so to me an’ more also,” he says, “if ever I falls across a Rooshian!” An’ “God send me a Rooshian—just one!” he says, meanin’ that Rooshians don’t grow on brambles hereabouts. Now the boy was our only flesh.

‘Well, sir, nigh sixteen year’ went by, an’ we two were sittin’, one quakin’ night, beside this very fire, hearkenin’ to the bedlam outside: for ’twas the big storm in ’Seventy, an’ even indoors we must shout to make ourselves heard. About ten, as we was thinkin’ to alley-couchey, there comes a bangin’ on the door, an’ Isaac gets up an’ lets the bar down, singin’ out, “Who is it?”

‘There was a big young man ’twixt the door-posts, drippin’ wet, wi’ smears o’ blood on his face, an’ white teeth showin’ when he talked. ’Twas a

half-furrin talk, an’ he spoke a bit faint too, but fairly grinned for joy to see our warm fire,—an’ his teeth were white as pearl.

‘ “Ah, sir,” he cried, “you will help? Our barque is ashore below—fifteen poor brothers! You will send for help?—you will aid?”

‘Then Isaac stepped back, and spoke very slow—“What nation?” he asked. “She is Russ—we are all Russ; sixteen poor brothers from Archangel,” said the young man, as soon as he took in the question. My man slewed round on his heel, and walked to the hearth here; but the sailor stretched out his hands, an’ I saw the middle finger of his right hand was gone. “You will aid, eh? Ah, yes, you will aid. They are clingin’—*so*—fifteen poor brothers, and many have wives.” But Isaac said: “Thank Thee, God,” and picked up a log from the hearth here. “Take ’em this message,” said he, facin’ round; an’, runnin’ on the sailor, who was faint and swayin’, beat him forth wi’ the burnin’ stick, and bolted the door upon him.

‘After that we sat quiet, he an’ I, all the night through, never takin’ our clothes off. An’ at daybreak Isaac walked down to the shore. There was nothin’ to see but two bodies, an’ he buried them an’ waited for more. That evenin’ another came in, an’ next day, two; an’ so on for a se’nnight. Ten bodies in all he picked up and buried i’ the meadow below. An’ on the fourth day he picked up a body wi’ one finger missin’, under the Nare Head. ’Twas the young man he had driven forth, who had wandered there an’ broke his neck. Isaac buried him too. An’ that was all, except two that the coastguard found an’ held an inquest over an’ carr’d off to churchyard.

‘So it befell; an’ for five year’ neither Isaac nor me opened mouth ’pon it, not to each other even. An’ then, one noonday, a sailor knocks at the door; an’ goin’ out, I seed he was a furriner, wi’ great white teeth showin’ dro’ his beard. “I be come to see Mister Isaac Lenine,” he says, in his outlandish English. So I called Isaac out; an’ the stranger grips ’en by the hand an’ kisses ’en, sayin’, “Little father, take me to their graves. My name is Feodor Himkoff, an’ my brother Dmitry was among the crew of the *Viatka*. You would know his body, if you buried it, for the second finger was gone from his right hand. I myself—wretched one!—chopped it by bad luck when we were boys, an’ played at wood cuttin’ wi’ our father’s axe. I have heard how they perished, far from aid, and how you gave ’em burial in your own field: and I pray to all the saints for you,” he says.

‘So Isaac led ’en to the field and showed ’en the grave that was staked off ’long wi’ the rest. God help my poor man! he was too big a coward to speak. So the man stayed wi’ us till sundown, an’ kissed us ’pon both cheeks, an’ went his way, blessin’ us. God forgi’e us—God forgi’e us!

‘An’ ever since he’s been breaking our heads dro’ the post-office wi’ such-like precious balms as these here.’ She broke off to settle Isaac more

comfortably in his chair. ' 'Tis all we can do to get rid of 'em on poor trampin' fellows same as yourself.'

THE DRAWN BLIND

SILVER trumpets sounded a flourish, and the javelin-men came pacing down Tregarrick Fore Street, with the sheriff's coach swinging behind them, its panels splendid with fresh blue paint and blazonry. Its wheels were picked out with yellow, and this scheme of colour extended to the coachman and the two lackeys, who held on at the back by leathern straps. Each wore a coat and breeches of electric blue, with a canary waistcoat, and was toned off with powder and flesh-coloured stockings at the extremities. Within the coach, and facing the horses, sat the two judges of the Crown Court and *Nisi Prius*, both in scarlet, with full wigs and little round patches of black plaister, like ventilators, on top; facing their lordships sat Sir Felix Felix-Williams, the sheriff, in a tightish uniform of the yeomanry with a great shako nodding on his knees, and a chaplain bolt upright by his side. Behind trooped a rabble of loafers and small boys, who shouted, 'Who bleeds bran?' till the lackeys' calves itched with indignation.

I was standing in the archway of the Packhorse Inn, among the maids and stable-boys gathered to see the pageant pass on its way to hear the Assize sermon. And standing there, I was witness of a little incident that seemed to escape the rest.

At the moment when the trumpets rang out, a very old woman, in a blue camlet cloak, came hobbling out of a grocer's shop some twenty yards up the pavement, and tottered down ahead of the procession as fast as her decrepit legs would move. There was no occasion for hurrying to avoid the crowd, for the javelin-men had barely rounded the corner of the long street, and were taking the goose-step very seriously. But she went by the 'Packhorse' doorway as if swift horsemen were after her, clutching the camlet cloak across her bosom, glancing over her shoulder, and working her lips inaudibly. I could not help remarking the position of her left arm. She held it bent exactly as though she held an infant to her old breast, and shielded it while she ran.

A few paces beyond the inn-door she halted on the edge of the kerb, flung another look up the street, and darted across the roadway. There stood a little shop—a watchmaker's—just opposite, and next to the shop a small ope with one dingy window over it. She vanished up the passage, at the entrance of which I was still staring idly when, half a minute later, a skinny trembling hand appeared at the window and drew down the blind.

I looked round at the men and maids; but their eyes were all for the

pageant, now not a stone's-throw away.

'Who is that old woman?' I asked, touching Caleb, the head ostler, on the shoulder.

Caleb—a small bandy-legged man, with a chin full of furrows, and the furrows full of grey stubble—withdrew his gaze grudgingly from the sheriff's coach.

'What woman?'

'She that went by a moment since.'

'She in the blue cloak, d' 'ee mean?—an old, ancient, wisht-lookin' body?'

'Yes.'

'A timmersome woman, like?'

'That's it.'

'Then her name's Cordely Pinsent.'

The procession reclaimed his attention. He received a passing wink from the charioteer, caught it on the volley and returned it with a solemn face; or rather, the wink seemed to rebound as from a blank wall. As the crowd closed in upon the circumstance of Justice, he turned to me again, spat, and went on:

'——Cordely Pinsent, widow of old Key Pinsent, that was tailor to all the grandees in the county so far back as I can mind. She's eighty odd; eighty-five if a day. I can just mind Key Pinsent—a great, red, rory-cum-tory chap, with a high stock and a wig like King George—"my royal patron" he called 'en, havin' by some means got leave to hoist the king's arms over his door. Such mighty portly manners, too—Oh, very spacious, I assure 'ee! Simme I can see the old Trojan now, with his white weskit bulgin' out across his doorway like a shop-front hung wi' jewels. Gout killed 'en. I went to his buryin'; such a stretch of experience does a young man get by time he reaches my age. God bless your heart alive! *I* can mind when they were hanged for forgery!'

'Who were hanged?'

'People,' he answered vaguely; 'and young Willie Pinsent.'

'This woman's son?'

'Aye, her son—her ewe-lamb of a child. 'Tis very seldom brought up agen her now, poor soul! She's so very old that folks forgits about it. Do 'ee see her window yonder, over the ope?'

He was pointing across to the soiled white blind that still looked blankly over the street, its lower edge caught up at one corner by a dusty geranium.

'I saw her pull the blind down.'

'Ah, you would if you was lookin' that way. I've a-seed her do't a score o' times. Well, when the gout reached Key Pinsent's stomach and he went off like the snuff of a candle at the age of forty-two, she was left unprovided, with a son of thirteen to maintain or go 'pon the parish. She was a Menhennick, tho', from t'other side o' the Duchy—a very proud family—and didn't mean to

dip the knee to nobody, and all the less because she'd demeaned hersel', to start with, by weddin' a tailor. But Key Pinsent by all allowance was handsome as blazes, and well-informed up to a point that he read Shakespeare for the mere pleasure o't.

'Well, she sold up the stock-in-trade an' hired a couple of rooms—the self-same rooms you see: and then she ate less'n a mouse an' took in needlework, plain an' fancy: for a lot o' the gentry's wives round the neighbourhood befriended her—though they had to be sly an' hide that they meant it for a favour, or she'd ha' snapped their heads off. An' all the while, she was teachin' her boy and tellin' 'en, whatever happened, to remember he was a gentleman, an' lovin' 'en with all the strength of a desolate woman.

'This Willie Pinsent was a comely boy, too: handsome as old Key, an' quick at his books. He'd a bold masterful way, bein' proud as ever his mother was, an' well knowin' there wasn' his match in Tregarrick for headwork. Such a beautiful hand he wrote! When he was barely turned sixteen they gave 'en a place in Gregory's Bank—Wilkins an' Gregory it was in those aged times. He still lived home wi' his mother, rentin' a room extra out of his earnin's, and turnin' one of the bedrooms into a parlour. That's the very room you're lookin' at. And when any father in Tregarrick had a bone to pick with his sons, he'd advise 'em to take example by young Pinsent—"so clever and good, too, there was no tellin' what he mightn't come to in time."

'Well-a-well, to cut it short, the lad was too clever. It came out, after, that he'd took to bettin' his employers' money agen the rich men up at the Royal Exchange. An' the upshot was that one evenin', while he was drinkin' tea with his mother in his lovin' light-hearted way, in walks a brace o' constables, an' says, "William Pinsent, young chap, I arrest thee upon a charge o' counterfeitin' old Gregory's handwritin', which is a hangin' matter!"

'An' now, sir, comes the cur'ous part o' the tale; for, if you'll believe *me*, this poor woman wouldn' listen to it—wouldn' hear a word o't. "What! my son Willie," she flames, hot as Lucifer—"my son Willie a forger! My boy, that I've nussed, an' reared up, an' studied, markin' all his pretty takin' ways since he learn'd to crawl! Gentlemen," she says, standin' up an' facin' 'em down, "what mother knows her son, if not I? I give you my word it's all a mistake."

'Aye, an' she would have it no other. While her son was waitin' his trial in jail, she walked the streets with her head high, scornin' the folk as she passed. Not a soul dared to speak pity; an' one afternoon, when old Gregory hissel' met her and began to mumble that "he trusted," an' "he had little doubt," an' "nobody would be gladder than he if it proved to be a mistake," she held her skirt aside an' went by with a look that turned 'en to dirt, as he said. "Gad!" said he, "she couldn' ha' looked at me worse if I'd been a tab o' turf!" meanin' to say "instead o' the richest man in Tregarrick."

‘But her greatest freak was seen when th’ Assizes came. Sir, she wouldn’ even go to the trial. She disdained it. An’ when, that mornin’, the judges had driven by her window, same as they drove to-day, what d’ ’ee think she did?

‘She began to lay the cloth up in the parlour yonder, an’ there set out the rarest meal, ready for her boy. There was meats, roasted chickens, an’ a tongue, an’ a great ham. There was cheese-cakes that she made after a little secret of her own; an’ a bowl of junket, an inch deep in cream, that bein’ his pet dish; an’ all kind o’ knick-knacks, wi’ grapes, an’ peaches, an’ apricots, an’ decanters o’ wine, white an’ red. Aye, sir, there was even crackers for mother an’ son to pull together, with scraps o’ poetry inside. An’ flowers—the table was bloomin’ with flowers. For weeks she’d been plannin’ it: an’ all the forenoon she moved about an’ around that table, givin’ it a touch here an’ a touch there, an’ taking a step back to see how beautiful it looked. An’ then, as the day wore on, she pulled a chair over by the window, an’ sat down, an’ waited.

‘In those days a capital trial was kept up till late into the night, if need were. By an’ by she called up her little servin’ gal that was then (she’s a gran’mother now), an’ sends her down to the court-house to learn how far the trial had got, an’ run back with the news.

‘Down runs Selina Mary, an’ back with word:

‘ “They’re a-summin’-up,” says she.

‘Then Mrs. Pinsent went an’ lit eight candles. Four she set ’pon the table, an’ four ’pon the mantel-shelf. You could see the blaze out in the street, an’ the room lit up, wi’ the flowers, an’ fruit, an’ shinin’ glasses—red and yellow dahlias the flowers were, that bein’ the time o’ year. An’ over each candle she put a little red silk shade. You never saw a place look cosier. Then she went back an’ waited: but in half an hour calls to Selina Mary agen:

‘ “Selina Mary, run you back to the court-house, an’ bring word how far they’ve got.”

‘So the little slip of a maid ran back, and this time ’twas:

‘ “Missis, the judge has done; an’ now they’re considerin’ about Master Willie.”

‘So the poor woman sat a while longer, an’ then she calls:

‘ “Selina Mary, run down agen, an’ as he comes out, tell ’en to hurry. They must be finished by now.”

‘The maid was gone twenty minutes this time. The evenin’ was hot an’ the window open; an’ now all the town that wasn’ listenin’ to the trial was gathered in front, gazin’ curiously at the woman inside. She was tittivatin’ the table for the fiftieth time, an’ touchin’ up the flowers that had drooped a bit i’ the bowls.

‘But after twenty minutes Selina Mary came runnin’ up the street, an’

fetched her breath at the front door, and went upstairs slowly and ’pon tip-toe. Her face at the parlour door was white as paper; an’ while she stood there the voices o’ the crowd outside began to take all one tone, and beat in the room like the sound o’ waves ’pon a beach.

‘ “Oh, missis——” she begins.

‘ “Have they finished?”

‘The poor cheald was only able to nod.

‘ “Then, where’s Willie? Why isn’t he here?”

‘ “Oh, missis, they’re goin’ to hang ’en!”

‘Mrs. Pinsent moved across the room, took her by the arm, led her downstairs, an’ gave her a little push out into the street. Not a word did she say, but shut the door ’pon her, very gentlelike. Then she went back an’ pulled the blind down slowly. The crowd outside watched her do it. Her manner was quite ord’nary. They stood there for a minute or so, an’ behind the blind the eight candles went out, one by one. By the time the Judges passed homeward ’twas all dark, only the blind showin’ white by the street lamp opposite. From that year to this she has pulled it down whenever a Judge drives by.’

THREE PHOTOGRAPHS

‘Photograph all the prisoners? But why?’ demanded Sir Felix Felix-Williams. Old Canon Kempe shrugged his shoulders; Admiral Trewbody turned the pages of the Home Secretary’s letter. They sat at the baize-covered table in the Magistrates’ Room—the last of the Visiting Justices who met, under the old *régime*, to receive the Governor’s report and look after the welfare of the prisoners in Bodmin County Gaol.

‘But why, in the name of common-sense?’ Sir Felix persisted.

‘I suppose,’ hazarded the Admiral, ‘it helps the police in identifying criminals.’

‘But the letter says “*all* the prisoners.” You don’t seriously tell me that any one wants a photograph to identify Poacher Tresize, whom I’ve committed a score of times if I’ve committed him once? And perhaps you’ll explain to me this further demand for a “Composite Photograph” of all the prisoners, male and female. A “Composite Photograph”!—have you ever seen one?’

‘No,’ the Admiral mused; ‘but I see what the Home Office is driving at. Someone has been persuading them to test these new theories in criminology the doctors are so busy with, especially in Italy.’

‘In Italy!’ pish’d Sir Felix Felix-Williams.

‘My dear Sir Felix, science has no nationality.’ The Admiral was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, and kept a microscope to amuse his leisure.

‘It has *some* proper limits, I should hope,’ Sir Felix retorted. It annoyed him—a Chairman of Quarter Sessions for close upon twenty years—to be told that the science of criminology was yet in its infancy; and he glanced mischievously at the Canon, who might be supposed to have a professional quarrel with scientific men. But the Canon was a wary fighter, and no waster of powder and shot.

‘Well, well,’ said he, ‘I don’t see what harm it can do, or what good. If the Home Secretary wants his Composite Photograph, let him have it. The only question is, Have we a photographer who knows how to make one? Or must we send the negatives up to Whitehall?’

. . . . .

So the Visiting Justices sent for the local photographer and consulted him. And he, being a clever fellow, declared it was easy enough—a mere question of care in superimposing the negatives. He had never actually made the experiment; his clients (so he called his customers) preferring to be photographed singly or in family groups. But he asked to be given a trial, and suggested (to be on the safe side) preparing two or three of these composite prints, between which the Justices might choose at their next meeting.

. . . . .

This was resolved, and the resolution entered in the minutes; and next day the photographer set to work. Some of the prisoners resisted and ‘made faces’ in front of the camera, squinting and pulling the most horrible mouths. A female shoplifter sat under protest, because she was not allowed to send home for an evening gown. But the most consented obediently, and Jim Tresize even asked for a copy to take home to his wife.

The Admiral (who had married late in life) resided with his wife and young family in a neat villa just outside the town, where his hobby was to grow pelargoniums. The photographer passed the gate daily on his way to and from the prison, and was usually hailed and catechized on his progress.

His patience with the recalcitrant prisoners delighted the Admiral, who more than once assured his wife that Smithers was an intelligent fellow and quite an artist in his way. ‘I wonder how he manages it,’ said Mrs. Trewbody. ‘He told baby last autumn that a little bird would fly out of the camera when he took off the cap, and every one allows that the result is most lifelike. But I don’t like the idea, and I fear it may injure his trade.’

The Admiral could not always follow his wife’s reasoning. ‘What is it you dislike?’ he asked.

‘Well, it’s not nice to think of oneself going into the same camera he has been using on those wretched prisoners. It’s sentiment, I dare say; but I had the same feeling when he stuck up Harry’s photograph in his showcase at the railway station, among all kinds of persons we don’t visit, and I requested him to remove it.’

The Admiral laughed indulgently, being one of those men who find a charm, even a subtle flattery, in their wives’ silliness.

‘I agree with you,’ he said, ‘that it’s not pleasant to be exposed to public gaze among a crowd of people one would never think of knowing. I don’t suppose it would actually encourage familiarity; at the same time there’s an air of promiscuity about it—I won’t say disrespect—which, ahem! jars. But with the prisoners it’s different,—my attitude to them is scientific, if I may say so. I look upon them as a race apart, almost of another world, and as such I find them extremely interesting. The possibility of mixing with them on any terms of intimacy doesn’t occur. I am aware, my dear,’ he wound up graciously, ‘that you women seldom understand this mental detachment, being as God made you, and all the more charming for your prejudices.’

. . . . .

At the next meeting of Justices Smithers the photographer presented himself, and produced his prints with a curious air of diffidence.

‘I have,’ he explained, ‘brought three for your Worships’ selection, and can honestly assure your Worships that my pains have been endless. What puzzles me, however, is that although in all three the same portraits have been imposed, and in the same order, the results are surprisingly different. The cause of these differences I cannot detect, though I have gone over the process several times and step by step; but out of some two dozen experiments I may say that all the results answer pretty closely to one or another of these three types.’ Mr. Smithers, who had spent much time in rehearsing this little speech, handed up photograph No. 1; and Sir Felix adjusted his spectacles.

‘Villainous!’ he exclaimed, recoiling.

The Canon and the Admiral bent over it together.

‘Most repulsive!’ said the Admiral.

‘Here, indeed,’—the Canon was more impressive,—‘here indeed is an object-lesson in the effects of crime! Is it possible that to *this* Man’s passions can degrade his divinely inherited features? Were it not altogether too horrible, I would have this picture framed and glazed and hung up in every cottage home in the land.’

‘My dear fellow,’ interrupted Sir Felix, ‘we cannot possibly let this monstrosity go up to Whitehall as representative of the inmates of Bodmin

Gaol! It would mean an inquiry on the spot. It would even reflect upon *us*. Ours is a decent county, as counties go, and I protest it shall not, with my consent, be injured by any such libel.'

Mr. Smithers handed up photograph No. 2.

'This looks better,' began Sir Felix; and with that he gave a slight start, and passed the photograph to the Canon. The Canon, too, started, and stole a quick glance at Sir Felix: their eyes met.

'It certainly is singular'—stammered Sir Felix. 'I fancied—without irreverence——But you detected it too?' he wound up incoherently.

'May I have a look?' The Admiral peered over the Canon's hand, who, however, did not relinquish the photograph but turned on Smithers with sudden severity.

'I presume, sir, this is not an audacious joke?'

'I assure your Worship——' protested the photographer. 'I had some thoughts of tearing it up, but thought it wouldn't be honest.'

'You did rightly,' the Canon answered; 'but, now that we have seen it, I have no such scruple.' He tore the print across, and across again. 'Even in this,' he said, with a glance at the Admiral, who winced, 'we may perhaps read a lesson, or at least a warning, that man's presumption in extending the bounds of his knowledge—or, as I should prefer to call it, his curiosity—may—er—bring him face to face with——'

But the Canon's speech tailed off as he regarded the torn pieces of cardboard in his hand. He felt that the others had been seriously perturbed and were not listening: he himself was conscious of a shock too serious for that glib emollient—usually so efficacious—the sound of his own voice. He perceived that it did not impose even on the photographer. An uncomfortable silence fell on the room.

Sir Felix was the first to recover. 'Put it in the waste-paper basket: no, in the fire!' he commanded, and turned to Smithers. 'Surely between these two extremes——'

'I was on the point of suggesting that your Worships would find No. 3 more satisfactory,' the photographer interrupted, forgetting his manners in his anxiety to restore these three gentlemen to their ease. His own discomfort was acute, and he overacted, as a man will who has unwittingly surprised a State secret and wishes to assure every one of his obtuseness.

Sir Felix studied No. 3. 'This appears to me a very ordinary photograph. Without being positively displeasing, the face is one you might pass in the street any day, and forget.'

'I hope it suggests no—no well-known features?' put in the Canon nervously.

'None at all, I think: but see for yourself. To me it seems—although hazy,

of course—the kind of thing the Home Office might find helpful.'

'It is less distinct than the others.' The Admiral pulled his whiskers.

'And for that reason the more obviously composite—which is what we are required to furnish. No, indeed, I can find nothing amiss with it, and I think, gentlemen, if you are agreed, we will forward this print.'

. . . . .

No. 3 was passed accordingly, the photographer withdrew, and the three Justices turned to other business, which occupied them for a full two hours.

But, I pray you, mark the sequel.

Mr. Smithers, in his relief and delight at the Magistrates' approbation, hurried home, fished out a copy of No. 3, exposed it proudly in his shop window, and went off to the Packhorse Inn for a drink.

Less than an hour later, Mrs. Trewbody, having packed her family into the jingle for their afternoon's ride with Miss Platt, the governess, strolled down into the town to do some light shopping; and, happening to pass the photographer's window, came to a standstill with a little gasp.

A moment later she entered the shop; and Mrs. Smithers, answering the shop bell, found that she had taken the photograph from the window and was examining it eagerly.

'This is quite a surprise, Mrs. Smithers. A capital likeness! May I ask how many copies my husband ordered?'

'I'm not aware, ma'am, that the Admiral has ordered any as yet; though I heard Smithers say only this morning as he hoped he'd be pleased with it.'

'I think I can answer for that, although he *is* particular. But I happen to know he disapproves of these things being exposed in the window. I'll take this copy home with me, if I may. Has your husband printed any more?'

'Well no, ma'am. There was one other copy; but Lady Felix-Williams happened to be passing just now, and spied it, and nothing would do but she must take it away with her.'

'Lady Felix-Williams?' Mrs. Trewbody stiffened with sudden distrust. 'Now, what would Lady Felix-Williams want with this?'

'I'm sure I can't tell you, ma'am: but she was delighted. "A capital likeness," she said; "I've never seen a photograph before that caught just that expression of his." '

'I should very much like to know what *she* had to do with his expression,' Mrs. Trewbody murmured to herself, between wonder and incipient alarm. But she concealed her feelings, good lady; and, having paid for her purchase, carried it home in her muff and stuck it upright against one of the Sèvres candlesticks on her boudoir mantel-shelf. And there the Admiral discovered it

three-quarters of an hour later. He came home wanting his tea; and, finding the boudoir empty, advanced to ring the bell. At that moment his eyes fell on Smithers's replica of the very photograph he had passed for furtherance to the Home Secretary. He picked it up and gave vent to a long whistle.

'Now, how the dickens——?'

His wife appeared in the doorway, with Harry, Dicky, and Theophila clinging to her skirts, fresh from their ride, and boisterous.

'My dear Emily, where in the world did you get hold of this?'

He held the photograph towards her at arm's length, and the children rushed forward to examine it.

'Papa! papa!' they shouted together, capering around it. 'Oh, mammy, isn't it him *exactly*?'

SCHOOL FRIENDS

'What ho, there!'

At this feudal summons I turned, and spied the Bashaw elbowing his way towards me through the Fleet Street crowd, his hat and tie askew and his big face a red beacon of good will. He fell on my neck, and we embraced.

'Is me recreant child returned? Is he tired at last av annihilatin' all that's made to a green thought in a green shade? An' did he home-sickun by the Cornish Coast for the Street that Niver Sleeps, an' the whirroo an' stink av her, an' the *foomum et opase strepitumké*—to drink delight av battle with his peers, an' see the great Achilles whom he knew—meanin' meself?' The Bashaw's style in conversation, as in print, bristles with allusion.

I shook my head.

'I go back to-morrow, I hope. Business brought me up, and as soon as it's settled I pack.'

'Too quick despairer—but I take it ye'll be bound just now for the "Cheese." Right y' are; and I'll do meself the honour to lunch wid ye, at your expense.'

Every one knows and loves the Bashaw, alias the O'Driscoll, that genial failure. Generations of Fleet Street youths have taken advice and help from him: have prospered, grown reputable, rich, and even famous: and have left him where he stood. Nobody can remember the time when O'Driscoll was not; though, to judge from his appearance, he must have stepped upon the town from between the covers of an illustrated keepsake, such as our grandmothers loved—so closely he resembles the Corsair of that period, with his ripe cheeks, melting eyes, and black curls that twist like the young tendrils of a vine. The curls are dyed nowadays, and his waist is not what it used to be in the picture-

books; but time has worn nothing off his temper. He is perennially enthusiastic, and can still beat any journalist in London in describing a Lord Mayor's Show.

'You behould in me,' he went on, with a large hand on my shoulder, 'the victim av a recent eviction—a penniless outcast. 'Tis no beggar's petition that I'll be profferin', however, but a bargun. Give me cold meat and salad, a pint av hock, an' fill me pipe wid the Only Mixture, an' I'll repay ye across the board wid a narrative—the sort av God-forsaken, ordinary thrifle that you youngsters turn into copy—may ye find forgiveness! 'Tis no use to me whatever. Ted O'Driscoll's instrument was iver the big drum, and he knows his limuts.'

'Yes, my boy,' he resumed, five minutes later, as he sat in the 'Cheshire Cheese,' beneath Dr. Johnson's portrait, balancing a black-handled knife between his first and second fingers and nodding good-fellowship to every journalist in the room; 'the apartment in Bloomsbury is desolut; the furnichur'—what was lift av ut—dispersed; the leopard an' the lizard keep the courts where O'Driscoll gloried an' drank deep; an' the wild ass—meanin' by that the midical student on the fourth floor—stamps overhead, but cannot break his sleep. I've been evicted: that's the long and short av ut. Lord help me!—I'd have fared no worse in the ould country—here's to her! Think what immortal copy I'd have made out av the regrettable incident over there!' His voice broke, but not for self-pity. It always broke when he mentioned Ireland.

'Is it comfort ye'd be speakin'?' he began again, filling his glass. 'Me dear fellow, divvle a doubt I'll fetch round, tight an' safe. Ould Mick Sullivan—he that built the *Wild West*, the fastest vessel that iver put out av Waterford—ould Mick Sullivan used to swear he'd make any ship seaworthy that didn' leak worse than a five-barred gate. An' that's me, more or less. I'm an ould campaigner. But listen to this. Me feelin's have been wrung this day, and that sorely. I promised ye the story, an' I must out wid ut, whether or no.'

It was the hour when the benches of the 'Cheese' began to empty. My work was over for the day, and I disposed myself to listen.

'The first half I spent at the acadimy where they flagellated the rudiments av polite learnin' into me small carcuss, I made a friend. He was the first I iver made, though not the last, glory be to God! But first friendship is like first love for the sweet taste it puts in the mouth. Niver but once in his life will a man's heart dance to that chune. 'Twas a small slip av a Saxon lad that it danced for then: a son av a cursed agint, that I should say it. But sorroa a thought had I for the small boccawn's nationality nor for his father's trade. I only knew the friendship in his pretty eyes an' the sweetness that knit our two sowls togither, like David's an' Jonathan's. Pretty it was to walk togither, an' discourse, an' get the strap togither for heaven knows what mischief, an' consowl each other

for our broken skins. He'd a wonderful gift at his books, for which I reverenced um, and at the singlestick, for which I loved um. Niver to this day did I call up the ould playground widout behowldin' that one boy, though all the rest av the faces (the master's included) were vague as wather—wather in which that one pair av eyes was reflected.

'The school was a great four-square stone buildin' beside a windy road, and niver a tree in sight; but pastures where the grass would cut your boot, an' stone walls, an' brown hills around, like the rim av a saucer. All belonged to the estate that Jemmy Nichol's father managed—a bankrupt property, or next door to that. It's done better since he gave up the place; but when I've taken a glance at the landscape since (as I have, once or twice) I see no difference. To me 'tis the naked land I looked upon the last day av the summer half, when I said good-bye to Jemmy; for he was lavin' the school that same afternoon for Dublin, to cross over to England wid his father.

'Sick at heart was I, an' filled already wid the heavy sense of solitariness, as we stood by the great iron gate, wishin' one another fare-ye-well.

' "Jemmy avick," says I, "dull, dull will it be widout ye here. And, Jemmy —send some av my heart back to me when ye write, as ye promise to do."

' "Wheniver I lay me down, Ned," he answered me (though by nature a close-hearted Saxon), "I'll think o' ye; an' wheniver I rise up I'll think o' ye. May the Lord do so to me, an' more also, if I cease from lovin' ye till my life's end."

'So we kissed like a pair av girls, and off he was driven, leavin' a great hollow inside the rim av the hills. An' I ran up to the windy dormitory, stumblin' at ivery third step for the blindin' tears, and watched um from the window there growin' small along the road. "Ye Mountains av Gilboa," said I, shakin' my fist at the hills, "let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon ye"; for I hated the place now that Jemmy was gone.

'Well, 'twas the ould story—letters at first in plenty, then fewer, then none at all. Long before I came over to try my luck I'd lost all news of Jem: didn't know his address, even. Nor till to-day have I set eyes on um. He's bald-headed, me boy, and crooked-faytured, to-day; but I knew him for Jemmy in the first kick av surprise.

'I was evicted this mornin', as I've towld ye. Six years I've hung me hat up in those same apartments in Bloomsbury; and, till last year, aisy enough I found me landlord over a quarter's rent or two overjue. But last midsummer year the house changed hands; and bedad it began to be "pay or quit." This day it was "quit." The new landlord came up the stairs at the head av the ejectin' army: I got up from breakfast to open the door to um. I'd never set eyes on um since I'd been his tenant. Bedad, it was Jemmy!'

O'Driscoll paused, and poured himself out yet another glass of hock.

'So I suppose,' I said, 'you ran into each other's arms, and kissed again with tears?'

'Then you suppose wrong,' said he, and sat for a moment or two silent, fingering the stem of his glass. Then he added, more gently:

'I looked in the face av um, and said to meself, "Jemmy doesn't remember me. If I introduce meself, I wonder what'll he do? Will he love me still, or will he turn me out?" An' by the Lord I didn't care to risk ut! I couldn't dare to lose that last illusion; an' so I put on me hat an' walked out, tellin' him nothing at all.'

A TOWN'S MEMORY

THE returned Emigrant was not one of those who sometimes creep back to Tregarrick and scan the folk wistfully and the names over the shops till they bethink themselves of stepping up the hill to take a look at the cemetery, and there find all they sought. This man stood under the archway of the Packhorse Inn (by A. Walters), with his soft hat tilted over his nose, a cigar in his mouth, hands in his trouser-pockets, and legs a-straddle, and smoked and eyed the passers-by with a twinkle of humour.

He knew them all again, or nearly all. He had quitted Tregarrick for the Cape at the age of fifteen, under the wing of a cousin from the Mining District; had made money out there, and meant to return to make more; and was home just now on a holiday, with gold in his pocket and the merest trace of silver in his hair. He watched the people passing, and it all seemed very queer to him and amusing.

They were one and all acting and behaving just as they had used to act and behave. Some were a trifle greyer, perhaps, and others stooped a bit; but they went about their business in the old fashion, and their occupations had not changed. It was just as if he had wound up a clockwork toy before leaving England, and had returned after many years to find it still working. Here came old Dymond, the postman, with the usual midday delivery, light as ever, and the well-remembered dot-and-go-one gait. The maids who came out to take the letters were different; in one of them the Emigrant recognized a little girl who had once sat facing him in the Wesleyan day-school; but the bells that fetched them out were those on which he had sounded runaway peals in former days, and with his eyes shut he could have sworn to old Dymond's double knock. The cart that rattled its load of empty cans up the street belonged to Nicholas Retallack ('Old Nick'), the milk-man, and that was Retallack beside it, returning from his morning round. The Emigrant took the cigar from his mouth

and blew a lazy cloud. But for Retallack he might never have seen South Africa or known Johannesburg. Retallack had caught him surreptitiously milking the Alderney into a battered straw hat, and had threatened a summons. There had been a previous summons with a conviction, and the Mayor had hinted at the Reformatory, so the Emigrant had been packed off. And here he was, back again; and here was Retallack trudging around, the same as ever.

In the window across the road a saddler sat cutting out a strap, and reminding the Emigrant of a certain First of April when he had ventured in and inquired for half a pint of strap-oil. It might almost be the same strap, as it certainly was the same saddler.

Down at the street corner, by the clock, a couple of Town Councillors stood chatting. While the Emigrant looked there came round the corner a ruck of boys from school chivvying and shouting after an ungainly man, who turned twice and threatened them with a stick. The Town Councillors did not interfere, and the rabble passed bawling by the 'Packhorse.' Long before it came the Emigrant had recognized the ungainly man. It was Dick Loony, the town butt. He had chivvied the imbecile a hundred times in just the same fashion, yelling 'Black Cat!' after him as these young imps were yelling—though why 'Black Cat' neither he nor the imps could have told. But Dicky had always resented it as he resented it now, wheeling round, shaking his stick, and sputtering maledictions. A stone or two flew harmlessly by. The Emigrant did not interfere.

As yet no one had recognized him. He had arrived the night before, and taken a room at the 'Packhorse,' nobody asking his name; had sat after supper in a corner of the smoking-room and listened to the gossip there, saying nothing.

'Who's he travellin' for?' somebody had asked of Abel Walters, the landlord. 'He ain't a commercial. He hadn't got the trunks, only a kit-bag. By the soft hat he wears I should say *a* agent in advance. Likely we'll have a circus before long.'

His father and mother were dead these ten years. He had sent home money to pay the funeral expenses and buy a substantial headstone. But he had not been up to the cemetery yet. He was not a sentimental man. Still, he had expected his return to make some little stir in Tregarrick, and now a shade of disappointment began to creep over his humour.

He flung away the end of his cigar and strolled up the sunny pavement to a sweet-shop where he had once bought ha'porths of liquorice and cinnamon-rock. The legend, 'E. Hosking, Maker of Cheesecakes to Queen Victoria,' still decorated the window. He entered and demanded a pound of best 'fairing,' smiling at the magnificence of the order. Mrs. Hosking—her white mob-cap and apron clean as ever—offered him a macaroon for luck, and weighed out

the sweets. Her hand shook more than of old.

‘You don’t remember me, Mrs. Hosking?’

‘What is it you say? You must speak a little louder, please, I’m deaf.’

‘You don’t remember me?’

‘No, I don’t,’ she said composedly. ‘I’m gone terrible blind this last year or two.’

The Emigrant paid for his sweets and walked out. He had bought them with a purpose, and now bent his steps down Market Street. At the foot of the hill he paused before a row of whitewashed cottages. A green fence ran along their front, and a pebbled path; and here he found a stout, matronly woman bent over a wash-tub.

‘Does Mrs. Best live here?’ he asked.

The woman withdrew about a dozen pins from her mouth and answered all in one breath:

‘She isn’t called Best any longer; she married agen five year ago; second husbing, he died too; she doesn’ live here any more.’

With this she stuck the pins very deliberately, one by one, in the bosom of her print gown, and plunged her hands into the wash-tub again.

The Emigrant stood nonplussed for a moment and scratched the back of his head, tilting his soft hat still farther forward on his nose.

‘She used to be very fond of me when I was a boy,’ he said lamely.

‘Yes?’ The tone seemed to ask what business that could be of hers.

‘She came as nurse to my mother when I was born. I suppose that made her take a fancy to me.’

‘Ah, no doubt,’ replied the woman vaguely, and added, while she soaped a long black stocking, ‘she did a lot o’ that, one time and another.’

‘She had a little girl of her own before I left Tregarrick,’ the Emigrant persisted, not because she appeared interested—she did not, at all—but with some vague hope of making himself appear a little less trivial. ‘Lizzie she called her. I suppose you don’t know what has become of the old woman?’

‘Well, considerin’ that I’m her daughter Elizabeth’—she lengthened the name with an implied reproof—‘I reckon I ought to know.’

The Emigrant’s hand sought and crushed the big packet of sweets well into his pocket. He flushed scarlet. At the same time he could hardly keep back a smile at his absurd mistake. To be here with lollipops for a woman of thirty and more!

‘You haven’t any little ones of your own?’

‘No, I haven’t. Why?’

‘Oh, well; only a question. My name is Peter Jago—Pete, I used to be called.’

‘Yes?’

He took notice that she had said nothing of her mother's whereabouts; and concluded, rightly, that the old woman must be in the workhouse.

'Well, I'm sorry,' he said. 'I thought I might be able to do something for her.'

The woman became attentive at last.

'Any small trifle you might think o' leavin' with me, sir, it should duly reach her. She've failed a lot, lately.'

'Thank you; I'll think it over. Good day.'

He strolled back to the 'Packhorse' and ate his dinner. Abel Walters, coming in after with a pint of port to his order, found the Emigrant with a great packet of sugared almonds and angelica spread open beside his cheese.

'I suppose, sir,' said Mr. Walters, eyeing the heap, 'you've travelled a great deal in foreign parts.'

Two days passed. The Emigrant visited the cemetery, inspected his parents' tombstone, and found about it a number of tombstones belonging to people whose faces he had not hitherto missed. But after his experiment upon Elizabeth Best he had not declared himself a second time. Indeed, his humour by this had turned sour, and his mind was made up that, if no one recognized him spontaneously he would leave his native town as quietly as he had come—would go back without revealing himself to a soul. It would be unfair to say that he felt aggrieved; but he certainly dismissed a project, with which he had often played in South Africa, of erecting a public drinking-fountain on Mount Folly, as the citizens of Tregarrick call the slope in front of the County Assize Hall.

The third day was Sunday, and he went to church in the morning. The Vicar who preached was a stranger to him; but in the sidesman who came down the aisle afterwards with the offertory-plate he recognized one Billy Smithers, who had been a crony of his some twenty years ago; who had, in fact, helped him more than once to milk Retallack's Alderney. He felt in his pocket and dropped a sovereign into the plate. The sidesman halted and rubbed his chin.

'Han't you made a mistake?' he asked in a stage whisper.

The Emigrant waved his hand in rather a lordly manner, and William Smithers, sidesman, proceeded down the aisle, wondering, but not suspecting.

The Vicar recited the prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here on earth, and the Emigrant joined the crowd trooping out by the western door.

But in the press just outside the door two hands suddenly seized his right hand and shook it violently. He turned and faced—Dicky Loony.

‘Me know, eh? Pete—Mas’r Pete!’ The idiot bent over his hand and mumbled it with his wry mouth, then shook it again, peering up in his face. ‘Eh? Peter—Pete. Yes. All right!’

The Emigrant looked down on this poor creature at whom he had flung scores of stones, but never a kind word. And the idiot ran on:

‘Dicky, eh?’—tapping his chest. ‘You know—Dicky. Pete—Pete, eh?’—and he made the gesture of one flinging a stone. ‘Often, ha, ha! *So* high.’ He spread his hand, palm downward, about five feet from the ground.

‘Well I’m blest!’ said the Emigrant softly. They stood now on the green together, a little apart from the crowd.

‘*So* high, eh? Li’l boy, eh? Fling—me know!’ He took the emigrant’s hand again and shook it, smiling and looking him straight in the eyes with innocent gaiety. ‘These boys—no good; no good now. Pete, *he* fling *so*. Li’l boy—quite li’l boy. Me know, eh? Dicky know!’

‘Well,’ repeated the Emigrant; ‘I’m blest, but this is funny!’

CUCKOO VALLEY RAILWAY

THIS century was still young and ardent when ruin fell upon Cuckoo Valley. Its head rested on the slope of a high and sombre moorland, scattered with granite and china-clay; and by the small town of Ponteglos, where it widened out into arable and grey pasture-land, the Cuckoo River grew deep enough to float up vessels of small tonnage from the coast at the spring tides. I have seen there the boom of a trading schooner brush the grasses on the river-bank as she came before a westerly wind, and the hay-makers stop and almost crick their necks staring up at her topsails. But between the moors and Ponteglos the valley wound for fourteen miles or so between secular woods, so steeply converging that for the most part no more room was left at the bottom of the V than the river itself filled. The fisherman beside it trampled on pimpernels, sundew, water-mint, and asphodels, or pushed between clumps of *Osmunda regalis* that overtopped him by more than a foot. If he took to wading, there was much ado to stand against the current. Only here and there it spread into a still black pool, greased with eddies; and beside such a pool, it was odds that he found a diminutive meadow, green and flat as a billiard table, and edged with clumps of fern. To think of Cuckoo Valley is to call up the smell of that fern as it wrapped at the bottom of the creel the day’s catch of salmon-peal and trout.

The town of Tregarrick (which possessed a jail, a workhouse, and a lunatic asylum, and called itself the centre of the Duchy) stood three miles back from

the lip of this happy valley, whither on summer evenings its burghers rambled to eat cream and junket at the Dairy Farm by the river-bank, and afterwards sit to watch the fish rise, while the youngsters and maidens played at hide-and-seek in the woods. But there came a day when the names of Watt and Stephenson waxed great in the land, and these slow citizens caught the railway frenzy. They took it, however, in their own fashion. They never dreamed of connecting themselves with other towns and a larger world, but of aggrandizement by means of a railway that should run from Tregarrick to nowhere in particular, and bring the intervening wealth to their doors. They planned a railway that should join Tregarrick with Cuckoo Valley, and there divide into two branches, the one bringing ore and clay from the moors, the other fetching up sand and coal from the sea. Surveyors and engineers descended upon the woods; then a cloud of navvies. The days were filled with the crash of falling timber and the rush of emptied trucks. The stream was polluted, the fish died, the fairies were evicted from their rings beneath the oak, the morals of the junketing houses underwent change. The vale knew itself no longer; its smoke went up day by day, week by week, with the noise of pickaxes and oaths.

On 13th August 1834 the Mayor of Tregarrick declared the new line open, and a locomotive was run along its rails to Dunford Bridge, at the foot of the moors. The engine was christened *The Wonder of the Age*; and I have before me a handbill of the festivities of that proud day, which tells me that the Mayor himself rode in an open truck, 'embellished with Union Jacks, lions and unicorns, and other loyal devices.' And then Nature settled down to heal her wounds, and the Cuckoo Valley Railway to pay no dividend to its promoters.

It is now two years and more since, on an August day, I wound up my line by Dunford Bridge, and sauntered towards the Light Horseman Inn, two gunshots up the road. The time was four o'clock, or thereabouts, and a young couple sat on a bench by the inn-door, drinking cocoa out of one cup. Above their heads and along the house-front a pine-tree straggled, but its foliage was too thin to afford a speck of shade as they sat there in the eye of the westering sun. The man (aged about one-and-twenty) wore the uncomfortable Sunday-best of a mechanic, with a shrivelled, but still enormous, bunch of Sweet-William in his button-hole. The girl was dressed in a bright green gown and a white bonnet. Both were flushed and perspiring, and I still think they must have ordered hot cocoa in haste, and were repenting it at leisure. They lifted their eyes, and blushed with a yet warmer red as I passed into the porch.

Two men were seated in the cool tap-room, each with a pasty and a mug of beer. A composition of sweat and coal-dust had caked their faces, and so deftly smoothed all distinction out of their features that it seemed at the moment natural and proper to take them for twins. Perhaps this was an error: perhaps,

too, their appearance of extreme age was produced by the dark grey dust that overlaid so much of them as showed above the table. As twins, however, I remember them, and cannot shake off the impression that they had remained twins for an unusual number of years.

One addressed me. ‘Parties outside pretty comfortable?’ he asked.

‘They were drinking out of the same cup,’ I answered.

He nodded. ‘Made man and wife this mornin’. I don’t fairly know what’s best to do. Lord knows I wouldn’t hurry their soft looks and dilly-dallyin’; but did ’ee notice how much beverage was left in the cup?’

‘They was mated at Tregarrick half-after-nine this mornin’,’ observed the other twin, pulling out a great watch, ‘and we brought ’em down here in a truck for their honeymoon. The agreement was for an afternoon in the woods; but by crum! sir, they’ve sat there and held one another’s hand for up’ards of an hour after the stated time to start. And we ha’n’t the heart to tell ’em so.’

He walked across to the window and peered for a few seconds over the blind.

‘There’s a mort of grounds in the cocoa that’s sold here,’ he went on, after a look, ‘and ’tisn’t the sort that does the stomach good, neither. For their own sakes, I’ll give the word to start, and chance their thankin’ me some day later, when they learn what things be made of.’

The other twin arose, shook the crumbs off his trousers, and stretched himself. I guessed now that this newly married pair had delayed traffic at the Dunford terminus of the Cuckoo Valley Railway for almost an hour and a half; and I determined to travel into Tregarrick by the same train.

So we strolled out of the inn towards the line, the lovers following, arm-in-arm, some fifty paces behind.

‘How far is it to the station?’ I inquired.

The twins stared at me.

Presently we turned down a lane scored with dry ruts, passed an oak plantation, and came on a clearing where the train stood ready. The line did not finish: it ended in a heap of sand. There were eight trucks, seven of them laden with granite, and an engine, with a prodigiously long funnel, bearing the name, *The Wonder of the Age*, in brass letters along its boiler.

‘Now,’ said one of the twins, while the other raked up the furnace, ‘you can ride in the empty truck with the lovers, or on the engine along with us—which you like.’

I chose the engine. We climbed on board, gave a loud whistle, and jolted off. Far down, on our right, the river shone between the trees, and these trees, encroaching on the track, almost joined their branches above us. Ahead, the moss that grew upon the sleepers gave the line the appearance of a green glade, and the grasses, starred with golden-rod and mallow, grew tall to the very edge

of the rails. It seemed that in a few more years Nature would cover this scar of 1834, and score the return match against man. Rails, engine, officials, were already no better than ghosts: youth and progress lay in the pushing trees, the salmon leaping against the dam below, the young man and maid sitting with clasped hands and amatory looks in the hindmost truck.

At the end of three miles or so we gave an alarming whistle, and slowed down a bit. The trees were thinner here, and I saw that a high road came down the hill, and cut across our track some fifty yards ahead. We prepared to cross it cautiously.

'Ho-o-y! Stop!'

The brake was applied, and as we came to a standstill a party of men and women descended the hill towards us.

' 'Tis Susan Warne's seventh goin' to be christen'd, by the look of it,' said the engine-driver beside me; 'an', by crum! we've got the Kimbly.'

The procession advanced. In the midst walked a stout woman, carrying a baby in long clothes, and in front a man bearing in both hands a plate covered with a white cloth. He stepped up beside the train, and, almost before I had time to be astonished, a large yellow cake was thrust into my hands. Engine-driver and stoker were also presented with a cake apiece, and then the newly married pair, who took and ate with some shyness and giggling.

'Is it a boy or girl?' asked the stoker, with his mouth full.

'A boy,' the man answered; 'and I count it good luck that you men of modern ways should be the first we meet on our way to church. The child'll be a go-ahead if there's truth in omens.'

'You're right, naybour. We're the speediest men in this part of the universe, I do believe. Here's luck to 'ee, Susan Warne!' he piped out, addressing one of the women; 'an' if you want a name for your seventh, you may christen 'en after the engine here, *The Wonder of the Age*.'

We waved our hats and jolted off again towards Tregarrick. At the end of the journey the railway officials declined to charge for the pleasure of my company. But after some dispute, they agreed to compromise by adjourning to the Railway Inn, and drinking prosperity to Susan Warne's seventh.

THE MOURNER'S HORSE

THE Board Schoolmaster and I are not friends. He is something of a zealot, and conceives it his mission to weed out the small superstitions of the countryside and plant exact information in their stead. He comes from up the country—a thin, clean-shaven town-bred man, whose black habit and tall hat, though considerably bronzed, refuse to harmonize with the scenery amid which they

move. His speech is formal and slightly dogmatic, and in argument he always gets the better of me. Therefore, feeling sure it will annoy him excessively, I am going to put him into this book. He laid himself open the other day to this stroke of revenge, by telling me a story; and since he loves precision, I will be very precise about the circumstances.

At the foot of my garden, and hidden from my window by the clipt box hedge, runs Sanctuary Lane, along which I see the heads of the villagers moving to church on Sunday mornings. But in returning they invariably keep to the raised footpath on the far side, that brings the women's skirts and men's small-clothes into view. I have made many attempts to discover how this distinction arose, and why it is adhered to, but never found a satisfying explanation. It is the rule, however.

From the footpath a high bank (where now the primroses have given place to stitchwort and ragged robin) rises to an orchard; so steeply that the apple-blossom drops into the lane. Just now the petals lie thickly there in the early morning, to be trodden into dust as soon as the labourers fare to work. Beyond and above the orchard comes a stretch of pasture-land and then a young oak-coppice, the fringe of a great estate, with a few Scotch firs breaking the sky-line on top of all. The head gamekeeper of this estate tells me we shall have a hot summer, because the oak this year was in leaf before the ash, though only by a day. The ash was foliating on the 29th of April, the oak on the 28th. Up there the bluebells lie in sheets of mauve, and the cuckoo is busy. I rarely see him; but his three notes fill the hot noon and evening. When he spits (says the gamekeeper again) it is time to be sheep-shearing.

My talk with the gamekeeper is usually held at six in the morning, when he comes down the lane and I am stepping across to test the water in Scarlet's Well.

This well bubbles up under a low vault scooped in the bank by the footpath and hung with hart's-tongue ferns. It has two founts, close together; but whereas one of them oozes only, the other is bubbling perennially, and, as near as I have observed, keeps always the same. Its specific gravity is that of distilled water—1.000°; and though, to be sure, it upset me, three weeks back, by flying up to 1.005°, I think that must have come from the heavy thunderstorms and floods of rain that lately visited us and no doubt imported some ingredients that had no business there. As for its temperature, I will select a note or two of the observations I made with a Fahrenheit thermometer this last year:

June 12th.—Temperature in shade of well, 62°; of water, 51°.

August 25th.—In shade of well, at noon, 73°; of water, 52°.

November 20th.—In shade of well, 43°; of water, 52°.

January 1st.—External air, 56°; enclosure, 53°; water, 52°.

March 11th.—A bleak, sunless day. Temperature in shade of well, at noon, 54°; water, 51°. The *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* in rich golden bloom within the enclosure.

But the spring has other properties besides its steady temperature. I was early abroad in my garden last Thursday week, and in the act of tossing a snail over my box hedge, when I heard some girls' voices giggling, and caught a glimpse of half a dozen sun-bonnets gathered about the well. Straightening myself up, I saw a group of maids from the village, and, in the middle, one who bent over the water. Presently she scrambled to her feet, glanced over her shoulder, and gave a shrill scream.

I, too, looked up the lane and saw, a stone's-throw off, the Schoolmaster advancing with long and nervous strides. He was furiously angry.

'Thomasine Slade,' said he, 'you are as shameless as you are ignorant!'

The girl tossed her chin and was silent, with a warm blush on her cheek and a lurking imp of laughter in her eye. The Schoolmaster frowned still more darkly.

'Shameless as you are ignorant!' he repeated, bringing the ferrule of his umbrella smartly down upon the macadam; 'and you, Jane Hewitt, and you, Lizzie Polkinghorne!'

'Why, what's the matter?' I asked, stepping out into the road.

At sight of me the girls broke into a peal of laughter, gathered up their skirts, and fled, still laughing, down the road.

'What's the matter?' I asked again.

'The matter?' echoed the Schoolmaster, staring blankly after the retreating skirts; then more angrily—'The matter? Come and look here!' He took hold of my shirt-sleeve and led me to the well. Stooping, I saw half a dozen pins gleaming in its brown depths.

'A love-charm.'

'Just so.'

'Thomasine Slade has been wishing for a husband. I see no sin in that. When she looked up and saw you coming down the lane——'

I paused. The Schoolmaster said nothing. He was leaning over the well, gloomily examining the pins.

'—your aspect was enough to scare any one,' I wound up lamely.

'I wish,' the Schoolmaster hastily began, 'I wish to Heaven I had the gift of humour! I lose my temper and grow positive. I'd kill these stupid superstitions with ridicule, if I had the gift. It's a great gift. My God, I do hate to be laughed at!'

'Even by a fool?' I asked, somewhat astonished at his heat.

‘Certainly. There’s no comfort in comparing the laugh of fools with the crackling of thorns under a pot, if you happen to be inside the pot and in process of cooking.’

He took off his hat, brushed it on the sleeve of his coat, and resumed in a tone altogether lighter:

‘Yes, I hate to be laughed at; and I’ll tell you a tale on this point that may amuse you at my expense.

‘I am London-bred, as you know, and still a Cockney in the grain, though when I came down here to teach school I was just nineteen, and now I’m over forty. It was during the summer holidays that I first set foot in this neighbourhood—a week before school reopened. I came early, to look for lodgings and find out a little about the people and settle down a bit before beginning work.

‘The Vicar—the late Vicar, I mean—commended me to old Retallack, who used to farm Rosemellin, up the valley, a widower and childless. His sister, Miss Jane Ann, kept house for him, and these were the only two souls on the premises till I came and was boarded by them for thirteen shillings a week. For that price they gave me a bedroom, a fair-sized sitting-room, and as much as I could eat.

‘A month after my arrival, Farmer Retallack was put to bed with a slight attack of colic. This was on a Wednesday, and on Saturday morning Miss Jane Ann came knocking at my door with a message that the old man would like to see me. So I went across to his room and found him propped up in the bed with three or four pillows and looking very yellow in the gills, though clearly convalescent.

‘ “Schoolmaster,” said he, “I’ve a trifling favour to beg of ye. You give the children a half-holiday, Saturdays—hey? Well, d’ye think ye could drive the brown hoss, Trumpeter, into Tregarrick this afternoon? The fact is, my old friend Abe Walters that kept the Packhorse Inn is lying dead, and they bury ’en at half after two to-day. I’d be main glad to show respect at the funeral and tell Mrs. Walters how much deceased’ll be missed, ancetera; but I might so well try to fly in the air. Now if you could attend and just pass the word that I’m on my back with the colic, but that you’ve come to show respect in my place, I’d take it very friendly of ye. There’ll be lashin’s o’ vittles an’ drink. No Walters was ever interred under a kilderkin.”

‘Now the fact was, I had never driven a horse in my life, and hardly knew (as they say) a horse’s head from his tail till he began to move. But that is just the sort of ignorance no young man will readily confess to. So I answered that I was engaged that evening. We were just organizing night-classes for the

young men of the parish, and the Vicar was to open the first, with a short address, at half-past six.

' "You'll be back in lashin's o' time," the farmer assured me.

'This put me fairly in a corner. "To tell you the truth," said I, "I'm not accustomed to drive much." But of course this was wickedly short of the truth.

'He declared that it was impossible to come to grief on the way, the brown horse being quiet as a lamb and knowing every stone of the road. And the end was that I consented. The brown horse was harnessed by the farm-boy and led round with the gig while Miss Jane Ann and I were finishing our midday meal. And I drove off alone in a black suit, and with my heart in my mouth.

'Trumpeter, as the farmer had promised, was quiet as a lamb. He went forward at a steady jog, and even had the good sense to quarter on his own account for the one or two vehicles we met on the broad road. Pretty soon I began to experiment gingerly with the reins; and by the time we reached Tregarrick streets was handling them with quite an air, while observing the face of every one I met, to make sure I was not being laughed at. The prospect of Tregarrick Fore Street frightened me a good deal, and there was a sharp corner to turn at the entrance of the inn-yard. But the old horse knew his business so well that had I pulled on one rein with all my strength I believe it would have merely annoyed, without convincing him. He took me into the yard without a mistake, and I gave up the reins to the ostler, thanking Heaven and looking careless.

'The inn was crowded with mourners, eating and drinking and discussing the dead man's virtues. They packed the Assembly Rooms at the back, where subscription dances are held, and the reek of hot joints was suffocating. I caught sight of the widow Walters bustling up and down between the long tables and shedding tears while she changed her guests' plates. She heard my message, welcomed me with effusion, and thrusting a plateful of roast beef under my nose, hurried away to put on her bonnet for the funeral.

'A fellow on my right paused with his mouth full to bid me eat. "Thank you," I said, "my only wish is to get out of this as quickly as possible."

'He contemplated me for half a minute with an eye like an ox's, remarked, "You'll be a furriner, no doubt," and went on with his meal.

'If the feasting was long, the funeral was longer. We sang so many burying-tunes, and the widow so often interrupted the service to ululate, that the town clock had struck four when I hurried back from the churchyard to the inn, and told the ostler to put my horse in the gig. I had little time to spare.

' "Beg your pardon, sir," the ostler said, "but I'm new to this place—only came here this day week. Which is your horse?"

' "Oh," I answered, "he's a brown. Make haste, for I'm in a hurry."

'He went off to the stables, and returned in about two minutes.

‘ “There’s six brown hosses in the stable, sir. Would you mind coming and picking out yours?”

‘I followed him with a sense of impending trouble. Sure enough there were six brown horses in the big stable, and to save my life I couldn’t have told which was Trumpeter. Of any difference between horses, except that of colour, I hadn’t an idea. I scanned them all anxiously, and felt the ostler’s eye upon me. This was unbearable. I pulled out my watch, glanced at it carelessly, and exclaimed:

‘ “By George, I’d no notion it was so early! On second thoughts, I won’t start for a few minutes yet.”

‘This was my only course—to wait until the other five owners of brown horses had driven home. I strolled back to the inn and talked and drank sherry, watching the crowd thin by degrees, and speeding the lingering mourners with all my prayers. The minutes dragged on till nothing short of a miracle could take me back in time to open the night-class. The widow drew near and talked to me. I answered her at random.

‘Twice I revisited the stable, and the second time found but three horses left. I walked along behind them, murmuring, “Trumpeter, Trumpeter!” in the forlorn hope that one of the three brutes would give a sign.

‘ “I beg your pardon, sir,” said the ostler; “were you saying anything?”

‘ “No—nothing,” said I, and luckily he was called away at this moment to the farther end of the stable. “O,” sighed I, “for Xanthus, horse of Achilles!”

‘I felt inclined to follow and confide my difficulty to the ostler, but reflected that this wouldn’t help me in the least: whereas if I applied to a fellow-guest he must (if indeed he could give the information) expose my previous hypocrisy to the ostler. After all, the company was dwindling fast. I went back and consumed more sherry and biscuits.

‘By this six o’clock had gone, and no more than a dozen guests remained. One of these was my bovine friend, my neighbour at the funeral banquet, who now accosted me as I struggled with a biscuit.

‘ “So you’ve got over your hurry. Glad to find ye settlin’ down so quick to our hearty ways.”

‘He shook hands with the widow and sauntered out. Ten more minutes passed, and now there were left only the widow herself and a trio of elderly men, all silent. As I hung about, trying to look unbounded sympathy at the group, it dawned upon me that they were beginning to eye me uneasily. I took a sponge cake and another glass of wine. One of the men—who wore a high stock and an edging of stiff grey hair around his bald head—advanced to me.

‘ “This funeral,” said he, “is over.”

‘ “Yes, yes,” I stammered, and choked over a sip of sherry.

‘ “We are waiting—let me tap you on the back——”

‘ “Thank you.”

‘ “We are waiting to read the will.”

‘I escaped from the room and rushed down to the stables. The ostler was harnessing the one brown horse that remained.

‘ “I was thinking you wouldn’t be long, sir. You’re the very last, I believe, and here ends a long day’s work.”

‘I drove off. It was near seven by this, but I didn’t even think of the night-class. I was wondering if the horse I drove were really Trumpeter. Somehow—whether because his feed of corn pricked him or no I can’t say—he seemed a deal livelier than on the outward journey. I looked at him narrowly in the twilight, and began to feel sure it was another horse. In spite of the cool air a sweat broke out upon me.

‘Farmer Retallack was up and dressed and leaning on a stick in the doorway as I turned into the yard.

‘ “I’ve been that worried about ye,” he began, “I couldn’t stay abed. Parson’s been up twice from the schoolhouse to make inquiries. Where in the name o’ goodness have ’ee been?”

‘ “That’s a long story,” said I, and then, feigning to speak carelessly, though I heard my heart go thump—“How d’ye think Trumpeter looks after the journey?”

‘ “Oh, *he*’s all right,” the old man replied indifferently; “but come along in to supper.”

‘Now, my dear sir’—the schoolmaster thus concluded his tale, tucking his umbrella tightly under his armpit, and tapping his right forefinger on the palm of his left hand—‘these pagans whom I teach are as sensitive as I to ridicule. If only I knew how to take them—if only I could lay my finger on the weak spot—I’d send their whole fabric of silly superstitions tumbling like a house of cards.’

This happened last Thursday week. Early this morning I crossed the road as usual with my thermometer, and found a strip of pink calico hanging from the brambles by the mouth of Scarlet’s Well. I had seen the pattern before on a gown worn by one of the villager’s wives, and knew the rag was a votive offering, hung there because her child, who had been ailing all the winter, is now strong enough to go out into the sunshine. As I bent the bramble carefully aside before stooping over the water, Lizzie Polkinghorne came up the lane and stood behind me.

‘Have ’ee heard the news?’ she asked.

‘No.’ I turned round, thermometer in hand.

‘Why, Thomasine Slade’s goin’ to marry the Schoolmaster! Their banns’ll

be called first time next Sunday.'

We looked at each other, and she broke into a shout of laughter. Lizzie's laugh is irresistible.

MONSIEUR BENEST

My tale is of a certain M. Benest, who until a few weeks ago was a prisoner on *parole* in one of your towns on the south coast. He had been *chef de hune* (which, as you know, is chief petty officer) of the *Embuscade* frigate, captured by Sir John Warren. In the action which lost her M. Benest lost a leg, and was placed in an English hospital, where they gave him a wooden one.

Now how it came about that on his discharge he was allowed to live in a town—call it a village, rather—a haven, at any rate, where for a couple of napoleons he might have found a boat any night of the week to smuggle him over to Roscoff, is more than I can tell you. It may be that he had once borne another name than Benest, one to command privileges: since many of my countrymen, as you know, have found it prudent in recent years to change their names and take up with callings below their real rank. There, at any rate, he was; and on the day after his arrival, he and the Rector of the parish—who was also a magistrate—took a walk and marked out the bounds together: two miles along the coast to the east, two miles along the coast to the west, and two miles up the valley behind the town. At the end of these two miles the valley itself branched into two and climbed inland, the road branching likewise; and M. Benest's mark was the signpost at the angle.

Well, at first he walked little, because of his wooden leg. He had lodgings with a widow in a whitewashed cottage overlooking the harbour-side, and seemed happy enough there, tending a monster geranium which grew against the house-wall, or pottering about the quay and making friends with the children. For the children soon picked up an affection for him, seeing that he was never too busy to drop his gardening and come and be umpire at their games of 'tig' or 'prisoners' bars.' Also he had stories for them, and halfpennies or sweetmeats in mysterious pockets, and songs which he taught them: *Giroflé, girofla*, and *Compagnons de la Marjolaine*, and *Les Petits Bateaux*—do you know it?

Papa, les p'tits bateaux
Qui vont sur l'eau,
Ont-ils des jambes?
—Mais oui, petit bêta,
S'ils n'en avaient pas, ils n' march'raient pas!

In short, M. Benest, with his loose blue coat and three-cornered naval cap,

endeared himself to the children, and through the children to every one.

It was some time before he began to take walks; and I believe he had been living in the town for six months, when one day, having stumped up the valley road for a change, and just as he was facing about for the return journey, he heard a voice in his own language singing to the air of *Vive Henri Quatre*.

The voice was shaky and, I dare say, uncertain in its upper notes; but it fetched M. Benest right-about-face again. He perceived that it came from the garden of a solitary cottage up the road, a gunshot and more beyond his signpost. But a tall hedge interrupted his view, and, though he stared long and earnestly, all he could see that day was a pea-stick nodding above it.

He came again, however,—not the next day, but the day after,—and was rewarded by a glimpse of a white cap with bows which seemed at that distance of a purplish colour. Its wearer was standing in the gateway and exchanging a word with the rector, who had reined up his horse in the road.

M. Benest walked home and made inquiries; but his landlady could only tell him that the cottage was rented by two ladies, sisters—she had heard that they came from the West Indies,—who saw nobody, but wished only to be let alone. One of them, who suffered from an incurable complaint, was never seen; the other could be seen on fine days in her garden, where she worked vigorously; and what the pair lived on was a mystery, for they bought nothing in the town or of their neighbours.

On learning this M. Benest became very cunning indeed. He bought a fishing rod.

For I ought to have told you that a stream ran down the valley beside the road, and it contained trout—perhaps as many as a dozen. M. Benest had no desire to catch them; but, you see, he was forced to acquire some show of expertness in order to deceive the wayfarers who paused and watched him; and in time (I am told) the fish, after being unhooked once or twice and restored apologetically to the water, came to enjoy disconcerting him. You must understand that he had no foolish illusions concerning the white cap and purplish ribbons—the Mademoiselle Henriette, as he discovered she was called. He only knew that here were two women, his compatriots, poor certainly, often hungry perhaps, shipwrecked so close to him upon this corner of an unfriendly land, yet divided from any comfort he could bring by fifty yards of road and his word of honour. She must be of the true blood of France who quavered out *Vive Henri Quatre* so resolutely over her digging and hoeing: but the sound of a French voice might hearten her as hers had heartened him. Therefore he sang lustily while he angled—which is not good for sport; and when he caught a fish, broke into paeans addressed less to the captive—with which, between you and me, he was secretly annoyed—than to an ear unseen, perhaps half a mile away.

But there came a day—how shall I tell it?—when calamity fell upon the cottage. For some time the farmers up the valley had been missing sheep. What so easy now as to suspect the two women who were never known to buy either bread or butcher's meat? You can guess? A rabble marched up from the town and broke in upon them. It found nothing, of course; and I am told that at sight of the face of the poor elder sister it fled back in panic, leaving the place a wreck.

It so happened that M. Benest had praetermitted his angling, that afternoon, for a stroll along the cliff: but he heard the news on his return, from his landlady, while he sat at tea—that is to say, he heard a part of it, for before the story was out he had set down his teacup, caught up hat and stick, and stumped out of the house. The most of the townspeople were indoors at tea, discussing the sensation; the few he encountered had no greeting from him. He looked neither to the right nor to the left; had no ears for his friends, the trout, as they rose at the evening flies. He reached the signpost and—walked past it! He stumped straight up to the garden gate, which stood ajar, and pushed it wide with his stick.

There were signs of trampling on the flower-beds; but—for it was July—the whole garden blazed with hollyhocks, œillets, sweet Williams, sweet peas, above all with that yellow flower—mimulus, monkey flower, is it not?—which grows so profusely in gardens beside streams. The air was weighted with scent of the réséda and of the jasmine which climbed the wall and almost choked the roses.

The cottage door stood ajar also. He thrust this open too, and for the first time stood face to face with Mademoiselle Henriette.

She sat by the kitchen table, with one arm flung across it, and her body bowed with grief. At her feet lay a trodden bunch of the monkey flowers: and at the tap-tap of his wooden leg on the threshold she sprang up and faced him, across the yellow blossoms.

'Mademoiselle,' he began, 'I have just learnt—but it is an infamy! *Permettez*—I am French, I also, though you do not know me perhaps.'

And with that M. Benest stammered and came to a halt, for her eyes were worse than woeful. They were accusing—yes, accusing *him*. Of what? *Nom de tonnerre*, what had he done?

'You, Monsieur! *You*—an officer of France!

'*Mais quel rapport y a-t-il?*'

'Your *parole*, Monsieur!'

'*Peste!* I forgot,' said M. Benest, half to himself.

'Forgot? Forgot your *parole*? *Mais écoutez donc! Nous savons souffrir, nous autres Françaises . . . Et la petite qui meurt—et moi qui mourrai presqu'à l'heure—mais nous nous en tenons à ne pas déshonorer la patrie à la*

fin. Ça finira bien, sous-officier—allez-vous-en. Mais allez!'

She stamped her foot upon the flowers, and M. Benest turned and fled from her. Nay, in his haste, taking a shortcut towards the signpost, he plunged his wooden leg deep in the marsh, and tumbled helpless, overwhelmed with shame.

He never passed the signpost again, or caught another glimpse of Mademoiselle Henriette's cap. Three days later the rector broke into the cottage and discovered her seated, dead and stiff, her hands stained with digging her sister's grave.

And the cottage had no new tenant. Only M. Benest continued to eye it wistfully, as he cast his flies and pondered on his offence, which she had died without forgiving.

But one July, two years after her death, a patch of gold appeared on the marsh below the hedge—a patch of the monkey flower. Some seeds had been blown thither, or carried down by the stream.

Next July the patch had doubled its length.

'The flowers are travelling towards me,' said M. Benest.

And year by year the stream brought them nearer. That was a terrible July for him when they came within two feet of the signpost; but he would not stretch a hand beyond it.

'She coquets with her forgiveness, the poor Mademoiselle Henriette. But I can wait: '*faut pas déshonorer la patrie à la fin*!'

Before the next July he had made sure of one plant at least on his side of the signpost; and fished beside it day after day, fearful lest some animal should browse upon it. But when the happy morning came for it to open, and M. Benest knelt beside his prize, he drew back a hand.

'Is it *quite* open?' he asked. 'Better wait, since all is safe, for the sun to warm it a little longer.'

And he waited, until a trout, to remind him, perhaps, took a fly with a splash beneath his nose. Then, with a start, M. Benest's fingers closed and snapped off the yellow blossom.

'She has forgiven me,' said he. 'Now I can forgive myself.'

WHEN THE SAP ROSE

A FANTASIA

An old yellow van—the *Comet*—came jolting along the edge of the downs and

shaking its occupants together like peas in a bladder. The bride and bridegroom did not mind this much; but the Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, who had bound them in wedlock at the Bible Christian Chapel two hours before, was discomforted by a pair of tight boots, that nipped cruelly whenever he stuck out his feet to keep his equilibrium.

Nevertheless, his mood was genial, for the young people had taken his suggestion and acquired a copy of their certificate. This meant five extra shillings in his pocket. Therefore, when the van drew up at the cross-roads for him to alight, he wished them long life and a multitude of children with quite a fatherly air.

'You can't guess where I'm bound for. It's to pay my old mother a visit. Ah, family life's the pretty life—that ever *I* should say it!'

They saw no reason why he should be cynical, more than other men. And the bride, in whose eyes this elderly gentleman with the tight boots appeared a rosy winged Cupid, waved her handkerchief until the vehicle had sidled round the hill, resembling in its progress a very infirm crab in a hurry.

As a fact, the Registrar wore a silk hat, a suit of black West-of-England broadcloth, a watch-chain made out of his dead wife's hair, and two large seals that clashed together when he moved. His face was wide and round, with a sanguine complexion, grey side-whiskers, and a cicatrix across the chin. He had shaved in a hurry that morning, for the wedding was early, and took place on the extreme verge of his district. His is a beautiful office—recording day by day the solemnest and most mysterious events in nature. Yet, standing at the cross-roads, between down and woodland, under an April sky full of sun and south-west wind, he threw the ugliest shadow in the landscape.

The road towards the coast dipped—too steeply for tight boots—down a wooded coombe, and he followed it, treading delicately. The hollow of the V ahead, where the hills overlapped against the pale blue, was powdered with a faint brown bloom, soon to be green—an infinity of bursting buds. The larches stretched their arms upwards, as men waking. The yellow was out on the gorse, with a heady scent like a pineapple's, and between the bushes spread the grey film of coming bluebells. High up, the pines sighed along the ridge, turning paler; and far down, where the brook ran, a mad duet was going on between thrush and chaffinch—'*Cheer up, cheer up, Queen!' 'Clip, clip, clip, and kiss me—Sweet!*'—one against the other.

Now, the behaviour of the Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages changed as he descended the valley. At first he went from side to side, because the loose stones were sharp and lay unevenly; soon he zigzagged for another purpose—to peer into the bank for violets, to find a gap between the trees where, by bending down with a hand on each knee and his head tilted back, he could see the primroses stretching in broad sheets to the very edge of the pine-

woods. By frequent tilting, his collar broke from its stud and his silk hat settled far back on his neck. Next he unbuttoned his waistcoat and loosened his braces; but no, he could not skip—his boots were too tight. He looked at each tree as he passed. 'If I could only see,' he muttered. 'I'll swear there used to be one on the right, just here.'

But he could not find it here—perhaps his memory misgave him—and presently turned with decision, climbed the low fence on his left, between him and the hollow of the coombe, and dropped into the plantation on the other side. Here the ground was white, in patches, with anemones; and as his feet crushed them, descending, the babel of the birds grew louder and louder.

He issued on a small clearing by the edge of the brook, where the grass was a delicate green, each blade pushing up straight as a spear-point from the crumbled earth. Here were more anemones, between patches of last year's bracken, and on the farther slope a mass of daffodils. He pulled out a pocket-knife that had sharpened some hundreds of quill pens, and looking to his right, found what he wanted at once.

It was a sycamore, on which the buds were swelling. He cut a small twig, as big round as his middle finger, and sitting himself down on a barked log, close by, began to measure and cut it to a span's length, avoiding all knots. Then, taking the knife by the blade between finger and thumb, he tapped the bark gently with the tortoise-shell handle. And as he tapped, his face went back to boyhood again, in spite of the side-whiskers, and his mouth was pursed up to a silent tune.

For ten minutes the tapping continued. The birds ceased their contention, and broke out restlessly at intervals. A rabbit across the brook paused and listened at the funnel-shaped mouth of his hole, which caught the sound and redoubled it.

'Confound these boots!' said the Registrar, and pulling them off, tossed them among the primroses. They were 'elastic-sides.'

The tapping ceased. A breath of the landward breeze came up, combing out the tangle that winter had made in the grass, caught the brook on the edge of a tiny fall, and puffed it back six inches in a spray of small diamonds. It quickened the whole copse. The oak saplings rubbed their old leaves one on another, as folks rub their hands, feeling life and warmth; the chestnut-buds groped like an infant's fingers; and the chorus broke out again, the thrush leading—'*Tiurru, tiurru, chippewee; tio-tee, tio-tee, queen, queen, que-en!*'

In a moment or two he broke off silently, and a honeybee shot out of an anemone-bell like a shell from a mortar. For a new sound disconcerted them—a sound sharp and piercing. The Registrar had finished his whistle and was blowing like mad, moving his fingers up and down. Having proved his instrument, he dived a hand into his tail-pocket and drew out a roll, tied around

with ribbon. It was the folded leather-bound volume in which he kept his blank certificates. And spreading it on his knees, he took his whistle again and blew, reading his music from the blank pages, and piping a strain he had never dreamed of. For he whistled of Births and Marriages.

O, happy Registrar! O, happy, happy Registrar! You will never get into those elastic-sides again. Your feet swell as they tap the swelling earth, and at each tap the flowers push, the sap climbs, the speck of life moves in the hedge-sparrow's egg; while, far away on the downs, with each tap, the yellow van takes bride and groom a foot nearer felicity. It is hard work in worsted socks, for you smite with the vehemence of Pan, and Pan had a hoof of horn.

The Registrar's mother lived in the fishing-village, two miles down the coombe. Her cottage leant back against the cliff, so closely that the boys, as they followed the path above, could toss tabs of turf down her chimney: and this was her chief annoyance.

Now, it was close on the dinner-hour, and she stood in her kitchen beside a pot of stew that simmered over the wreck-wood fire.

Suddenly a great lump of earth and grass came bouncing down the chimney, striking from side to side, and soused into the pot, scattering the hot stew over the hearthstone and splashing her from head to foot.

Quick as thought, she caught up a besom and rushed out around the corner of the cottage.

'You stinking young adders!' she began.

A big man stood on the slope above her.

'Mother, cuff my head, that's a dear! I couldn' help doin' it.'

It was the elderly Registrar. His hat, collar, tie, and waistcoat were awry; his boots were slung on the walking-stick over his shoulder; stuck in his mouth and lit was a twist of root-fibre, such as country boys use for lack of cigars, and he himself had used, forty years before.

The old woman turned to an ash-colour, leant on her besom, and gasped.

'William Henry!'

'I'm not drunk, mother: been a Band of Hope these dozen years.' He stepped down the slope to her and bent his head low. 'Box my ears, mother, quick! You used to have a wonderful gift o' cuffin'.'

'William Henry, I'm bound to do it or die.'

'Then be quick about it.'

Half-laughing, half-sobbing, she caught him a feeble cuff, and next instant held him close to her old breast. The Registrar disengaged himself after a minute, brushed his eyes, straightened his hat, picked up the besom, and offered her his arm. They passed into the cottage together.

THE BRIDALS OF YSSELMONDE

WHEN the Grand Duke Ferdinand of Carinthia travelled in state to wed the Princess Sophia of Ysselmonde, he did so by land, and for two reasons; the first being that this was the shortest way, and the second that he possessed no ships. These, at any rate, were the reasons alleged by his Chancellor, to whom he left all arrangements. For himself, he took very little interest in the marriage beyond inquiring the age of his bride. 'Six years,' was the answer, and this seemed to him very young, for he had already passed his tenth birthday.

The Pope, however, had contrived and blessed the match; so Ferdinand raised no serious objection, but in due course came to Ysselmonde with his bodyguard of the famous Green Carinthian Archers, and two hundred halberdiers and twelve wagons—four to carry his wardrobe, and the remaining eight piled with wedding presents. On the way, while Ferdinand looked for birds' nests, the Chancellor sang the praises of the Princess Sophia, who (he declared) was more beautiful than the day. 'But you have never seen her,' objected Ferdinand. 'No, Your Highness, and that is why I contented myself with a purely conventional phrase'; and the Chancellor, who practised *finesse* in his odd moments, began to talk of the sea, the sight of which awaited them at Ysselmonde. 'And what is the sea like?' 'Well, Your Highness, the sea is somewhat difficult to describe, for in fact there is nothing to compare with it.' 'You have seen it, I suppose?' 'Sire, I have done more; for once, while serving as Ambassador at Venice, I had the honour to be upset in it.'

With such converse they beguiled the road until they reached Ysselmonde, and found the sea completely hidden by flags and triumphal arches. And there, after three days' feasting, the little Grand Duke and the still smaller Princess were married in the Cathedral by the Cardinal Archbishop, and the Pope's legate handed them his master's blessing in a morocco-covered case; and as they drove back to the Palace the Dutchmen waved their hats and shouted 'Boo-mp!' but the Carinthian Archers cried 'Talassio!' which not only sounded better, but proved (when they obligingly explained what it meant) that the ancestors of the Grand Duke of Carinthia had lived in Rome long before any Pope.

On reaching the Palace the bride and bridegroom were taken to a gilded drawing-room, and there left to talk together, while the guests filled up the time before the banquet by admiring the presents and calculating their cost. Ferdinand said, 'Well, *that*'s over'; and the Princess said, 'Yes,'—for this was their first opportunity of conversing alone.

'You're a great deal better than I expected,' said Ferdinand reassuringly. Indeed, in her straight dress sewn with seed-pearls and her coif of Dutch lace surmounted with a little crown of diamonds, the Princess looked quite

beautiful; and he in his white satin suit, crossed with the blue ribbon of St. John Nepomuc, was the handsomest boy she had ever seen. 'Besides,' he added, 'my Chancellor says you are the hereditary High Admiral of the Ocean—it's in the marriage settlement; and that would make up for a lot. Where is it?'

'The Ocean?' She felt very shy still. 'I have never seen it, but I believe it's somewhere at the bottom of the garden.'

'Suppose we go and have a look at it?'

She was about to say that she must ask leave of her governess, but he looked so masterful and independent that she hadn't the courage. It gave her quite a thrill as he took her hand and led her out through the low window to the great stone terrace. They passed down the terrace steps into a garden ablaze with tulip beds in geometrical patterns; at the foot ran a yew hedge, and beyond it, in a side-walk, they came upon a scullion boy chasing a sulphur-yellow butterfly. The Grand Duke forgot his fine manners, and dropped his bride's hand to join in the chase; but the boy no sooner caught sight of him than he fled with a cry of dismay and popped into an arbour. There, a minute later, the bride and bridegroom found him stooping over a churn and stirring with might and main.

'What are you stirring, boy?' asked Ferdinand.

'Praised be the Virgin!' said the boy, 'I *believe* it's an ice-pudding for the banquet. But they shouldn't have put the ice-puddings in the same arbour as the fireworks; for, if Your Highness will allow me to say so, you can't expect old heads on young shoulders.'

'Are the fireworks in our honour too?'

'Why, of course,' the scullion answered. 'Everything is in your honour to-day.'

This simplified matters wonderfully. The children passed on through a gate in the garden wall and came upon a clearing beside a woodstack; and there stood a caravan with its shafts in the air. A woman sat on the tilt at the back, reading, and every now and then glancing towards two men engaged in deadly combat in the middle of the clearing who shouted as they thrust at one another with long swords.

The little Princess, who, except when driven in her state-coach to the Cathedral, had never before strayed outside the garden, turned very pale and caught at her husband's hand. But he stepped forward boldly.

'Now yield thee, caitiff, or thine hour has come!' shouted one of the fighters and flourished his blade.

'Sooner I'll die than tum te tum te tum!' the other answered quite as fiercely.

'Slave of thine become,' said the woman from the caravan.

‘Thank you. Sooner I’ll die than slave of thine become!’ He laid about him with fresh vigour.

‘Put down your swords,’ commanded Ferdinand. ‘And now tell me who you are.’

‘We are Valentine and Orson,’ they answered.

‘Indeed?’ Ferdinand had heard of them, and shook hands affably. ‘Then I’m very glad to make your acquaintance.’

‘And,’ said they, ‘we are rehearsing for the performance at the Palace to-night in Your Highnesses’ honour.’

‘Oh, so this is in our honour too?’

‘To be sure,’ said the woman; ‘and I am to dress up as Hymen and speak the Epilogue in a saffron robe. It has some good lines; for instance—

‘ “Ye Loves and Genial Hours, conspire
To gratify this Royal Pair
With Sons impetuous as their Sire,
And Daughters as their Mother fair!” ’

‘Thank you,’ said Ferdinand. ‘But we are very busy to-day and must take one thing at a time. Can you tell us the way to the sea, please?’

The woman pointed along a path which led to a moss-covered gate and an orchard where the apple-blossom piled itself in pink clouds against the blue sky: as they followed the path they heard her laughing, and looked back to see her still staring after them and laughing merrily, while Valentine and Orson leaned on their swords and laughed too.

The orchard was the prettiest in the whole world. Blackbirds played hide-and-seek beneath the boughs, blue and white violets hid in the tall grass around the boles, and the spaces between were carpeted with daisies to the edge of a streamlet. Over the streamlet sang thrushes and goldfinches and bullfinches innumerable, and their voices shook down the blossom like a fall of pink snow, which threatened to cover even the daisies. The Grand Duke and the Princess believed that all this beauty was in their honour, no less than the chorus of the bells floating across the tree-tops from the city.

‘This is the best of all,’ said Ferdinand as they seated themselves by the stream. ‘I had no idea marriage was such fun. And they haven’t even forgotten the trout!’ he cried, peering over the brink.

‘Can you make daisy-chains?’ asked the Princess timidly.

He could not; so she taught him, feeling secretly proud that there was something he could learn of her. When the chain was finished he flung it over her neck and kissed her. ‘Though I don’t like kissing, as a rule,’ he explained.

‘And this shall be my wedding present,’ said she.

‘Why, I brought you six wagon-loads!—beauties—all chosen by my Chancellor.’

‘But he didn’t make or choose this one,’ said Sophia, ‘and I like this one best.’ They sat silent for a moment. ‘Dear me,’ she sighed, ‘what a lot we have to learn of each other’s ways!’

‘Hallo!’ Ferdinand was staring down the glade. ‘What’s that line at the end there, across the sky?’

Sophia turned. ‘I think that’s the sea—yes, there is a ship upon it.’

‘But why have they hung a blue cloth in front of it?’

‘I expect that’s in our honour too.’

They took hands and trotted to the end of the orchard; and there, beyond the hedge, ran a canal, and beyond the canal a wide flat country stretched away to the sea,—a land dotted with windmills and cattle and red-and-white houses with weathercocks,—a land, too, criss-crossed with canals, whereon dozens of boats, and even some large ships, threaded their way like dancers in and out of the groups of cattle, or sailed past a house so closely as almost to poke a bowsprit through the front door. The weathercocks spun and glittered, the windmills waved their arms, the boats bowed and curtseyed to the children. Never was such a salutation. Even the blue cloth in the distance twinkled, and Ferdinand saw at a glance that it was embroidered with silver.

But the finest flash of all came from a barge moored in the canal just below them, where a middle-aged woman sat scouring a copper pan.

‘Good day!’ cried Ferdinand across the hedge. ‘Why are you doing that?’

‘Why, in honour of the wedding, to be sure! ‘Must show one’s best at such times, if only for one’s own satisfaction.’ Then, as he climbed into view and helped Sophia over the hedge, she recognized them, and, dropping her pan with a clatter, called on the saints to bless them and keep them always. The bridal pair clambered down to the towpath, and from the towpath to her cabin, where she fed them (for they were hungry by this time) with bread and honey from a marvellous cupboard painted all over with tulips: in short, they enjoyed themselves immensely.

‘Only,’ said Ferdinand, ‘I wish they hadn’t covered up the sea, for I wanted a good look at it.’

‘The sea?’ said the barge-woman, all of a shiver. Then she explained that her two sons had been drowned in it. ‘Though, to be sure,’ said she, ‘they died for Your Majesty’s honour, and, if God should give them back to me, would do so again.’

‘For me?’ exclaimed Sophia, opening her eyes very wide.

‘Aye, to be sure, my dear. So it’s no wonder—eh?—that I should love you.’

. . . . .

By the time they said good-bye to her and hurried back through the orchard, a dew was gathering on the grass and a young moon had poised herself above the apple-boughs. The birds here were silent; but high on the stone terrace, when they reached it, a solitary one began to sing. From the bright windows facing the terrace came the clatter of plates and glasses, with loud outbursts of laughter. But this bird had chosen his station beneath a dark window at the corner, and sang there unseen. It was the nightingale.

They could not understand what he sang. 'It is my window,' whispered Sophia, and began to weep in the darkness, without knowing why; for she was not miserable in the least, but, on the contrary, very, very happy. They listened, hand in hand, by a fountain on the terrace. Through the windows they could see the Papal Legate chatting at table with the King, Sophia's father, and the Chancellor hobnobbing with the Cardinal Archbishop. Only the Queen of Ysselmonde sat at the table with her wrists on the arms of her throne and her eyes looking out into the darkness, as though she caught some whisper of the bird's song. But the children knew that he sang for them, not for her; for he told of all the adventures of the day, and he told not as I am telling them, but so beautifully that the heart ached to hear. Yet his song was of two words only. 'Young—young—young! Love—love—love!'—the same words over and over.

A courtier came staggering out from the banqueting-hall, and the bird flew away. The children standing by the fountain watched him as he found the water and dipped his face in it, with a groan. He was exceedingly drunk; but as he lifted his head he caught sight of them in the moonlight and excused himself.

'In Your Highnesses' honour,' he assured them: 'been doing my best.'

'Poor man!' said Sophia. 'But how loyal!'

THE CZARINA'S VIOLET

Once upon a time the German Emperor wished to be at peace with the Czar of Russia. He was at peace already—but he wished to be more so; because he was old, and old men desire to see peace all around them. It makes the settling up of their worldly affairs so much easier; and when they die people say: 'There went one who saw the folly of quarrelling!'

But unfortunately he was so infirm with age that he could not risk the journey to St. Petersburg. So in his place, with a letter of apology, he sent his Chancellor—who was no other than the famous Prince Bismarck.

Prince Bismarck arrived at St. Petersburg late at night. But the Lord Chamberlain was up, and gave him supper, after which he was shown to a

magnificent bedroom with a bright fire burning—for Russia is a cold country.

Next morning he awoke to find the sun shining; and being an early riser—to which habit he was wont to attribute much of his success in life—he lost no time in putting on his clothes, to take a walk in the park.

But early as Prince Bismarck was, the Czar's Guards were earlier. At every corner of the great palace, at the point where every two alleys divided, and at intervals along every well-kept avenue, he found a tall soldier planted. As he passed, each soldier saluted, raising his rifle to the 'present' in five distinct and accurate motions. And this annoyed Prince Bismarck, because the birds were singing all the time, and the dew sparkling on the grass, and, moreover, he wanted to be alone, to collect his thoughts; for the Czar would certainly send for him after breakfast, and there were some nice points to be discussed before the Treaty could be agreed on.

'These Guards are a nuisance,' said Prince Bismarck to himself. 'Moreover their uniform clashes in colour with the petunias. There is more wealth than taste in this country.'

He walked on and on, until at length it really seemed that he was free of their attentions. For he came to an avenue of pine-trees along which no sentries were visible; and at the end it opened upon a level stretch of turf, the like of which he had never seen for smoothness or beauty.

'This is better,' he began. But 'Oh, confound it!' he went on, as his eyes fell on yet another soldier who stood stiffly, almost (but not quite) in the centre of the grass plot.

He was moving on impatiently, when it struck him as curious that a soldier should be posted just there. He wanted to be alone, to compose his opening remarks to the Czar; yet in all his life he had never been able to pass by anything he did not understand—which was another secret of his success. So he went up to the soldier, who presented arms in five distinct motions, accurate as clockwork.

'Excuse me, my man,' said Prince Bismarck; 'but what are you guarding here?'

'How should *I* know?' said the soldier, who happened to be a Finn, and had not yet learnt Court address.

'But this is curious,' said Bismarck, looking about him. 'If you were standing guard by the walk, now—or even in the centre of this piece of turf—though I don't see what purpose that would serve——'

'I stand where I am told to stand,' answered the soldier, somewhat angry at being criticized by a stranger in civilian dress.

'And who told you to stand here?'

'Why, the sergeant, to be sure.'

This was all Prince Bismarck could learn. He walked on. But, as he

returned to the palace, there was the soldier still posted, as patient as ever, and guarding nothing at all.

After breakfast he was sent for, and held a long conversation with the Czar; who, towards the end of it, began to wonder how a man so absent-minded had contrived to make himself a European reputation of the first class.

'I am afraid,' said the Czar at length, very politely, 'I have the misfortune not to make my point clear. If it be a question of how I station my soldiers in Poland——'

'In the middle of grass-plots!' interrupted Prince Bismarck.

The Czar stared——

'I—I humbly beg your Imperial Majesty's pardon!' cried Prince Bismarck, recollecting himself and sitting up with a jerk. 'The fact is, I saw something this morning which so puzzled me that it has been weighing on my mind ever since.'

'Indeed?' said the Czar. 'May one ask what that was?—for we desire to study our guest's comfort in everything.'

Bismarck told him.

The Czar frowned, for he was considering. 'Beyond the pine avenue, you say? That must be the old archery-ground. . . . Why, yes! Now I come to think of it, there *is* a guardsman just in that place. I must have passed him hundreds of times: but it never occurred to me to wonder what he was doing there. Let us go and ask him!' suggested the Czar brightly. 'We can let the Treaty wait until this afternoon.'

They walked out to the archery-ground together. The guard had been relieved; but there stood a soldier, though a different one, on precisely the same spot; and he saluted precisely as all the others had saluted.

'Why are you standing here?' demanded the Czar.

The soldier trembled a good deal, but confessed that he did not know. The sergeant was sent for; but he knew as little as the soldier. He went in turn to summon his captain, who could only say that every sentinel was posted under the Colonel's directions. This meant sending for the Colonel of the Guard.

The Colonel explained that in disposing the sentinels he rigidly followed a plan drawn up by his predecessor (an eminent Field Officer, since deceased), and approved by the War Ministry of that day, after consultation with the Ministry of the Interior.

'Do you tell me that you have never shifted a single one, in all this time?' asked the Czar.

'May it please you, sire, not one in all these twelve years,' answered the Colonel of the Guard with evident pride. He mentioned the length of his service, laying a little stress upon it, because the promotion lists had overlooked his name and he had almost begun to think his merits forgotten.

‘Not a single man, sire, by so much as a foot!’ said the Colonel of the Guard.

‘We will look into this after luncheon,’ said the Czar somewhat hastily—for he did not wish Prince Bismarck to think his army at any point inefficient. ‘Meanwhile let a dispatch be sent to the Minister for War. I wish to be informed *why* this man is standing on this grass plot.’

A pretty to-do there was when this message reached the Ministry! The Minister for War himself sat for two hours in consultation with all the oldest Field Marshals he could summon at short notice: and as for the Secretaries and Clerks of the department, they tumbled over one another as they hunted through pigeon-holes, dived into dispatch boxes, dossiers, waste-paper baskets. The dust was terrific; it kept them sneezing all the while.

The Senior Field Marshal of the Empire was bedridden, besides being very deaf. The Minister had to take a cab and call upon him.

‘Yes, yes,’ said the Senior Field Marshal, misunderstanding. ‘The Emperor wants to know exactly how I managed to beat the Turks, fifty-five years ago. Well, that is satisfactory, because none of the histories describe it accurately.’

As a matter of fact, it was not at all certain that he *had* beaten the Turks. The Turkish histories in particular were quite positive that, on the contrary, he had been beaten. But he began to tell the Minister just how it happened, from the very start, tracing out the position of the two armies on the pattern of the bed-quilt.

‘But,’ protested the Minister, waving his hands and then talking rapidly on his fingers by the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, ’the Emperor does not want to know about the Turks. He wants to know why a soldier is on guard in the old archery-ground precisely thirty-seven paces south-west-by-south from the spot where the southernmost target used to stand,’—for these were the bearings shown on the Colonel of the Guard’s sentry-plan.

‘Oh!’ said the Senior Field Marshal, not concealing his disappointment. ‘Well, my memory is not what it used to be; but I dare say he was put there, to start with, as a punishment.’

‘But he has been there for years and years and years!’ gesticulated the Minister.

‘I can quite believe it,’ said the Senior Field Marshal. ‘Discipline was discipline in my days.’

‘And, moreover, it is not the same soldier! The guard is relieved every four hours.’

‘To be sure,’ said the Senior Field Marshal. ‘That introduces a new factor into our calculations. Fours into twenty-four goes eight—no, six . . . six times three hundred and sixty-five, not counting leap years——’

The Minister left him to reckon it out and drove back to the War Office in deep dejection of spirits. Towards the close of the day he was obliged to

present himself at the Palace and admit, with tears in his eyes, that all his investigations had been in vain. No one in the Army could tell, nor was there any record to show, why the soldier stood on the grass plot.

Meanwhile, and all through the afternoon, a whole corps of Engineers had been examining the turf, inch by inch, and they could report no clue.

The Czar by this time was so eager to fathom the mystery that he had forgotten all about the Treaty; and so, indeed, had Prince Bismarck. Next day it was the same. The Lord Chamberlain had sent for all the Household and examined them one by one, to no effect. The servants, as they passed and repassed in the corridors, would halt and ask one another: ‘But how *did* the soldier come on the grass plot?’

On the third day the Czar sent around the heralds with a proclamation. He offered the sum of one thousand roubles and a free pardon to any one who would come forward with the true solution.

In a top attic of the Palace an old woman sat spinning linen for the imperial tablecloths. She was forgotten by everybody save by the little maid-servant whose duty it was to bring her meals; and she had bent over the spinning-wheel so long that her body was almost two-double. But in her time she had been nurse to a former Czarina—to the present Czar’s grandmother, in fact.

‘Dear me!’ said the old Nurse: ‘There go the heralds’ trumpets, down in the city. His Imperial Majesty must be sending out some proclamation or other. I do hope he is not declaring war against anybody?’

‘Why, haven’t you heard?’ said the little maid-servant. ‘It’s about the soldier.’

‘What soldier?’

‘The soldier on the grass plot.’

‘What grass plot?’

‘Why, the one where they used to shoot with bows and arrows. There’s a soldier in the middle of it, standing guard, and every one is wild to know what he is guarding.’

‘But every one ought to know *that*,’ said the old Nurse. ‘Mercy on us, what forgetful heads we do wear in these days!’

‘But *nobody* knows!’ cried the little maid-servant, staring at her; ‘and the Czar is offering a thousand roubles to any one who can tell him!’

‘My child,’ said the Nurse, smiling on her; ‘that—or a part of it—would make you a very pretty marriage-portion, would it not? Well, you are a good child. Take my arm and lead me downstairs to His Imperial Majesty.’

So the little maid-servant led her downstairs, and when they came into the Czar’s presence the old Nurse dropped a curtsey and said:

‘May it please your Imperial Majesty, I can tell you all about the soldier on the grass plot. Years and years ago, when the Czarina, your Majesty’s

grandmother, was a bride, she held a great contest of archery: for the Court ladies were famous archers in those days—she being one of the skilfullest. Such a beautiful arm and wrist as she had, too! There is nothing like archery to show off a pretty arm and wrist.

—'Well, there the ladies were assembled, one fine spring afternoon, and when they had shot their first flight of arrows at the butts, they were all hurrying forward to count their hits and change ends. But the Czarina stopped suddenly, and called on them all to stop. Then she dropped on her knees and they all gathered about her; for there, almost in the middle of the turf, she had happened on the first violet of the year.

'The Czar, Your Imperial Majesty's Grandfather, came on the ground as they were all kneeling about her in a ring and admiring it. Many declared it to be an omen of luck, for the Czarina was beginning to hope for a baby—who in time arrived indeed, and in time became your Imperial Majesty's father. The Czar, who adored his young wife, at once sent for a Guard and stationed him beside the violet to warn the ladies not to trample upon it as they passed to and from the butts. It was not a very comfortable position for the poor man, there, almost in the line of fire; and the Czarina, seeing him wince once or twice as an arrow passed him by rather too closely, called the contest at an end; she had ever a soft heart, even for the humblest. But the Guard remained to warn off the common folks; and there, no doubt, he has remained ever since.'

'But what about the violet?' said the Czar.

They went and searched. There was not a trace of it. The flower had long since disappeared.

—Yet not for ever. The Guard was withdrawn, and in time he in his turn was almost forgotten, and the spot where he had stood. But one day the twenty-second gardener's five-year-old daughter (he had been but the forty-sixth gardener when he married the little maid-servant—so, you see, they were rising rapidly in the world) came running to her mother with a flower she had discovered while playing in the old archery-ground.

'See, mother! The first violet of the year!'

So the violet had come to life again when the heavy boots of the sentries were no longer there to trample it. But this part of the tale never reached the Palace, where, however, when they have occasion to talk of red tape, they still use a phrase of which few remember the origin: 'But how shall we get the Soldier off the grass plot?'

Moral

Prince! your armies, horse and foot,
Cannot kill a violet.
Call your engineers to root it,
Your artillery to shoot it;
See, the flower defies you yet.
Drum, drum, fife and drum—
Pass and let the children come!

SILHOUETTES

The small rotund gentleman who had danced and spun all the way to Gantick village from the extreme south of France, and had danced and smiled and blown his flageolet all day in Gantick street without conciliating its population in the least, was disgusted. Towards dusk he crossed the stile which divides Sanctuary Lane from the churchyard, and pausing with a leg on either side of the rail, shook his fist back at the village which lay below, its grey roofs and red chimneys just distinguishable here and there between a foamy sea of apple-blossom and a haze of bluish smoke. He could not well shake its dust off his feet, for this was hardly separable on his boots from the dust of many other villages, and also it was mostly mud. But his gesture betokened extreme rancour.

'These Cor-rnishmen,' he said, 'are pigs all! There is not a Cor-rnishman that is not a big pig!'

He lifted the second leg wearily over the rail.

'As for Art——'

Words failed him here, and he spat upon the ground, adding:

'Moreover, they shut up their churches!'

This was really a serious matter; for he had not a penny-piece in his pocket—the last had gone to buy a loaf—and there was no lodging to be had in the village. The month was late April—a bad time to sleep in the open; and though the night drew in tranquilly upon a day of broad sunshine, the earth had by no means sucked down the late heavy rains. The church porch, however, had a broad bench on either side and faced the south, away from the prevailing wind. He had made a mental note of this early in the day, being schooled to anticipate such straits as the present. While, with a gait like a limping hare's, he passed up the narrow path between the graves, his eyes were busy.

The churchyard was narrow and surrounded by a high grey wall, mostly hidden by an inner belt of well-grown cypresses. On the south side the ranks of these trees were broken for some thirty feet, and here the back of a small dwelling-house abutted on the cemetery. There was one window only in the

yellow-washed wall, and this window—a melancholy square framed in moss-stained plaster—looked straight into the church porch. The flageolet-player eyed it suspiciously; but the casement was shut and the blind drawn down. The whole aspect of the cottage proclaimed that its inhabitants were very poor folk—not at all the sort to tell tales upon a casual tramp if they spied him bivouacking upon holy ground.

He limped into the porch, and cast off the blue bag that was strapped upon his shoulders. Out of it he drew a sheep's-wool cape, worn very thin; and then turned the bag inside out, on the chance of a forgotten crust. The disappointment that followed he took calmly—being on the whole a sweet-tempered man, nor easily angered except by an affront on his vanity. His violent rancour against the people of Gantick arose from their indifference to his playing. Had they taken him seriously—had they even run out at their doors to listen and stare—he would not have minded that stinginess.

He who sleeps sups. The little man passed the flat of his hand, in the dusk, over the two benches, chose the one which had fewest asperities of surface, tossed his bag and flageolet upon the other, pulled off his boots, folded his cape to make a pillow, and stretched himself at length. In less than ten minutes he was sleeping dreamlessly.

For four hours he slept without movement. But just above his head there hung a baize-covered board containing a list or two of the parish ratepayers and the usual notice of the spring training of the Royal Cornwall Rangers Militia. This last placard had broken from two of its fastenings, and towards midnight flapped loudly in an eddy of the light wind. The sleeper stirred, and passed a languid hand over his face. A spider within the porch had been busy while he slept, and his hand encountered gossamer.

His eyes opened. He sat upright, and lowered his bare feet upon the flags. Outside, the blue firmament was full of stars sparkling unevenly, as though the wind were trying in sport to puff them out. In the eaves of the porch he could hear the martins rustling in the crevices—they had returned but a few days back to their old quarters. But what drew the man to step out under the sky was the cottage window over the wall.

The lattice was pushed back and the room inside was brightly lit. But between him and the lamp a white sheet had been stretched right across the window; and on this sheet two quick hands were weaving all kinds of clever shadows, shaping them, moving them, or re-shaping them with the speed of summer lightning.

It was certainly a remarkable performance. The shadows took the forms of rabbits, swans, foxes, elephants, fairies, sailors with wooden legs, old women who smoked pipes, ballet-girls who pirouetted, anglers who bobbed for fish, twirling harlequins, and the profiles of eminent statesmen—all made with two

hands and, at the most, the help of a tiny stick or piece of string. They danced and capered, grew large and then small, with such profusion of odd turns and changes that the flageolet-player began to giggle as he wondered. He remarked that the hands, whenever they were disentwined for a moment, appeared to be very small and plump.

In about ten minutes the display ceased, and the shadow of a woman's head and neck crossed the sheet, which was presently drawn back at one corner.

'Is that any better?' asked a woman's voice, low but distinct.

The flageolet-player started and bent his eyes lower, across the graves and into the shadow beneath the window. For the first time he was aware of a figure standing there, a little way out from the wall. As well as he could see, it was a young boy.

'Much better, mother. You can't think how you've improved at it this week.'

'Any mistakes?'

'The harlequin and columbine seemed a little jerky. But your hands were tired, I know.'

'Never mind that: they mustn't be tired, and it's got to be perfect. We'll try them again.'

She was about to drop the corner of the sheet when the listener sprang out towards the window, leaping with bare feet over the graves and waving his flageolet wildly.

'Ah, no—no, madame!' he cried. 'Wait one moment, the littlest, and I shall inspire you.'

'Who ever is that?' cried the woman's voice at the window.

The youth below faced round on the intruder. He was white in the face and had wanted to run, but mastered his voice and inquired gruffly:

'Who the devil are you?'

'I? I am an artist, and as such I salute madame and monsieur her son. She is greater artist than I, but I shall help her. They shall dance better this time, her harlequin and columbine. Why? Because they shall dance to my music—the music that I shall make here, on this spot, under the stars. *Tiens!* I shall play as if possessed. I feel that. I bet you. It is because I have found an artist—an artist in Gantick. O-my-good-lor! It makes me expand!'

He had pulled off his greasy hat, and stood bowing and smiling, showing his white teeth and holding up his flageolet, that the woman might see and be convinced.

'That's all very well,' said the boy; 'but my mother doesn't want it known that she practises at these shadows.'

'Ha? It is perhaps forbidden by law?'

‘Since you have found us out, sir,’ said the woman, ‘I will tell you why we are behaving like this, and trust you to tell nobody. I have been left a widow, in great poverty, and with this one son, who must be educated as well as his father was. Richard is a promising boy, and cannot be satisfied to stand lower in the world than his father stood. His father was an auctioneer. But we are left very poor—poor as mice: and how was I to get him better teaching than the Board Schools here? Well, six months ago, when sadly perplexed, I found out by chance that this small gift of mine might earn me a good income in London, at—a music-hall——’

‘Mother!’ interjected the youth reprovingly.

‘Pursue, madame,’ said the flageolet-player.

‘Of course, sir, Richard doesn’t like or approve of me performing at such places, but he agrees with me that it is necessary. So we are hiding it from everybody in the village, because we have always been respected here. We never guessed that anybody would see us from the churchyard, of all places, at this time of night. As soon as I have practised enough, we mean to travel up to London. Of course I shall change my name to something French or Italian, and hope nobody will discover——’

But the flageolet-player sat suddenly down upon a damp grave, and broke into hysterical laughter.

‘Oh-oh-oh! Quick, madame! dance your pretty figures while yet I laugh and before I curse. O stars and planets, look down on this mad world, and help me play! And, O monsieur, your pardon if I laugh; for that either you or I are mad is a cock-sure. Dance, madame!’

He put the flageolet to his lips and blew. In a moment or two harlequin and columbine appeared on the screen, and began to caper nimbly, naturally, with the airiest graces. The tune was a jigging reel, and soon began to inspire the performer above. Her small dancers in a twinkling turned into a gambolling elephant, then to a pair of swallows. A moment after they were flower and butterfly, then a jigging donkey, then harlequin and columbine again. With each fantastic change the tune quickened and the dance grew wilder. At length, tired out, the woman spread her hands out wide against the sheet, as if imploring mercy.

The player tossed his flageolet over a headstone and rolled back on the grave in a paroxysm of laughter. Above him the rooks had poured out of their nests, and were cawing in flustered circles.

‘Monsieur,’ he gasped out, sitting up and wiping his eyes, ‘was it good this time?’

‘Yes, it was.’

‘Then could you spare from the house one little crust of bread? For I am famished.’

The youth went round the churchyard wall, and came back in a couple of minutes with some bread and cold bacon.

‘Of course,’ said he, ‘if you should meet either of us in the village to-morrow, you will not recognize us.’

The little man bowed. ‘I agree,’ said he, ‘with your mother, monsieur, that you must be educated at all costs.’

ST. PIRAN AND THE VISITATION

A FULL fifty years had St. Piran dwelt among the sand-hills between Perranzabuloe and the sea before any big rush of saints began to pour into Cornwall: for ’twas not till the old man had discovered tin for us that they sprang up thick as blackberries all over the country; so that in a way St. Piran had only himself to blame when his idle ways grew to be a scandal by comparison with the push and bustle of the new-comers.

Never a notion had he that, from Rome to Land’s End, all his holy brethren were holding up their hands over his case. He sat in his cottage above the sands at Perranzabuloe and dozed to the hum of the breakers, in charity with all his parishioners, to whom his money was large as the salt wind; for his sleeping partnership in the tin-streaming business brought him a tidy income. And the folk knew that if ever they wanted religion, they had only to knock and ask for it.

But one fine morning, an hour before noon, the whole parish sprang to its feet at the sound of a horn. The blast was twice repeated, and came from the little cottage across the sands.

‘ ’Tis the blessed saint’s cowhorn!’ they told each other. ‘Sure the dear man must be in the article of death!’ And they hurried off to the cottage, man, woman, and child: for ’twas thirty years at least since the horn had last been sounded.

They pushed open the door, and there sat St. Piran in his arm-chair, looking good for another twenty years, but considerably flustered. His cheeks were red, and his fingers were clutching the cowhorn nervously.

‘Andrew Penhaligon,’ said he to the first man that entered, ‘go out and ring the church bell.’

Off ran Andrew Penhaligon. ‘But, blessed father of us,’ said one or two, ‘we’re all *here*! There’s no call to ring the church bell, seein’ you’re neither dead nor afire, blessamercy!’

‘Oh, if you’re all here, that alters the case: for ’tis only a proclamation I have to give out at present. To-morrow mornin’—Glory be to God!—I give warnin’ that Divine service will take place in the parish church.’

‘You’re sartin you bain’t feelin’ poorly, St. Piran dear?’ asked one of the women.

‘Thank you, Tidy Mennear, I’m enjoyin’ health. But, as I was sayin’, the parish church’ll be needed to-morrow, an’ so you’d best set to and clean out the edifice; for I’m thinkin’,’ he added, ‘it’ll be needin’ that.’

‘To be sure, St. Piran dear, we’ll humour ye.’

‘ ’Tisn’ that at all,’ the saint answered; ‘but I’ve had a vision.’

‘Don’t you often?’

‘H’m! but this was a peculiar vision; or maybe a bit of a birdeen whispered it into my ears. Anyway ’twas revealed to me just now in a dream that I stood on the lawn at Bodmin Priory, and peeped in at the Priory window. An’ there in the long hall sat all the saints together at a big table covered with red baize, and plotted against us. There was St. Petroc in the chair, with St. Guron by his side, an’ St. Neot, St. Udy, St. Teath, St. Keverne, St. Wen, St. Probus, St. Enodar, St. Just, St. Fimbarrus, St. Clether, St. Germoe, St. Veryan, St. Winnock, St. Minver, St. Anthony, with the virgins Grace, and Sinara, and Iva—the whole passel of ’em. An’ they were agreein’ there was no holiness left in this parish of mine; an’ speakin’ shame of me, my childer—of me, that have banked your consciences these fifty years, and always been able to pay on demand: the more by token that I kept a big reserve, an’ you knew it. Answer me: when was there ever a panic in Perranzabuloe? “ ’Twas all very well,” said St. Neot, when his turn came to speak, “but this state o’ things ought to be exposed.” He’s as big as bull’s beef, is St. Neot, ever since he worked that miracle over the fishes, an’ reckons he can disparage an old man who was makin’ millstones to float when he was suckin’ a coral. But the upshot is, they’re goin’ to pay us a Visitation to-morrow, by surprise. And, if only for the parish credit, we’ll be even wid ’um, by dad!’

St. Piran still lapsed into his native brogue when strongly excited.

But he had hardly done when Andrew Penhaligon came running in:

‘St. Piran, honey, I’ve searched everywhere; an’ be hanged to me if I can find the church at all!’

‘Fwhat’s become av ut?’ cried the saint, sitting up sharply.

‘How should I know? But devil a trace can I see!’

‘Now, look here,’ St. Piran said; ‘the church *was* there, right enough.’

‘That’s a true word,’ spoke up an old man, ‘for I mind it well. An elegant spike it had, an’ for a sea-mark a shingle roof.’

‘Spake up now,’ said the saint, glaring around; ‘fwhich av ye’s gone an’ misbestowed me parish church? For I won’t believe,’ he said, ‘that it’s any worse than carelussness—at laste, not yet-a-bit.’

Some remembered the church, and some did not: but the faces of all were clear of guilt. They trooped out on the sands to search.

Now, the sands by Perranzabuloe are for ever shifting and driving before the northerly and nor'-westerly gales; and in time had heaped themselves up and covered the building out of sight. To guess this took the saint less time than you can wink your eye in; but the bother was that no one remembered exactly where the church had stood, and as there were two score at least of tall mounds along the shore, and all of pretty equal height, there was no knowing where to dig. To uncover them all was certainly a job to last until doomsday.

'Blur-an'-agurs, but it's ruined I am!' cried St. Piran. 'An' the Visitashun no further away than to-morra at tin a.m.!' He wrung his hands, then caught up a spade, and began digging like a madman.

They searched all day, and with lanterns all the night through: they searched from Ligger Point to Porth Towan, but came on never a sign of the missing church.

'If it only had a spire,' one said, 'there'd be some chance.' But as far as could be recollected, the building had but a dumpy spike.

'Once caught, twice shy,' said another; 'let us find it this once, an' next time we'll have landmarks to dig it out by.'

It was at sunrise that St. Piran, worn out and heart-sick, let fall his spade and spoke from one of the tall mounds, where he had been digging for an hour.

'My children,' he began, and the men uncovered their heads, 'my children, we are going to be disgraced this day; and the best that we can do is to pray that we may take it like men. Let us pray.'

He knelt down on a great sandhill, and the men and women around dropped on their knees also. And then St. Piran put up the prayer that has made his name famous all the world over.

The Prayer of St. Piran

Hear us, O Lord, and be debonair: for ours is a particular case. We are not like the men of St. Neot or the men of St. Udy, who are for ever importuning Thee upon the least occasion, praying at all hours and every day of the week. Thou knowest it is only with extreme cause that we bring ourselves to trouble Thee. Therefore regard our moderation in time past, and be forward to help us now. Amen.

There was silence for a full minute as he ceased; and then the kneeling parishioners lifted their eyes towards the top of the mound.

St. Piran was nowhere to be seen!

They stared into each other's faces. For a while not a sound was uttered. Then a woman began to sob:

'We've lost 'en! We've lost 'en!'

‘Like Enoch, he’s been taken!’

‘Taken up in a chariot an’ horses of fire. Did any see ’en go?’

‘And what’ll we do without ’en? Holy St. Piran, come back to us!’

‘Hullo! hush a bit an’ hearken!’ cried Andrew Penhaligon, lifting a hand.

They were silent, and listening as he commanded, heard a muffled voice and a faint calling as it were from the bowels of the earth.

‘Fetch a ladder!’ it said; ‘fetch a ladder! It’s meself that’s found ut, glory be to God! Holy queen av Heaven! but me mouth is full av sand, an’ it’s bursting I’ll be if ye don’t fetch a ladder quick!’

They brought a ladder and set it against the mound. Three of the men climbed up. At the top they found a big round hole, from the lip of which they scraped the sand away, discovering a patch of shingle roof, through which St. Piran—whose weight had increased of late—had broken and tumbled heels over head into his own church.

Three hours later there appeared on the eastern sky-line, against the yellow blaze of the morning, a large cavalcade that slowly pricked its way over the edge and descended the slopes of Newlyn Downs. It was the Visitation. In the midst rode St. Petroc, his crozier tucked under his arm, astride a white mule with scarlet ear-tassels and bells and a saddle of scarlet leather. He gazed across the sands to the sea, and turned to St. Neot, who towered at his side upon a flea-bitten grey.

‘The parish seems to be deserted,’ said he: ‘not a man nor woman can I see, nor a trace of smoke above the chimneys.’

St. Neot tightened his thin lips. In his secret heart he was mightily pleased.

‘Eight in the morning,’ he answered, with a glance back at the sun. ‘They’ll be all abed, I’ll warrant you.’

St. Petroc muttered a threat.

They entered the village street. Not a soul turned out at their coming. Every cottage door was fast closed, nor could any amount of knocking elicit an answer or entice a face to a window. In gathering wrath the visiting saints rode along the seashore to St. Piran’s small hut.

Here the door stood open: but the hut was empty. A meagre breakfast of herbs was set out on the table, and a brand-new scourge lay somewhat ostentatiously beside the platter. The visitors stood nonplussed; looked at each other; then eyed the landscape. Between barren sea and barren downs the beach stretched away, with not a human shape in sight. St. Petroc, choking with impotent wrath, appeared to study the hollow green breakers from between the long ears of his mule, but with quick sidelong glances right and left, ready to jump down the throat of the first saint that dared to smile.

After a minute or so St. Enodar suddenly turned his face inland, and held up a finger.

‘Hark!’ he shouted above the roar of the sea.

‘What is it?’

‘It sounds to me,’ said St. Petroc, after listening for some moments with his head on one side, ‘it sounds to me like a hymn.’

‘To be sure ’tis a hymn,’ said St. Enodar, ‘and the tune is *Mullyon*, for a crown.’ And he pursed up his lips and followed the chant, beating time with his forefinger:

When, like a thief, the Midianite
Shall steal upon the camp,
O, let him find our armour bright,
And oil within our lamp!

‘But where in the world does it come from?’ asked St. Neot.

This could not be answered for the moment, but the saints turned and moved slowly on the track of the sound, which at every step grew louder and more distinct.

It is at no appointed hours,
It is not by the clock,
That Satan, grisly wolf, devours
The unprotected flock.

The visitors found themselves at the top of an enormous sandhill, from the top of which the chant was pouring as lava from a crater. They set their ears to the sandy wall. They walked round it, and listened again.

But ever prowls th’ insidious foe,
And listens round the fold.—

This was too much. St. Petroc smote twice upon the sandhill with his crozier, and shouted:

‘Hi, there!’

The chant ceased. For at least a couple of minutes nothing happened; and then St. Piran’s bald head was thrust cautiously forward over the summit.

‘Holy St. Petroc! Was it only you, after all? And St. Neot—and St. Udy! O, glory be!’

‘Why, who did you imagine we were?’ St. Petroc asked, still in amazement.

‘Why, throat-cutting Danes, to be sure, by the way you were comin’ over the hills when we spied you, three hours back. An’ the trouble we’ve had to cover up our blessed church out o’ sight of thim marautherin’ thieves! An’ the intire parish gathered inside here an’ singin’ holy songs in expectation of imminent death! An’ to think ’twas you holy men, all the while! But why didn’t ye send word ye was comin’, St. Petroc, darlint? For it’s little but sand

ye'll find in your mouths for breakfast, I'm thinkin'.'

THE MAGIC SHADOW

ONCE upon a time there was born a man-child with a magic shadow.

His case was so rare that a number of doctors have been disputing over it ever since and picking his parents' histories and genealogies to bits, to find the cause. Their inquiries do not help us much. The father drove a cab; the mother was a charwoman and came of a consumptive family. But these facts will not quite account for a magic shadow. The birth took place on the night of a new moon, down a narrow alley into which neither moon nor sun ever penetrated beyond the third-storey windows—and that is why the parents were so long in discovering their child's miraculous gift. The hospital-student who attended merely remarked that the babe was small and sickly, and advised the mother to drink sound port-wine while nursing him—which she could not afford.

Nevertheless, the boy struggled somehow through five years of life, and was put into small-clothes. Two weeks after this promotion his mother started off to scrub out a big house in the fashionable quarter, and took him with her: for the house possessed a wide garden, laid with turf and lined with espaliers, sunflowers, and hollyhocks, and as the month was August, and the family away in Scotland, there seemed no harm in letting the child run about in this paradise while she worked. A flight of steps descended from the drawing-room to the garden, and as she knelt on her mat in the cool room it was easy to keep an eye on him. Now and then she gazed out into the sunshine and called; and the boy stopped running about and nodded back, or shouted the report of some fresh discovery.

By and by a sulphur butterfly excited him so that he must run up the broad stone steps with the news. The woman laughed, looking at his flushed face, then down at his shoe-strings, which were untied: and then she jumped up, crying out sharply—'Stand still, child—stand still a moment!'

She might well stare. Her boy stood and smiled in the sun, and his shadow lay on the whitened steps. Only the silhouette was not that of a little breeched boy at all, but of a little girl in petticoats; and it wore long curls, whereas the charwoman's son was close-cropped.

The woman stepped out on the terrace to look closer. She twirled her son round and walked him down into the garden, and backwards and forwards, and stood him in all manner of positions and attitudes, and rubbed her eyes. But there was no mistake: the shadow was that of a little girl.

She hurried over her charing, and took the boy home for his father to see before sunset. As the matter seemed important, and she did not wish people in

the street to notice anything strange, they rode back in an omnibus. They might have spared their haste, however, as the cab-driver did not reach home till supper-time, and then it was found that in the light of a candle, even when stuck inside a carriage-lamp, their son cast just an ordinary shadow. But next morning at sunrise they woke him up and carried him to the house-top, where the sunlight slanted between the chimney-stacks: and the shadow was that of a little girl.

The father scratched his head. ‘There’s money in this, wife. We’ll keep the thing close; and in a year or two he’ll be fit to go round in a show and earn money to support our declining years.’

With that the poor little one’s misfortunes began. For they shut him in his room, not allowing him to play with the other children in the alley—there was no knowing what harm might come to his precious shadow. On dark nights his father walked him out along the streets; and the boy saw many curious things under the gas-lamps, but never the little girl who inhabited his shadow. So that by degrees he forgot all about her. And his father kept silence.

Yet all the while she grew side by side with him, keeping pace with his years. And on his fifteenth birthday, when his parents took him out into the country and, in the sunshine there, revealed his secret, she was indeed a companion to be proud of—neat of figure, trim of ankle, with masses of waving hair; but whether blonde or brunette could not be told; and, alas! she had no eyes to look into.

‘My son,’ said they, ‘the world lies before you. Only do not forget your parents, who conferred on you this remarkable shadow.’

The youth promised, and went off to a showman. The showman gladly hired him; for, of course, a magic shadow was a rarity, though not so well paying as the Strong Man or the Fat Woman, for these were worth seeing every day, whereas for weeks at a time, in dull weather or foggy, our hero had no shadow at all. But he earned enough to keep himself and help the parents at home; and was considered a success.

One day, after five years of this, he sought the Strong Man, and sighed. For they had become close friends.

‘I am in love,’ he confessed.

‘With your shadow?’

‘No.’

‘Not with the Fat Woman!’ the Strong Man exclaimed, with a start of jealousy.

‘No. I have seen her that I mean these three days in the Square, on her way

to music lesson. She has dark brown eyes and wears yellow ribbons. I love her.'

'You don't say so! She has never come to our performance, I hope.'

'It has been foggy ever since we came to this town.'

'Ah, to be sure. Then there's a chance: for, you see, she would never look at you if she knew of—of that other. Take my advice—go into society, always at night, when there is no danger; get introduced; dance with her; sing serenades under her window; then marry her. Afterwards—well, that's your affair.'

So the youth went into society and met the girl he loved, and danced with her so vivaciously and sang serenades with such feeling beneath her window, that at last she felt he was all in all to her. Then the youth asked to be allowed to see her father, who was a Retired Colonel; and professed himself a man of Substance. He said nothing of the Shadow: but it is true he had saved a certain amount. 'Then to all intents and purposes you are a gentleman,' said the Retired Colonel; and the wedding-day was fixed.

They were married in dull weather, and spent a delightful honeymoon. But when spring came and brighter days, the young wife began to feel lonely; for her husband locked himself, all the day long, in his study—to work, as he said. He seemed to be always at work; and whenever he consented to a holiday, it was sure to fall on the bleakest and dismallest day in the week.

'You are never so gay now as you were last autumn. I am jealous of that work of yours. At least,' she pleaded, 'let me sit with you and share your affection with it.'

But he laughed and denied her: and next day she peered in through the keyhole of his study.

That same evening she ran away from him: having seen the Shadow of another woman by his side.

Then the poor man—for he had loved his wife—cursed the day of his birth and led an evil life. This lasted for ten years, and his wife died in her father's house, unforgiving.

On the day of her funeral, the man said to his shadow—'I see it all. We were made for each other, so let us marry. You have wrecked my life and now must save it. Only it is rather hard to marry a wife whom one can only see by sunlight and moonlight.'

So they were married; and spent all their life in the open air, looking on the naked world and learning its secrets. And his Shadow bore him children, in stony ways and on the bare mountain-side. And for every child that was born the man felt the pangs of it.

And at last he died and was judged: and being interrogated concerning his good deeds, began—

'We two——'

—and looked around for his Shadow. A great light shone all about; but she was nowhere to be seen. In fact, she had passed before him; and his children remained on earth, where men already were heaping them with flowers and calling them divine.

Then the man folded his arms and lifted his chin.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'I am simply a sinner.'

There are in this world certain men who create. The children of such are poems, and the half of their soul is female. For it is written that without woman no new thing shall come into the world.

OUR LADY OF GWITHIAN

'Mary, mother, well thou be!
Mary, mother, think on me;
Sweetè Lady, maiden clean,
Shield me from ill, shame, and teen;
Shield me, Lady, from villainy
And from all wicked company!'
Speculum Christiani.

Here is a little story I found one day among the legends of the Cornish Saints, like a chip in porridge. If you love simplicity, I think it may amuse you.

Lovey Bussow was wife of Daniel Bussow, a tin-streamer of Gwithian Parish. He had brought her from Camborne, and her neighbours agreed that there was little amiss with the woman if you overlooked her being a bit weak in the head. They set her down as 'not exactly.' At the end of a year she brought her husband a fine boy. It happened that the child was born just about the time of year the tin-merchants visited St. Michael's Mount; and the father —who streamed in a small way, and had no beast of burden but his donkey, or 'naggur'—had to load up panniers and drive his tin down to the shore-market with the rest, which for him meant an absence of three weeks, or a fortnight at the least.

So Daniel kissed his wife and took his leave; and the neighbours, who came to visit her as soon as he was out of the way, all told her the same story —that until the child was safely baptized it behoved her to be very careful and keep her door shut for fear of the Piskies. The Piskies, or fairy-folk (they said), were themselves the spirits of children that had died unchristened, and liked

nothing better than the chance to steal away an unchristened child to join their nation of mischief.

Lovey listened to them, and it preyed on her mind. She reckoned that her best course was to fetch a holy man as quickly as possible to baptize the child and make the cross over him. So one afternoon, the mite being then a bare fortnight old, she left him asleep in his cradle and, wrapping a shawl over her head, hurried off to seek Meriden the Priest.

Meriden the Priest dwelt in a hut among the sand-hills, a bowshot beyond St. Gwithian's Chapel on the seaward side, as you go out to Godrevy. He had spent the day in barking his nets, and was spreading them out to dry on the short turf of the towans; but on hearing Lovey's errand, he good-naturedly dropped his occupation and, staying only to fill a bottle with holy water, walked back with her to her home.

As they drew near, Lovey was somewhat perturbed to see that the door, which she had carefully closed, was standing wide open. She guessed, however, that a neighbour had called in her absence, and would be inside keeping watch over the child. As she reached the threshold, the dreadful truth broke upon her: the kitchen was empty, and so was the cradle!

It made her frantic for a while. Meriden the Priest offered what consolation he could, and suggested that one of her neighbours had called indeed, and finding the baby alone in the cottage, had taken it off to her own home to guard it. But this he felt to be a forlorn hope, and it proved a vain one. Neither search nor inquiry could trace the infant. Beyond a doubt the Piskies had carried him off.

When this was established so that even the hopefullest of the good-wives shook her head over it, Lovey grew calm of a sudden and (as it seemed) with the calm of despair. She grew obstinate too.

'My blessed cheeld!' she kept repeating. 'The tender worm of 'en! But I'll have 'en back, if I've to go to the naughty place to fetch 'en. Why, what sort of a tale be I to pitch to my Dan'l, if he comes home and his firstborn gone?'

They shook their heads again over this. It would be a brave blow for the man, but (said one to another) he that marries a fool must look for thorns in his bed.

'What's done can't be undone,' they told her. 'You'd best let a two-three of us stay the night and coax 'ee from frettin'. It's bad for the system, and you so soon over child-birth.'

Lovey opened her eyes wide on them.

'Lord's sake!' she said, 'you don't reckon I'm goin' to sit down under this? What?—and him the beautifullest, straightest cheeld that ever was in Gwithian Parish! Go'st thy ways home, every wan. Piskies steal my cheeld an' Dan'l's, would they? I'll pisky 'em!'

She showed them forth—'put them to doors' as we say in the Duchy—every one, the Priest included. She would have none of their consolation.

'You mean it kindly, naybors, I don't say; but tiddn' what I happen to want. I wants my cheeld back; an' I'll *have*'n back, what's more!'

They went their ways, agreeing that the woman was doited. Lovey closed the door upon them, bolted it, and sat for hours staring at the empty cradle. Through the unglazed window she could see the stars; and when these told her that midnight was near, she put on her shawl again, drew the bolt, and fared forth over the towans. At first the stars guided her, and the slant of the night-wind on her face; but by and by, in a dip between the hills, she spied her mark and steered for it. This was the spark within St. Gwithian's Chapel, where day and night a tiny oil lamp, with a floating wick, burned before the image of Our Lady.

Meriden the Priest kept the lamp filled, the wick trimmed, year in and year out. But he, good man, after remembering Lovey in his prayers, was laid asleep and snoring within his hut, a bowshot away. The chapel-door opened softly to Lovey's hand, and she crept up to Mary's image, and abased herself before it.

'Dear Aun' Mary,' she whispered, 'the Piskies have taken my cheeld! You d'knaw what that means to a poor female—you there, cuddlin' your liddle Jesus in the crook o' your arm. An' you d'knaw likewise what these Piskies be like; spiteful li'l toads, same as you or I might be if happen we'd died unchristened an' hadn' no share in heaven nor hell nor middle-earth. But that's no excuse. Aun' Mary, my dear, I want my cheeld back!' said she. That was all Lovey prayed. Without more ado she bobbed a curtsy, crept from the chapel, closed the door, and way-to-go back to her cottage.

When she reached it and struck a light in the kitchen she more than half expected to hear the child cry to her from his cradle. But, for all that Meriden the Priest had told her concerning the Virgin and her power, there the cradle stood empty.

'Well-a-well!' breathed Lovey. 'The gentry are not to be hurried, I reckon. I'll fit and lie down for forty winks,' she said; 'though I do think, with her experience Mary might have remembered the poor mite would be famished afore this, not to mention that the milk in me is beginnin' to hurt cruel.'

She did off some of her clothes and lay down, and even slept a little in spite of the pain in her breasts; but awoke a good two hours before dawn, to find no baby restored to her arms, nor even (when she looked) was it back in its cradle.

'This'll never do,' said Lovey. On went her shawl again, and once again she faced the night and hurried across the towans to St. Gwithian's Chapel. There in her niche stood Our Lady, quite as though nothing had happened,

with the infant Christ in her arms and the tiny lamp burning at her feet.

‘Aun’ Mary, Aun’ Mary,’ said Lovey, speaking up sharp, ’this iddn’ no sense ’t all! A person would think time was no objic, the way you stick there starin’, an’ my poor cheeld leary with hunger afore now—as you, bein’ a mother, oft to knaw. Fit an’ fetch ’en home to me quick. Aw, do ’ee co’, that’s a dear soul!’

But Our Lady stood there and made no sign.

‘I don’t understand ’ee ’t all,’ Lovey groaned. ‘ ’Tiddn’ the way I’d behave in your place, and you d’knaw it.’

Still Our Lady made no sign.

Lovey grew desperate.

‘Aw, very well, then!’ she cried. ‘Try what it feels like without your liddle Jesus!’

And reaching up a hand, she snatched at and lifted the Holy Child that fitted into a stone socket on Our Lady’s arm. It came away in her grasp, and she fled, tucking it under her shawl.

All the way home Lovey looked for the earth to gape and swallow her, or a hand to reach down from heaven and grip her by the hair; and all the way she seemed to hear Our Lady’s feet padding after her in the darkness. But she never stopped nor stayed until she reached home; and there, flinging in through the door and slamming to the bolt behind her, she made one spring for the bed, and slid down in it, cowering over the small stone image.

Rat-a-tat! tat!—someone knocked on the door so that the cottage shook.

‘Knock away!’ said Lovey. ‘Whoever thee be, thee’rt not my cheeld.’

Rat-a-tat! tat!

‘My cheeld wouldn’ be knockin’: he’s got neither strength nor sproil for it. An’ you may fetch Michael and all his Angels, to tear me in pieces,’ said Lovey; ‘but till I hear my own cheeld creen to me, I’ll keep what I have!’

Thereupon Lovey sat up, listening. For outside she heard a feeble wail.

She slipped out of bed. Holding the image tight in her right arm, she drew the bolt cautiously. On the threshold at her feet, lay her own babe, nestling in a bed of bracken.

She would have stooped at once and snatched him to her. But the stone Christling hampered her, lying so heavily in her arm. For a moment, fearing trickery, she had a mind to hurl it far out of doors into the night. . . . It would fall without much hurt into the soft sand of the towans. But on a second thought she held it forth gently in her two hands.

‘I never meant to hurt ’en, Aun’ Mary,’ she said. ‘But a firstborn’s a firstborn, be we gentle or simple.’

In the darkness a pair of invisible hands reached forward and took her hostage.

. . . . .

When it was known that the Piskies had repented and restored Lovey Bussow's child to her, the neighbours agreed that fools have most of the luck in this world; but came nevertheless to offer their congratulations. Meriden the Priest came also. He wanted to know how it had happened; for the Piskies do not easily surrender a child they have stolen.

Lovey—standing very demure, and smoothing her apron down along her thighs—confessed that she had laid her trouble before Our Lady.

'A miracle, then!' exclaimed his Reverence. 'What height! What depth!'

'That's of it,' agreed Lovey. 'Aw, b'lieve me, your Reverence, we mothers understand wan another.'

WIDDERSHINS

A DROLL

Once upon a time there was a small farmer living in Wendron parish, not far from the church-town. 'Thaniel Teague was his name. This Teague happened to walk into Helston on a Furry-day,[2] when the Mayor and townspeople dance through the streets to the Furry-tune. In the evening there was a grand ball given at the Angel Hotel, and the landlord very kindly allowed Teague—who had stopped too late as it was—to look in through the door and watch the gentry dance the Lancers.

Teague thought he had never seen anything so heavenly. What with one hindrance and another 'twas past midnight before he reached home, and then nothing would do for him but he must have his wife and six children out upon the floor in their night-clothes, practising the Grand Chain while he sang—

'Out of my stony griefs
Bethel I'll raise!'

The seventh child, the babby, they set down in the middle of the floor, like a nine-pin. And the worst of it was, the poor mite twisted his eyes so, trying to follow his mammy round and round, that he grew up with a cast from that hour.

'Tis of this child—Joby he was called—that I am going to tell you. Barring the cast, he grew up a very straight lad, and in due time began to think upon marrying. His father's house faced south, and as it came easier to him to look north-west than any other direction, he chose a wife from Gwinear parish. His elder brothers had gone off to sea for their living, and his sister had married a mine-captain: so when the old people died, Joby took over the farm and

worked it, and did very well.

Joby’s wife was very fond of him, though of course she didn’t like that cast in his looks: and in many ways ’twas inconvenient too. If the poor man ever put hand on plough to draw a straight furrow, round to the north ’twould work as sure as a compass-needle. She consulted the doctors about it, and they did no good. Then she thought about consulting a conjurer; but being a timorous woman as well as not over-wise, she put it off for a while.

Now, there was a little fellow living over to Penryn in those times, Tommy Warne by name, that gave out he knew how to conjure. Folks believed in him more than he did himself: for, to tell truth, he was a lazy shammick, who liked most ways of getting a living better than hard work. Still, he was generally made pretty welcome at the farm-houses round, for he could turn a hand to anything and always kept the maids laughing in the kitchen. One morning he dropped in on Farmer Joby and asked for a job to earn his dinner; and Joby gave him some straw to spin for thatching. By dinner-time Tom had spun two bundles of such very large size that the farmer rubbed his chin when he looked at them.

‘Why,’ says he, ‘I always thought you a liar—I did indeed. But now I believe you can conjure, sure enough.’

As for Mrs. Joby, she was so much pleased that, though she felt certain the devil must have had a hand in it, she gave Tom an extra helping of pudding for dinner.

Some time after this, Farmer Joby missed a pair of pack-saddles. Search and ask as he might, he couldn’t find out who had stolen them, or what had become of them.

‘Tommy Warne’s a clever fellow,’ he said at last. ‘I must see if he can tell me anything.’ So he walked over to Penryn on purpose.

Tommy was in his doorway smoking when Farmer Joby came down the street. ‘So you’m after they pack-saddles,’ said he.

‘Why, how ever did you know?’

‘That’s my business. Will it do if you find ’em after harvest?’

‘To be sure ’twill. I only want to know where they be.’

‘Very well, then; after harvest they’ll be found.’

Home the farmer went. Sure enough, after harvest, he went to unwind Tommy’s two big bundles of straw-rope for thatching the mow, and in the middle of each was one of his missing pack-saddles.

‘Well, now,’ said Joby’s wife, ‘that fellow must have a real gift of conjurin’! I wonder, my dear, you don’t go and consult him about that there cross-eye of yours.’

‘I will, then,’ said Joby; and he walked over to Penryn again the very next market-day.

' "Cure your eyes," is it?' said Tommy Warne. 'Why, to be sure I can. Why didn't you ax me afore? I thought you *liked* squintin'.'

'I don't, then; I hate it.'

'Very well; you shall see straight this very night if you do what I tell you. Go home and tell your wife to make your bed on the roof of the four-poster; and she must make it widdershins,[3] turnin' bed-tie and all against the sun, and puttin' the pillow where the feet come as a rule. That's all.'

'Fancy my never thinkin' of anything so simple as that!' said Joby. He went home and told his wife. She made his bed on the roof of the four-poster, and widdershins, as he ordered; and they slept that night, the wife as usual, and Joby up close to the rafters.

But scarcely had Joby closed an eye before there came a rousing knock at the door, and in walked Joby's eldest brother, the sea-captain, that he hadn't seen for years.

'Get up, Joby, and come along with me if you want that eye of yours mended.'

'Thank you, Sam, it's curin' very easy and nice, and I hope you won't disturb me.'

'If 'tis Tommy Warne's cure you're trying, why then I'm part of it; so you'd best get up quickly.'

'Aw, that's another matter, though you might have said so at first. I'd no notion you and Tommy was hand-'n-glove.'

Joby rose up and followed his brother out of doors. He had nothing on but his night-shirt, but his brother seemed in a hurry, and he didn't like to object.

They set their faces to the road and they walked and walked, neither saying a word, till they came to Penryn. There was a fair going on in the town; swing-boats and shooting-galleries and lillybanger standings, and naphtha lamps flaming, and in the middle of all, a great whirly-go-round, with striped horses and boats, and a steam-organ playing 'Yankee Doodle.' As soon as they started Joby saw that the whole thing was going around widdershins; and his brother stood up under the naphtha-lamp and pulled out a sextant and began to take observations.

'What's the latitude?' asked Joby. He felt that he ought to say something to his brother, after being parted all these years.

'Decimal nothing to speak of,' answered Sam.

'Then we ought to be nearing the Line,' said Joby. He hadn't noticed the change, but now he saw that the boat they sat in was floating on the sea, and that Sam had stuck his walking-stick out over the stern and was steering.

'What's the longitude?' asked Joby.

'That doesn't concern us.'

' 'Tis west o' Grinnidge, I suppose?' Joby knew very little about

navigation, and wanted to make the most of it.

‘West o’ Penryn,’ said Sam, very sharp and short. ‘ ’Twasn’ Grinnidge Fair we started from.’

But presently he sings out ‘Here we are!’ and Joby saw a white line, like a popping-crease, painted across the blue sea ahead of them. First he thought ’twas paint, and then he thought ’twas catgut, for when the keel of their boat scraped over it, it sang like a bird.

‘That was the Equator,’ said Sam. ‘Now let’s see if your eyes be any better.’

But when Joby tried them, what was his disappointment to find the cast as bad as ever?—only now they were slewing right the other way, towards the South Pole.

‘I never thought well of this cure from the first,’ declared Sam. ‘For my part, I’m sick and tired of the whole business!’ And with that he bounced up from the thwart and hailed a passing shark and walked down its throat in a huff, leaving Joby all alone on the wide sea.

‘There’s nice brotherly behaviour for you!’ said Joby to himself. ‘Lucky he left his walking-stick behind. The best thing I can do is to steer along close to the Equator, and then I know where I am.’

So he steered along close to the Line, and by and by he saw something shining in the distance. When he came nearer, ’twas a great gilt fowl stuck there with its beak to the Line and its wings sprawled out. And when he came close, ’twas no other than the cock belonging to the tower of his own parish church of Wendron!

‘Well!’ said Joby,’ one has to travel to find out how small the world is. And what might you be doin’ here, naybour?’

‘Is that you, Joby Teague? Then I’ll thank you to do me a good turn. I came here in a witch-ship last night, and the crew put this spell upon me because I wouldn’t pay my footing to cross the Line. A nice lot, to try and steal the gilt off a church weather-cock! ’Tis ridiculous,’ said he, ‘but I can’t get loose for the life o’ me!’

‘Why, that’s as easy as A B C,’ said Joby. ‘You’ll find it in any book of parlour amusements. You take a fowl, put its beak to the floor, and draw a chalk line away from it, right and left——’

Joby wetted his thumb, smudged out a bit of the Equator on each side of the cock’s nose, and the bird stood up and shook himself.

‘And now is there anything I can do for you, Joby Teague?’

‘To be sure there is. I’m getting completely tired of this boat: and if you can give me a lift, I’ll take it as a favour.’

‘No favour at all. Where shall we go visit?—the Antipodes?’

‘No, thank you,’ said Toby. ‘I’ve heard tell they get up an’ do their

business when we honest folks be in our beds: and that kind o' person I never could trust. Squint or no squint, Wendron's Wendron, and that's where I'm comfortable.'

'Well, it's no use loitering here, or we may get into trouble for what we've done to the Equator. Climb on my back,' said the bird, 'and home we go!'

It seemed no more than a flap of the wings, and Joby found himself on his friend's back on one of the pinnacles of Wendron Church and looking down on his own farm.

'Thankin' you kindly, soce, and now I think I'll be goin',' said he.

'Not till I've cured your eyesight, Joby,' said the polite bird.

Joby by this time was wishing his eyesight to botheration; but before he could say a word, a breeze came about the pinnacles, and he was spinning around on the cock's back—spinning around widdershins—clutching the bird's neck and holding his breath.

'And now,' the cock said, as they came to a standstill again, 'I think you can see a hole in a ladder as well as any man.'

Just then the bells in the tower below them began to ring merrily.

Said Joby, 'What's that for, I wonder?'

'It looks to me,' said the cock, 'as if your wife was gettin' married again.'

Sure enough, while the bells rang, Joby saw the door of his own house open, and his own wife come stepping towards the church, leaning on a man's arm. And who should that man be but Tommy Warne?

'And to think I've lived fifteen years with that woman, and never lifted my hand to her!'

Said the bird, 'The wedding is fixed for eleven o'clock, and 'tis on the stroke now. If I was you, Joby, I'd climb down and put back the church clock.'

'And so I would, if I knew how to get to it.'

'You've but to slide down my leg to the parapet: and from the parapet you can jump right on to the string-course under the clock.'

Joby slid down the bird's leg, and jumped on to the ledge. He had never before noticed a clock in Wendron Church tower; but there was one, staring him in the face.

'Now,' cried his friend, 'catch hold of the minute-hand and turn!' Joby did so—'Widdershins!' screamed the bird: 'faster! faster!' Joby whizzed back the minute-hand with all his might.

'Aië, ul—ul—oo! Lemme go! 'Tis my arm you're pullin' off!' 'Twas his own wife's voice in his own four-poster. Joby had slid down the bed-post and caught hold of her arm, and was workin' it round like mad from right to left.

'I ax your pardon, my dear. I was thinkin' you was another man's bride.'

‘Indeed, I must say you wasn’t behavin’ like it,’ said she.

But when she got up and lit a candle, she was pleased enough. For Joby’s eyes were as straight as yours or mine. And straight they have been ever since.

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[2] Flora-day, 8th May.

[3] From S. to N., through E.

MY GRANDFATHER, HENDRY WATTY

A DROLL

’Tis the nicest miss in the world that I was born grandson of my own father’s father, and not of another man altogether. Hendry Watty was the name of my grandfather that might have been; and he always maintained that to all intents and purposes he *was* my grandfather, and made me call him so—’twas such a narrow shave. I don’t mind telling you about it. ’Tis a curious tale, too.

My grandfather, Hendry Watty, bet four gallons of eggy-hot that he would row out to the Shivering Grounds, all in the dead waste of the night, and haul a trammel there. To find the Shivering Grounds by night, you get the Gull Rock in a line with Tregamenna and pull out till you open the light on St. Anthony’s Point; but everybody gives the place a wide berth because Archelaus Rowett’s lugger foundered there, one time, with six hands on board; and they say that at night you can hear the drowned men hailing their names. But my grandfather was the boldest man in Port Loe, and said he didn’t care. So one Christmas Eve by daylight he and his mates went out and tilled the trammel; and then they came back and spent the fore part of the evening over the eggy-hot, down to Oliver’s tiddly-wink,[4] to keep my grandfather’s spirits up and also to show that the bet was made in earnest.

’Twas past eleven o’clock when they left Oliver’s and walked down to the cove to see my grandfather off. He has told me since that he didn’t feel afraid at all, but very friendly in mind, especially towards William John Dunn, who was walking on his right hand. This puzzled him at the first, for as a rule he didn’t think much of William John Dunn. But now he shook hands with him several times, and just as he was stepping into the boat he says, ‘You’ll take care of Mary Polly, while I’m away.’ Mary Polly Polsue was my grandfather’s sweetheart at that time. But why he should have spoken as if he was bound on a long voyage he never could tell; he used to set it down to fate.

‘I will,’ said William John Dunn; and then they gave a cheer and pushed my grandfather off, and he lit his pipe and away he rowed all into the dead waste of the night. He rowed and rowed, all in the dead waste of the night; and he got the Gull Rock in a line with Tregamenna windows; and still he was rowing, when to his great surprise he heard a voice calling:

‘*Hendry Watty! Hendry Watty!*’

I told you my grandfather was the boldest man in Port Loe. But he dropped his two paddles now, and made the five signs of Penitence. For who could it be railing him out here in the dead waste and middle of the night?

‘HENDRY WATTY! HENDRY WATTY! *drop me a line*.’

My grandfather kept his fishing-lines in a little skivet under the stern-sheets. But not a trace of bait had he on board. If he had, he was too much a-tremble to bait a hook.

‘HENDRY WATTY! HENDRY WATTY! *drop me a line, or I’ll know why*!’

My poor grandfather by this had picked up his paddles again, and was rowing like mad to get quit of the neighbourhood, when something or somebody gave three knocks—*thump, thump, thump!*—on the bottom of the boat, just as you would knock on a door. The third thump fetched Hendry Watty upright on his legs. He had no more heart for disobeying, but having bitten his pipe-stem in half by this time—his teeth chattered so—he baited his hook with the broken bit and flung it overboard, letting the line run out in the stern-notch. Not half-way had it run before he felt a long pull on it, like the sucking of a dog-fish.

‘*Hendry Watty! Hendry Watty! pull me in.*’

Hendry Watty pulled in hand over fist; and in came the lead sinker over the notch, and still the line was heavy; he pulled and he pulled, and next, all out of the dead waste of the night, came two white hands, like a washerwoman’s, and gripped hold of the stern-board; and on the left of these two hands, on the little finger, was a silver ring, sunk very deep in the flesh. If this was bad, worse was the face that followed—a great white parboiled face, with the hair and whiskers all stuck with chips of wood and seaweed. And if this was bad for anybody, it was worse for my grandfather, who had known Archelaus Rowett before he was drowned out on the Shivering Grounds, six years before.

Archelaus Rowett climbed in over the stern, pulled the hook with the bit of pipe-stem out of his cheek, sat down in the stem-sheets, shook a small crayfish out of his whiskers, and said very coolly—

‘If you should come across my wife——’

That was all my grandfather stayed to hear. At the sound of Archelaus’s voice he fetched a yell, jumped clean over the side of the boat and swam for dear life. He swam and swam, till by the bit of the moon he saw the Gull Rock

close ahead. There were lashin's of rats on the Gull Rock, as he knew: but he was a good deal surprised at the way they were behaving: for they sat in a row at the water's edge and fished, with their tails let down into the sea for fishing-lines: and their eyes were like garnets burning as they looked at my grandfather over their shoulders.

'Hendry Watty! Hendry Watty! You can't land here—you're disturbing the pollack.'

'Bejimbers! I wouldn' do that for the world,' says my grandfather: so off he pushes and swims for the mainland. This was a long job, and 'twas as much as he could do to reach Kibberick beach, where he fell on his face and hands among the stones, and there lay, taking breath.

The breath was hardly back in his body, before he heard footsteps, and along the beach came a woman, and passed close by to him. He lay very quiet, and as she came near he saw 'twas Sarah Rowett, that used to be Archelaus's wife, but had married another man since. She was knitting as she went by, and did not seem to notice my grandfather: but he heard her say to herself, 'The hour is come, and the man is come.'

He had scarcely begun to wonder over this, when he spied a ball of worsted yarn beside him that Sarah had dropped. 'Twas the ball she was knitting from, and a line of worsted stretched after her along the beach. Hendry Watty picked up the ball and followed the thread on tip-toe. In less than a minute he came near enough to watch what she was doing: and what she did was worth watching. First she gathered wreckwood and straw, and struck flint over touchwood and teened a fire. Then she unravelled her knitting: twisted her end of the yarn between finger and thumb—like a cobbler twisting a wax-end—and cast the end up towards the sky. It made Hendry Watty stare when the thread, instead of falling back to the ground, remained hanging, just as if 'twas fastened to something up above; but it made him stare more when Sarah Rowett began to climb up it, and away up till nothing could be seen of her but her ankles dangling out of the dead waste and middle of the night.

'HENDRY WATTY! HENDRY WATTY!'

It wasn't Sarah calling, but a voice far away out to sea.

'HENDRY WATTY! HENDRY WATTY! *send me a line*.'

My grandfather was wondering what to do, when Sarah speaks down very sharp to him, out of the dark:

'Hendry Watty! Where's the rocket apparatus? Can't you hear the poor fellow asking for a line?'

'I do,' says my grandfather, who was beginning to lose his temper; 'and do you think, ma'am, that I carry a Boxer's rocket in my trousers pocket?'

'I think you have a ball of worsted in your hand,' says she. 'Throw it as far as you can.'

So my grandfather threw the ball out into the dead waste and middle of the night. He didn’t see where it pitched, or how far it went.

‘Right it is,’ says the woman aloft. ‘ ’Tis easy seen you’re a hurler. But what shall us do for a cradle? Hendry Watty! Hendry Watty!’

‘Ma’am to *you*,’ says my grandfather.

‘If you’ve the common feelings of a gentleman, I’ll ask you kindly to turn your back; I’m going to take off my stocking.’

So my grandfather stared the other way very politely; and when he was told he might look again, he saw she had tied the stocking to the line and was running it out like a cradle into the dead waste of the night.

‘Hendry Watty! Hendry Watty! Look out below!’

Before he could answer, plump! a man’s leg came tumbling past his ear and scattered the ashes right and left.

‘Hendry Watty! Hendry Watty! Look out below!’

This time ’twas a great white arm and hand, with a silver ring sunk tight in the flesh of the little finger.

‘Hendry Watty! Hendry Watty! Warm them limbs!’

My grandfather picked them up and was warming them before the fire, when down came tumbling a great round head and bounced twice and lay in the firelight, staring up at him. And whose head was it but Archelaus Rowett’s, that he’d run away from once already, that night?

‘Hendry Watty! Hendry Watty! Look out below!’

This time ’twas another leg, and my grandfather was just about to lay hands on it, when the woman called down:

‘Hendry Watty! catch it quick! It’s my own leg I’ve thrown down by mistake!’

The leg struck the ground and bounced high, and Hendry Watty made a leap after it. . . .

. . . . .

And I reckon it’s asleep he must have been: for what he caught was not Mrs. Rowett’s leg, but the jib-boom of a deep-laden brigantine that was running him down in the dark. And as he sprang for it, his boat was crushed by the brigantine’s fore-foot and went down under his very boot-soles. At the same time he let out a yell, and two or three of the crew ran forward and hoisted him up to the bowsprit and in on deck, safe and sound.

But the brigantine happened to be outward-bound for the River Plate; so that, what with one thing and another, ’twas eleven good months before my grandfather landed again at Port Loe. And who should be the first man he sees standing above the cove but William John Dunn?

‘I’m very glad to see you,’ says William John Dunn.

‘Thank you kindly,’ answers my grandfather; ‘and how’s Mary Polly?’

‘Why, as for that,’ he says, ‘she took so much looking after, that I couldn’t feel I was keeping her properly under my eye till I married her, last June month.’

‘You was always one to over-do things,’ said my grandfather.

‘But if you was alive an’ well, why didn’ you drop us a line?’

Now when it came to talk about ‘dropping a line’ my grandfather fairly lost his temper. So he struck William John Dunn on the nose—a thing he had never been known to do before—and William John Dunn hit him back, and the neighbours had to separate them. And next day, William John Dunn took out a summons against him.

Well, the case was tried before the magistrates: and my grandfather told his story from the beginning, quite straightforward, just as I’ve told it to you. And the magistrates decided that, taking one thing with another, he’d had a great deal of provocation, and fined him five shillings. And there the matter ended. But now you know the reason why I’m William John Dunn’s grandson instead of Hendry Watty’s.

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[4] Beer-house.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Shorter Stories* by Arthur Quiller-Couch]