FATHER GREGORY

P. C. WREN

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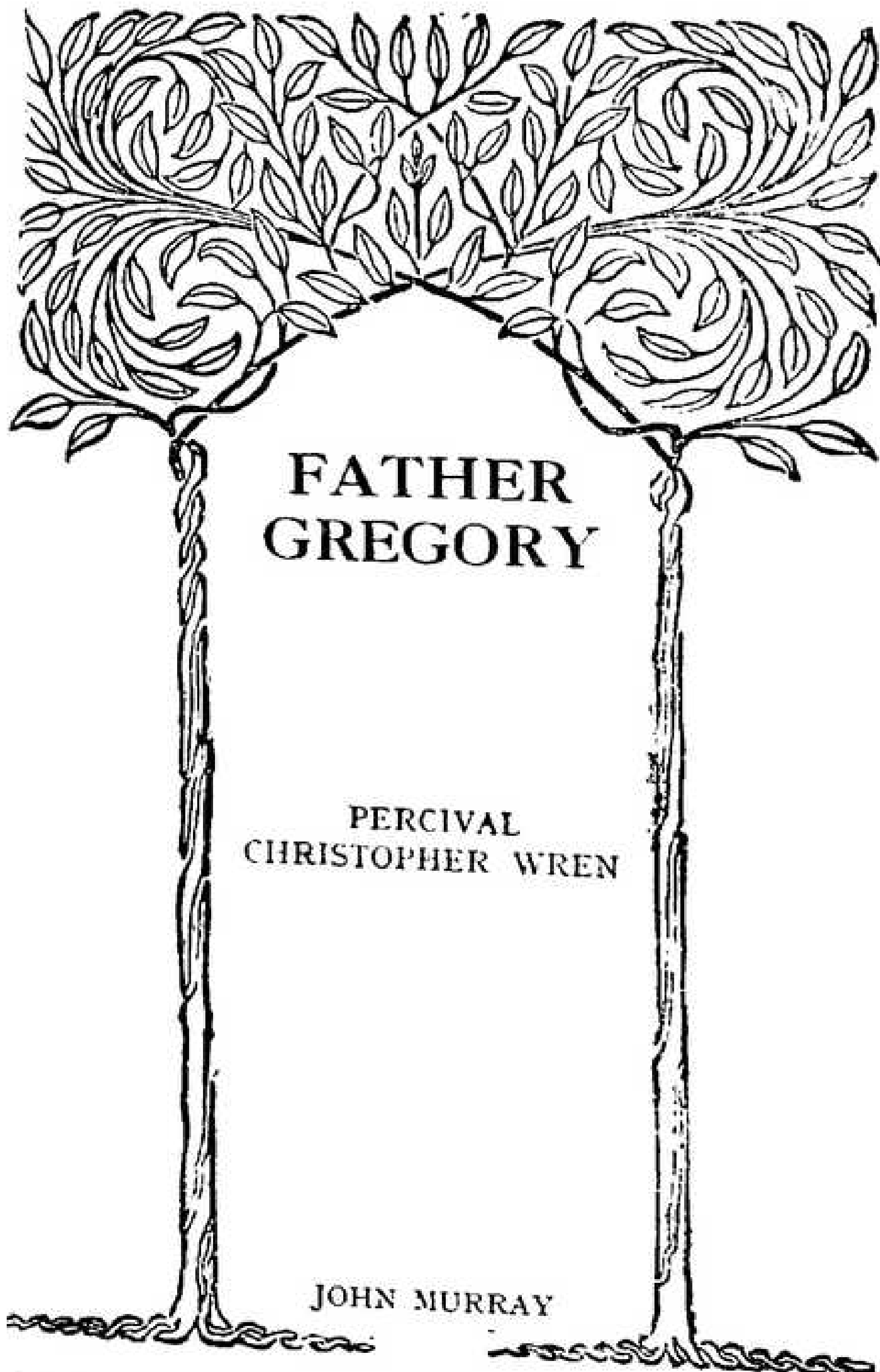

FATHER GREGORY

PERCIVAL
CHRISTOPHER WREN

JOHN MURRAY

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Part I

THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS IS HARD

CHAPTER I

THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS

My Soul, sit thou a patient looker-on;
Judge not the Play before the Play is done:
Her plot hath many changes: every day
Speaks a new scene; the last act crowns the Play.

"This Sahib appears even madder than most of his kind," said the native station-master of Kondah to the booking-clerk who squatted beside him in the shade of the only building the station boasted.

"Without doubt," replied that young gentleman, who, by reason of much learning, little understanding, and less pay, entertained a most bitter hatred for those who had given him a free education and then omitted to see him suitably rewarded for accepting it. "How shall Educated Gent. B.A., pull on with thirty rupees a mensem?" he frequently inquired.

"Is not this the tenth day that he has left his tents and met the train?" pursued the station-master, as he paused in the massaging of his bare legs.

"Tenth or thirteenth, perhaps," replied the clerk, adding with pained, resigned piety: "I do not know why God made panthers, Pathans, and Sahibs." He then closed his eyes and resumed his favourite day-dream of wrecking a train full of Europeans—all gazetted Civil Officials for preference. That might teach them not to decoy one into becoming Educated Gent. B.A., by many long years of superhuman labour, and then turning one adrift to find one's own level.

Meanwhile, the object of the conversation of these worthies, a tall, lithe man in white riding-kit, patiently tramped the platform of the God-forsaken little wayside station, from end to end, awaiting the daily train that meanders through hundreds of miles of desert to the tin-shed station of Kondah, where it delivers over its rare passengers to the mercy of the native-state railway that takes them on, with more or less punctuality and safety, to another little junction in another big desert, and to high hopes of reaching a third junction whence real trains run to a great seaport and tall ships for Bombay and Home.

From end to end of the long low platform he tramped, doggedly, steadily, apparently oblivious of the smiting heat that poured down direct from the

blasting midday sun above, and that poured up, radiated, from the stone platform and the corrugated-iron building below; apparently oblivious of the blinding glare reflected from the yellow sand of the limitless desert on either hand, from the white dust of the road, from the glittering metals of the narrow-gauge track, from the eye-searing whitewash of the station; oblivious of the two squatting, chewing, expectorating officials, unshorn, unkempt, unclean; of the crouching dungaree-clad coolie, the gaping crows, the wheeling, wailing kites; the limping, shivering pariah-dog; of everything in the brilliant red-hot world about him.

Anon the coolie arose and, with a heavy hammer, smote many blows upon a dangling yard of iron—producing a din that to an imaginative mind, at a considerable distance, might perhaps suggest the rapid ringing of a heavy bell.

At the sound, John Durham's stern, handsome face changed, relaxed, softened, and, as it was lit up with the glow of hope, expectation, and love, became more than handsome—fine and noble. The lines of anxiety, sorrow, and sleeplessness seemed to vanish as he smiled and unconsciously thought a prayer.

He shaded his eyes with his hand, peered up the line through the blinding, dancing glare and heat-haze, till at length, afar off, he espied the tiny baby train that, capricious, erratic, wilful, played the chief rôle on the stage of this Gilbertian railway.

Why had the infernal thing stopped?

Was she in it?

Would she come?

Could she come?

Should she come?

The old, old question. Had she the right to leave the ruffian, the brute, the drunkard; the scoundrel who ill-treated, hated, insulted, and shamed her, and to come to the lover, the friend, the man who worshipped and adored her; to come to him who would give his life for her happiness, his very soul for her welfare?

What!—Because of the empty words, the letter of the law of a mediaeval man-made ceremony—should a splendid woman be bound for ever to a gross beast who hated her?

What!—Because she had been bought and sold like a dog or a horse by a wealthy evil sensualist from a bankrupt greedy father—should she have no right to save herself, to escape from a hell upon earth?

What!—Because she had been forced and compelled as a girl of sixteen, a mere child, was she bound to submit to degradation, misery, bondage of mind, body, and soul for ever?

Whom God hath joined together! . . . Away with the lying cant! . . . Whom two villainous scoundrels have joined together by paying a fee to a hireling fellow-man to mumble a few words in a church.

Marriages made in Heaven to celestial music! . . . Sickening humbug! A marriage made in a club-bar to the chink of gold and crackle of bank-notes or the scrape of a cheque-signing pen. . . .

If ever God joined a couple in the bonds of undying love and mutual faith and honour, He joined John Durham and Joan Rayven during that golden delirium, when, for the first time, after five years of solid misery, her unspeakable husband—entirely for his own purposes *bien entendu*—had let her out of his sight and sent her to the Hills by herself.

Joan Rayven—beautiful, proud, witty, tender Joan; noble, brave, accomplished, intellectual Joan; fine gentlewoman—now only twenty-one, and for five years the prey of a Beast. . . .

William Pooch—gross, ugly, vulgar Bill Pooch; coarse, ignorant, brutal Pooch; drunken, sensual Pooch, the rich and evil ruffian—aged fifty-five, and for five years the cruel owner of Joan Rayven!

How his blood boiled as he thought of them. . . . Was that infernal toy train never coming? . . . Could she be in it? . . .

Surely God never gave men such joy as would be Durham's if she, she herself, radiant, dainty, beautiful, stepped from that train. No, the mind could not bring itself to believe in the possibility of such exquisite, ineffable bliss. . . .

Fancy taking Joan over to the camp until to-morrow's train arrived from Pettah Junction and prepared to return across the Native State to that other lost spot, whence one could strike the big main line.

Fancy making tea for Joan. . . .

Fancy finding Joan there, her own beautiful wonderful self—John Durham's wife, in the sight of God, for ever and beyond. . . .

No! Such happiness could not be in this evil, dreary world, surely.

Fancy having Joan to love, honour, obey; to guard, shelter, and cherish; to serve and for ever to worship and adore. . . . To have Joan for companion, friend, and wife, with never a parting here or hereafter. . . .

No—this is not Heaven, and Heaven itself could hold out no joy to compare with such perfect bliss. . . .

The train whistled impudently, mockingly, impishly, and started forward.

The pariah-dog, clear-eyed and mangy, limping and shivering in the sun, left the opposite platform, and painfully jerked its pink-patched, hideous body, step by step, across the track.

To Durham's pitying eye, it looked the last and lowest of all created things, a crawling concentration of misery, disease, and degradation—and he made a mental note that he would come back and mercifully shoot it, if he were again disappointed, as doubtless he would be, alas! to-day and on many morrows.

He did not shoot it—unfortunately.

If he had, the lives of hundreds of people would have run differently, and of two would have been saved.

So marvellous and mysterious are the workings of Providence—or the Happenings of Chance.

The infant train stopped once more and, in the dancing glare, the engine appeared to make grimaces at John Durham.

It screamed derisively.

The Englishman ground his teeth and shook his riding-whip at it, for suspense, anxiety, hope, and fear, mingling, were merging into agony of soul.

With a whoop of defiance, the spoilt child of the railway backed and slowly receded, squealing, as though in sheer delight at torturing a Sahib.

With an expression of anger, Durham strode towards it, sprang off the platform and hurried in pursuit. In a few minutes the train halted, resumed its journey to the station, and reached the man whom it had seemed to mock.

Swinging himself on the footboard of the only first-class carriage, Durham climbed up and looked into each of its two compartments.

Empty.

Of course.

With a heavy sigh that was almost a sob, he dropped to the ground again and strode across to his tents—to live through another twenty-four hours at the very least, awaiting the woman for whom he had already waited a week, and for whom he would wait another three weeks—if necessary.

God grant the strain of waiting, of suspense, anxiety, fear, doubt, and hope-deferred—did not send him mad, to wander away in the desert just before she came.

Had he been all his life in the little camp beside the tiny station in the dreadful desert?

Was he dead and was this really Hell? Hell where he was doomed to meet a train and a shattering disappointment daily for a thousand million æons? . . .

Come—this would not do. He was taking it harder and harder every day. What would it be by the end of the month if he went on like this? What would be his condition on the last day if she had not come even then, and so would never come? . . .

He must do something at once—yes—he would go and see for the thousandth time that all was right in her tent, the tent that she herself, living and breathing, would enter, please God.

Raising the *chick* curtain he entered the canvas bower that he had prepared for her, removed his *topi* reverently, and looked round in search of opportunity for improvement.

It was a fair and dainty interior, and reflected credit upon his taste.

Walled and roofed in olive green, with a thick, patternless, olive-green carpet, it was cool and restful to the eye, a wonderful contrast to the screaming glare without.

A fresh young palm in a green tub provided a different and even cooler green. A tiny camp-cot, with snowy frilled pillow and embroidered sheet, was covered with a green eiderdown quilt, for the nights were chill and damp with a heavy dew in that—by day—red-hot desert.

On a miniature dressing-table was a belaced dainty cover on which stood a little silver lamp with a green silk shade, assorted silver toilet ware, and a mirror. A long, low hammock-chair bore green cushions, lace-covered, and on a low, carven table a green vase contained the results of the man's pitiful attempts at flower-arranging, the which might have been more successful

had the God-forsaken spot boasted more flowers. On a book-stand by the chair lay her favourite Browning, Francis Thompson, and Herrick, bound in dull, soft, green leather. A beloved and cherished picture was fastened to the tent-wall above the bed. The place breathed of refinement, delicacy, simplicity, and virtue.

John Durham sighed heavily, changed the big silver frame, containing her portrait and his, from the table to the book-stand, and taking the vase of "flowers"—mainly leaves and hedge-blossom—left the tent.

Entering his own, he flung himself down on his rough camp-bed and groaned in anguish and weariness of soul.

Suspense, doubt, anxiety, and fear for the woman he loved, were wearing him out. . .

Another twenty-four hours to kill somehow, before the next train arrived. . . .

What should he do if she had not come by the last day of the month? . . . Shoot himself? . . . He might be able to live without her if that were all, since he had her portrait, her love, and—memories . . . but he could not go on living and know her to be at the mercy of Pooch, suffering. . . . Joan the prey of "Bill" Pooch. Joan! No—he could not live knowing that, and feeling it every moment of the day.

Would it not be a kindness, if she came not, simply to go and kill Pooch?

No, certainly not. She loved him, John Durham unworthy, and life would be an even more intolerable burden to her if he were a hunted fugitive from the law, a long-sentence convict, or an executed felon.

Perhaps she would come. . . .

Once again, what were her very words, spoken on that dark morning when they parted, she to return to her brutal proprietor in the far North-East and he to his district in the South?

"For three months, John, I will try and forget you—my true husband though you are. . . . I will try and forget you and forgive him. . . . I will do my very utmost with him and for him, though it is hopeless. . . . I will honestly warn him, too. Then I will decide—and if there be no change, and I can see hope of none, I will come to you, my Love, my Husband, my Own Man. . . . Give me the route and details in writing, and I will learn it by heart. . . . Wait at the place—Kondah, isn't it?—as you suggest, throughout the month of December. . . . If I do not come between the first day and the

last, you will know that I shall never come, John, and that you are never to see me again. . . . Do not dream of writing to me—I have never yet received a letter unopened by my husband, though I have scarcely spoken to a man till God sent me you, Beloved. . . . Nor dare I write to you. You must simply wait and wait that month—if I am worth it . . . and perhaps wait in vain, for I will stay with him if he will make it possible. . . . But you would not fail me, John! . . . *Think of my reaching that lost spot in the desert and finding—no one.* And with him hunting me! . . . Oh, John, you would not fail me? . . ." And he had replied:

"My brave and beautiful Beloved, my wife in the sight of God—not death himself shall keep me away. There is no power on earth could stop me, nor draw me from the spot. I would not leave it to save myself from torture and death. . . . From the first day of December to the last, three months hence, I will be at Kondah in the desert—*happen what may*! . . ."

"And if he should ever find us, John . . ." she had faltered.

"We will face him and Fate too, my dearest. . . . I do not advise him to find us. . . . But if he does—what of it? *No* punishment could count for a moment against the joy of our admission to the Paradise that will be ours. . . ."

"I am afraid, John. . . . He is so cunning, so remorseless, so unscrupulous. . . ."

"He shall never find us, Beloved—Light of my Life. . . . Nor can he pursue you if you choose your moment well and follow these directions. . . . You will be absolutely lost in an hour or two. . . . Secure that hour or two in advance of him, Sweetheart, and nothing can come between us. . . . Nor shall anything separate us, once we have met. . . . I will not plead with you for myself, but, oh, my own Darling, think well of the awful years ahead, and you but a girl, before you decide to stay with him. . . ."

And they had parted in the dark, dank dawn, groping, groping blindly, with dimmed eyes and souls.

Would she come?

Could she come?

Should she come?

And the world-old arguments, pleas, and casuistry recommenced.

All night the man wrestled with his conscience, reasoned against his intelligence, strove with himself.

"Right is right and Wrong is wrong," said Conscience. "Two wrongs never made a right."

"I do right to save a woman from such a life of torture as the male mind cannot conceive, to help her to escape from a hell upon earth, to translate her from a Purgatory of hate to a Paradise of love," replied the man. "If it be wrong let it *be* wrong; there are many wrongs nobler than some 'rights.' "

"You can't be truly happy for long," said Intelligence. "You will be social outcasts, lepers, pariahs, passed by on the other side by Those-who-have-never-been-found-out. You will always have the shadow of a wronged and vengeful husband upon you, and the shadow of a great sin between you."

"What is Society to me?" replied the man. "I care no more what chattering human apes are saying than what mosquitoes and crows are saying. The farther we are from the 'World' the better pleased we shall be. . . . And who is the more entitled to vengeance, the man who tortures the woman or the man who saves her? Who is the more 'wronged,' the drunken, brutal, husband or the poor victim, the woman he should cherish and guard? Whose is the sin, his or ours? Shall she stay in the same house with him and his native mistresses? . . . And the reptile keeps within the letter of the vile law, which will not let her divorce him unless he beats her. But for that, he *would* beat her. . . . A wronged husband! . . . The shadow of a sin! . . . And what of the wronged wife and the shadow and substance of five years of brutality and shame and torture . . ." and the suffering lover groaned aloud.

In the morning he groomed himself carefully and, sleepless, prepared to visit the scene of his daily sentry-go once more. The train would not come for many hours, but time would pass more quickly on the platform than in the tent, and the steady tramping was sedative—an anodyne.

Quitting his own roughly furnished abode he entered "Joan's Bower," as he called the big new tent, replaced the bowl of leaves and tree-blossoms, gave a few touches here and there, breathed a wordless prayer for her welfare, and turned his face to the dreary, lonely little station. . . .

The cool dew-washed morning had no freshness for him, the new-born day no promise, the rising sun no soul-light. Dark presentiment oppressed his mind, and foreboding clutched his heart. Something would happen that

day and it would not be the arrival of Joan. . . . Something would happen. . . .

A creature of the lizard family, a huge ugly brute, a yard long, ran across his path and vanished into its hole. How he loathed those—what were they—iguanas? . . . Something of the kind. . . . Hideous reptiles!—Whatever might be the scientific name for them, a jolly good everyday one would be "Pooch." . . . Yes, he'd get his gun and go shooting Pooches in the desert if she did not come to-day. . . .

What nonsense was he talking now? This wouldn't do at all. Nerves going! His gun—what had he intended to do with his gun? Ah yes, that poor wretched pi-dog—he had said he would put it out of its misery. Should he go back and get it while he remembered it, and shoot the poor beast at once?

John Durham hung irresolute, half turned to go back, and looked towards his tents. As he stood, his fate, and that of the woman he loved better than life, hung in the balance, as did the fate of men unborn.

No. He could not face those empty tents again just now—time enough when he had to do so. . . .

In the narrow shadow of the low platform, the pi-dog lay shivering, jerking spasmodically, moaning. Saliva dripped from its jaws as it made unwholesome noises, long, low, direful notes of misery and agony. At times it raised itself painfully and howled at the sky, snapped at nothing, and collapsed. . . .

Reaching the centre of the near platform, John Durham stepped down on to the line to cross over to the far one.

He almost trod on the pi-dog.

Emitting a wild yelp it sprang at him with surprising agility and the strength of madness.

For a second it dangled from his wrist and hand, through which its filthy fangs met like the teeth of a steel-trap.

And John Durham realized that he had been bitten by a mad dog.

Well, nobody else should be bitten by that particular specimen at all events. Seizing the scruff of its neck in his powerful right hand he bore it to where the heavy iron hammer of the bell-ringer hung from a nail—and did what was necessary.

He then gave thought to himself.

Bitten by a mad dog! He must fly for dear life to the Pasteur Institute at Kasauli, many hundreds of miles away, at once, of course. In the hydrophobia hospital alone was salvation from an unthinkable death.

Kasauli at once. Next train from here would go at . . .

Joan.

He could not leave Kondah till Joan came.

She might arrive at any time, now. How *could* he go?

Joan. . . .

Kasauli. . . .

How could he desert Joan? . . .

How could he sit at Kondah while the poison worked and he became even as the dead cur, that now lay there affronting the daylight, had been a moment ago—a foaming, barking Horror. . . .

To wait for Joan and . . . hydrophobia, madness, death?

To flee to Kasauli and . . . salvation, health, life?

Was he to sit there waiting the most horrible death a man can die?

He must wire to her.

He must not. It would in all probability be received by her husband—*and suppose Joan had already started*! . . .

No. The issue was simple and there was no evasion—his plighted word and death, or unfaithfulness and life.

But could he not go, and leave his tents standing all ready for Joan if she came—with a letter entrusted to the station-master. “I have been bitten by a mad dog and have gone to Kasauli. Follow me there.”

No. Death a thousand times.

“Follow me there!” Pah! With a maddened brute of a husband in pursuit; with no notion as to how to get to Kasauli; perhaps with no money. Quite likely she would leave her home with no more of her hated husband’s money than would suffice to bring her to Kondah.

Well—he could leave money with the station-master, as well as the letter. . . . And would she ever receive either, if she came?

Most probably not. . . . The station-master would use great intelligence in being sufficiently unintelligent to part with the money and letter. . . . And then again, her words to him, "*Think of my reaching that spot and finding no one! . . . And with him hunting me! . . . Oh, John, you would not fail me? . . .*"

And his solemn oath that he would *not* fail her. . . .

She trusted her lover absolutely. Should he "let her down"? Death rather—a thousand times. He would stay—and give *pros* and *cons* no further thought. There was always the chance that he was not infected with the virus—and he would take the chance.

Within a few seconds of being bitten, John Durham's mind was made up.

"I cannot possibly communicate with her," said he. "I cannot possibly desert her. I remain for the month, or till she comes." And he strode across to his camp to wash and cleanse his mangled hand.

He would omit no precautions and then the rest was with God.

With a penknife-blade and the flame of a big lamp he did his best at cauterization, scoured the burns with permanganate of potash, and then applied a paste obtained by mixing witch-hazel, boracic acid, and zinc oxide from his medicine-chest.

Feeling a little sick and shaky he returned to the station and resumed his tramp until the train arrived.

This he did for many days, to the growing wonder of the station "staff."

As the days passed, John Durham was conscious of an ever-growing sickness, terrible pains in the head and throat, and a difficulty in swallowing, and once desiring to speak to the station-master, he found his voice a horrible croak, almost a growl.

One day the coolie flung a pail of water swishing along the front of the iron shed called a booking-office, and John Durham, leaping round at the sound, saw the water and fell to the ground in a convulsive fit. . . .

As the days passed, he came to see the world around him as a great race-course along which thundered towards him three giant horses, one of which bore Joan, another bore New Year's Day, and the third, Death. . . . Death on a pale horse. . . . At times he could most distinctly see them coming, with the Pale Horse leading, and, as the daily train drew in, he could hear the awful thunder of their hoofs.

Which would reach him first?

One day he could not walk up and down the platform, but must sit on a bench and wait with what patience he might—for he was growing very weak, starving, by reason of the difficulty of swallowing.

Could Joan yet come in time for Pasteur to save him?

On the next morning he only got a few yards from his tent, fell, and was obliged to crawl back.

On the following morning he did not leave his tent at all. . . .

And on that same day a beautiful woman, whose gentle face was marred and strained by a look of terror, the mask of expectant fear of a hunted animal, entered a reserved ladies'-compartment of the Calcutta mail.

She wore a white hat and a light dustcloak, though those were not the garments in which she had left her home, and she possessed a ticket for a place to which she did not go. No man entered this carriage during the journey to the first junction, and yet a man left it at that place—a young, slim, clean-shaven gentleman arrayed in a big *topi*, riding-kit, and a light overcoat. He took the first train that departed on the other line, and yet no young man left it, though a uniformed nurse quitted the compartment that the young man had entered.

Eventually she caught the toy train for Kondah, though no uniformed nurse arrived there.

But, on the last day of December, a beautiful woman whose gentle face was strained and marred by a look of anxiety and fear, and who wore a black hat and brown holland coat, stepped from that toy train on to the Kondah platform.

As she realized, at last, that no one was there to meet her, the beautiful face went deathly white, her lips trembled, her eyes filled with tears, and she swayed on her feet. Then suddenly she caught sight of Durham's tents, flushed, smiled, and said:

"He thought it best not to meet me on the platform for fear of possible fellow-travellers and gossip."

Then, having put her dressing-case in charge of the station-master, she walked towards the tents—slowly because her heart was drumming in an alarming manner and breathing had become an exercise of pain and difficulty.

As she approached the nearest tent and whispered “John” she was answered by the sound of a horrible crowing bark—that was not the barking of a dog. . . .

*   *   *   *   *

Some few months later the poor lady’s only child was born in the Burrapore Lunatic Asylum and registered as John Durham—for in her more lucid moments, the madwoman declared Durham to be her name, and prayed that she might be protected from one William Pooch should he arrive to claim and seize her before her real husband, John Durham, could come and join her.

Since John Durham—a bachelor, was well known to have died of hydrophobia, months before, the authorities communicated incontinent with Mr. William Pooch, and that gentleman came and claimed his wife.

The first part of the punishment he inflicted, the mere beginning thereof, was such sequestration and disposal of the worshipped and idolized baby as might enable her to rest assured that she would never see it again.

Part II

THIRTY YEARS AFTER.—THE LURES AND THE FAILURES

. . . "We have done with Hope and Honour, we are lost to love and Truth
We are dropping down the ladder, rung by rung" . . .

KIPLING.

CHAPTER I

SOME FAILURES

Frères humains, qui apres nous vivez,
N'ayez les coeurs contres nous endurciz
Car, si pitié de nous pauvres avez
Dieu en aura plustost de vous merciz.

. . . .

Ne soyez donc de nostre confrairie
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre.

FRANCOIS VILLON. (14—.)

In the card-room, Major Cecil Saxon Barronby, R.F.A. (cashiered), partnered the Honourable Reginald Burke, Trooper (bought out), against Mr. Henry Hoalke, I.C.S. (dismissed), and the Reverend Montague Dalcane, M.A., B.D. (unfrocked).

Jack Pontreuil, Barr.-at-Law (disbarred), looked on and wagered enormous sums with himself.

The pyjamas of the Reverend Montague lacked buttons, and the feet of Major Barronby lacked socks.

As the Major's trembling right hand left his trim moustache, to play his card, he made a motion as if to bring his shirt-cuffs into sight from beneath the sleeves of his cotton-coat, and incurred the acrimonious criticism of the sour-visaged Mr. Hoalke—a mean-looking person who ate hungrily at his finger-nails.

"You can't get blood out of a stone, Barronby," said he.

"No? . . . You might get some out of a Hoalke though. What are you driving at?" inquired the Major, raising his heavy face, with its heavy moustache, heavy bloodshot eyes, and heavy stare. He was wearing his entire wardrobe—a white suit, black silk neckerchief, and dancing-pumps.

Hoalke, a wizened pimply person with scant sandy hair and straggling beard, flinched before the steady glare of the Major, but, with a kind of *gamin* impudence and rat-courage, replied:

"You can't get blood out of a stone and you can't shoot your linen when you've got no shirt."

"No, and you can't shoot a snarling cur when you've got no gun—more's the pity," was the rejoinder.

"No—but you can kick him though," observed the Honourable Reginald Burke, in a soft and silky voice, and brought his monocle to bear upon the ex-ornament of the Indian Civil Service. Also he raised an exceedingly shapely foot, clad in an expensive, though ancient and well-worn boot, drew up his well-cut, well-creased, though ancient and well-worn trouser, crossed his legs, and regarded the elevated foot with affection.

"Yes, you can kick him all right," he sighed and prepared to rise. . . .

"Whisht! Hush! Here's Father Gregory," said the—formerly—Reverend Montague Dalcane, who could see down the great verandah from where he sat.

All looked towards the doorless doorway, and all rose as one, upon the entrance of a small, slim, old priest, clad in a long black gown, with a silken cap upon his silver hair and a silver cross on the black cord that encircled his neck.

His face was faultlessly beautiful and unspeakably gentle, kind, and sweet. Being beautiful it was not devoid of strength.

"Pray sit down, my children," said he hastily, as the men rose. "Don't let me interrupt for one second. I'm only passing through to the go-down."

The players bowed and resumed their seats.

It was noticeable that no signs of the outbreak of temper and hostilities survived the passage of Father Gregory through the card-room.

"Whose play?" asked the once Reverend Montague, a huge fat mountain of a man with a huge fat face, on which was an unfading kindly smile, the face that women trusted and children turned to instinctively for sympathy.

"Your lead, my dear Hoalke. . . ."

"*Boy!*" called the Honourable Reginald Burke, in a musical tenor, and, as the servant approached, said:

"Bring me a whisk . . . er . . . brand . . . ah . . . *glass of water*. . . . Stonybroke and mustn't write chits for luxuries, while on the free list, what?" he murmured, as the man turned to go.

"And four cigarettes," added Dulcane, raising his voice.

Three pairs of eyes regarded the erstwhile reverend gentleman with interest and surprise, as the servant returned and handed him a plate whereon he might lay the requisite money—for, not being at the moment on the free list, Dalcane was in the class that could procure luxuries by paying cash.

"Yes, my breth . . . er . . . dear boys, I've got a four-*anna* piece somewhere, and it's my birthday. I wish they were four bottles of champagne I could offer you; I do indeed," he continued, and struggled to insert his fat hand into the breast pocket of his pyjama jacket.

"I know of nothing cheaper than wishes, Friar Tuck," remarked Mr. Henry Hoalke with an unpleasant sneer. "There are people who establish a reputation for generosity by means of lavish gifts of good wishes, congratulations, promises, compliments, and such-like. . . ."

"There are people who establish a reputation for mean-hearted malice and curmudgeonry, by means of constantly making beastly and ungentlemanly remarks," replied Major Barronby, again fixing the heavy insolent stare on Hoalke, who snarled like a dog.

"Oh, come on, Barronby—your lead," interposed Dalcane, and silence fell upon the little group of detrimentals until the arrival of the cigarettes.

"Thanks awfully, Padre Sahib," murmured Burke to the ex-priest, as he lighted the gift and blew a long slow cloud of smoke with an air of great enjoyment. "First smoke I've had since Sunday morning."

"Here's *to* you, Dalcane," said the Major, doing similarly. "May your shadow never grow less and . . .," fearing that he might possibly hurt the feelings of his enormously fat friend by what appeared an allusion to his bulk, he stopped abruptly and hastily concluded, "and always back winners at long prices."

"I trust we break no new rule of the establishment by smoking cigarettes before lunch?" sneered Hoalke. "One is sometimes apt to forget for a moment, that one is in a combined nursery-reformatory and monastic-penitentiary. . . . Might as well be in a damned almshouse and done with it."

"If you don't like it, Hoalke, you can always leave it to its fate, you know," observed Reginald Burke languidly, and added, in a gentle murmur:

"Wonder if my last pair of boots *would* burst if I kicked you, in the name of common decency and of John Durham, our noble Founder."

“Yes, we could struggle on without you, y’know, Hoalke,” corroborated the Major . . .

“Shall we have another rubber,” interposed the ex-priest, again endeavouring to pour oil on the troubled waters.

“No—not if we are to change partners, thanks,” replied Major Barronby, “I might get the Hoalke,” and, with an elaborate shudder at the bare idea, he rose from the table and stretched his tall, powerful frame with a mighty yawn.

“Tell you what, Burke,” said he, “I’ll play you a hundred up and stake my neckerchief against your other pair of socks. . . . But I shall have to wear a white handkerchief till quarter-day if I lose, though, and they’re beastly inadequate for that purpose. But I want some socks badly. . . .”

“Anything you like, Barry,” replied Reginald Burke, who had never refused a wager nor a challenge in the whole of his misspent life, “but there’s an appalling hole in the heel of one of them, you know—more hole than sock really. . . . Yes, you might call the thing a hole with a sock hanging on to it, perhaps. . . . It’s a sock within the meaning of the act though, and presents an unbroken front to the world, even in shoes. If you wear boots why . . . perfectly doggy garment. Come on,” and the rash wagerers departed to the billiard-room with a nod to the late Reverend Montague Dalcane and a careful ignoring of Mr. Henry Hoalke, who, according to Burke, was the Club’s only “outsider,” had the soul of a weasel, and used the standards of a pawnbroker’s clerk.

“Sorry I insulted you just now, Dalcane,” remarked the gentleman in question as he ceased biting at his nails, rose, and lounged to the big French window that opened on the trim velvet lawn of the Club garden, “I’ve no liver, you know, and precious little stomach, practically no alimentary system left, in fact. . . . I am ill—damned ill—and very miserable.”

“Not a word, Hoalke, my dear fellow, I beseech you!” hastily replied the unfrocked clergyman. “We’re none of us lucky or very happy, but I am fortunate in the possession of the most aggressive health. To be ill as well as down, must be awful, and besides, you didn’t insult me in the least. . . . You have my sincerest sympathy. . . . I wish I could—er—help you in any way, but”—very wistfully—“I am not in a position to offer ghostly comfort or the consolations of religion nowadays. . . . But if you’d care to talk—I am a good listener, and I know it does one good sometimes. But there! Father Gregory could accomplish with perfect success what I could hardly begin ——”

"You are a good man, Padre, and a gentleman," replied Hoalke, looking round, "and I'd like to know your story."

"Oh, I have no story, my dear Hoalke," was the reply, "no lurid past wherewith to titillate your ears. . . . I am just a faithless, unfrocked priest—a poor wretch whose Faith failed him as his eyesight or hearing might have done. . . . The plain tale of my life is not a bit dramatic or interesting."

"Well, the history of every man, in a place like this, must be dramatic and interesting, I should think," replied the ex-Civilian. "How else could they be in this harbour for first-class hulks; this home for lost, strayed, stolen, and starving dogs of good pedigree; this almshouse for decayed and rotten gentlemen? . . . Interesting! . . . Good Lord, we're the finest collection of freaks and failures in the world—and all men of former position and means."

"Yes," agreed Dalcane, "we're a unique institution, I admit—and I love the place."

"You *do*?" ejaculated the other. "Well, it chokes *me*. . . . I loathe it. . . . It brands and burns me. . . . I feel I am a charity pauper living on other people's bounty."

Since that was precisely Mr. Hoalke's position, the sensation was not remarkable.

"It has one merit, I admit," he continued, "there are no women here, and we are saved from *that* curse at least—and I believe the married men are the most grateful of all for that huge 'small mercy.' I can stick it while it is a monastic and celibate institution——"

"Like a Seamen's Rest—a refuge for distressed *marrieders*, what?" tittered the fat man, who loved his little joke.

"Yes, I can just bear it while no woman can set foot in the place," repeated Hoalke, and, as he did so for over a quarter of a century, it is to be supposed that he spoke the truth upon this occasion.

"But you never know what Durham may do next," he continued, "he's quite capable of having a new wing built and reserving it for well-born Magdalens and generally detrimental and damaged gentlewomen."

"Oh, no," dissented the other, "Durham might very well endow such a place elsewhere if he had the means to spare, and have it run by the right type of philanthropic women, but he'd hardly go in for a mixed club. . . . A

cock-and-hen club has its difficulties under normal circumstances, but *here* . . .! And after all we *are* a Club and not an almshouse or pauper asylum."

"Nominally at any rate. Some of us work and many of us are not paupers—but Durham must run the Club at fearful loss."

"Of course he does. He loses thousands annually, and I know Father Gregory puts his all into it—but it remains a Club in spite of that. . . . The committee manages everything but the finances, and we pay according to our means—and when we have no means we can run up unlimited bills for pure necessities. . . . But he'd probably eject, if not prosecute, anyone who tried to swindle him and to live here at free quarters when he had any money. . . . I believe those who have means pay as much as they would at the Calcutta Club, or the Byculla, or the Club of Western India."

"Yes. . . . One must confess that Durham is a wise man as well as a noble one," agreed Hoalke with apparent reluctance.

"There's no denying he's doing a grand work of charity and philanthropy without pauperizing anybody. . . . One is expected to earn what one can, and pay a portion of it—and to obey the Club rules—or go. But they irk me at times, and I feel I'm a damned prisoner, a pauper pensioner on his bounty, and a——"

"But, Good Heavens, man!" interrupted the ex-priest. "Think of it. *Think* of it—and then of the bazaar and workhouse that he has saved us from—and keeps us from! Half of us would have died in the gutter and the other half in the infirmary, excepting those who died in jail. Think of it! . . . An assured and permanent home in a magnificent Club; the society of men of one's own class; privacy, comfort, peace, and all the necessities of decent life. You can't expect a man of Durham's wisdom to offer flagrant luxuries for nothing—or little. We should be spoilt and pauperized loafers in a week."

"Well, that may be all very true, but I wish to God I could come into a fortune and get away from it all," rejoined Hoalke, biting fiercely at his finger-nails once more.

"I wish to God I could come into a fortune and pay Durham all I owe him of money and something of what I owe him of gratitude and love, by placing the balance in his hands to enable him to extend his work here. I know it cuts him to the heart to 'blackball' a deserving applicant for—er—membership," replied Dalcane, and added, "Hullo! There goes the Professor," as a strange figure passed the big windows, crossed the wide verandah, and left its cool shadow for the blinding sunshine of the lawn. The

Professor wore a long, loose bath-gown of brilliant mauve and white striped towelling, and a pair of Japanese slippers of plaited grass. In one hand he bore a butterfly-net and in the other a glass jam-jar with a string handle.

A very fat servant, faint but pursuing, waved a battered and dingy white sun-*topi*, overtook its owner, and presented it to him.

"Eh, what? What's this?" inquired the Professor with polite interest, "Hat? Head? Precisely. I see your point. Sun. Doubtless. I thank you," and the Professor hung the *topi* on his arm as poets' milkmaids do, or do not, their dainty pails, placed his jam-jar in it, and pursued the even tenor of his way.

"Were I a betting man I would offer odds that Dr. Foy will be on his track within two minutes," observed the Reverend Montague Dalcane. "If he isn't, he's not in the Club."

Even as he spoke, a little, rotund, rubicund personage with a most unascetic countenance and "figure," burst from the porch and propelled himself with remarkable speed in the direction of the errant and bareheaded Professor. His little legs positively twinkled as he bolted across the lawn in pursuit of his beloved Aunt, his Old Hoss, his Geezer, as he indifferently and impartially termed the Professor, whom he watched over as a mother does a wilful toddling child.

"Hi, Auntie! ye silly ol' hoss," he roared. "Putt ye'r bonnet on ye'r silly ol' head and come back. Ye can't catch tiddlers in a butterfly-net, and ye can't keep butterflies in a jam-pot without a lid."

Overtaking his quarry, who had stopped, turned, and peered in his direction, he continued, between pants:

"And ye can't go disgracin' this Club, prancin' through the scenery in y'r shameless, flauntin' God-forsaken fandango of a night-shirt. Come home, ye silly ol' beldam, an' dhress y'rself like a Christian sowl and a dacent woman."

The Professor raised a didactic finger and opened the argument as the doctor seized the ancient *topi* and placed it at a most rakish angle over the weak and watery eye that fixed him with a severe gaze.

"My dear Foy," he began, "my dear good foolish Foy—I am not a Christian and souls do not dress. And as I have told you before when you have applied absurd epithets to my name, or suggested an—er—femalely avuncular relationship between us, I am *not* a woman, alas! I am not a beldam, and I am certainly not your Aunt. Also this is not a night-gown and

I have sold all my other garments to Hoalke, I believe, for the wherewithal to buy books that are positively necessary to me, if I am ever to settle the question of the Origin of Bacteria or the—" and here the flow of his eloquence was stayed by reason of his rapid propulsion in the direction of the verandah at the end of the bath-gown cord, which his tormentor had seized, untied, and commenced to use as a tow-rope.

"Cease, my dear Foy," he cried, when he had recovered breath. "Leave me alone. I am going to the pond. I want some *amœbæ*."

"Ye want y'r silly ol' head smacked," replied Dr. Foy. "Come home, Maria. Come home, ye baste, or I'll carry ye."

"Now, my dear good Foy," protested the Professor, effectually stopping his enforced retirement by the simple process of sitting down, "am I, or am I not, a sane adult person, capable of conducting all the affairs of life with discretion and promptitude. Did I or did I not——"

"Yah! ye contrairey ol' schamer," roared the foiled captor, "*Did ye or did ye not!* Did ye dhrink the hair restorer I gave ye for y'r silly ole head, and rub the chlorodyne I gave ye to dhrink into y'r balmy pate, eh? . . . Did ye spend an hour last night puffin' y'r silly ol' bellows trying to blow out the electric light, eh? . . . Did ye put y'r omelette into y'r pocket an' y'r book into y'r mouth, this morning, eh? . . . An' five minnuts afther, did ye put the match in y'r mouth an' throw away the cheroot, eh? . . . Who put his socks over his boots? . . . Who stropped his shaving brush and rubbed his face with a razor? . . . Who threw money to the ducks because he'd forgot to bring 'em any bread? . . . Who put a copper in the vegetable dish when the servant offered it him at dinner? . . . Who posted his letters in the filter for a week?" . . . and suddenly wheeling round, Dr. Foy placed the end of the cord over his shoulder, gripped it with two hands, and commenced to tow the recumbent, struggling, and protesting Professor into port.

In port, the strange procession of two, tug and derelict, came to an anchor, and the tug cast off—at the unspoken bidding of the harbour-master. In less nautical language, Dr. Foy and the Professor encountered Father Gregory in the porch, and unto him did the captive appeal as unto Cæsar, on his smiling cry of "Children, children! not quarrelling nor teasing each other, I hope."

"No, Father, he's teasing *me*," accused the Professor eagerly. "Make him let me go, Father—he's pulling me violently—ah—north-east by east and I want to go south-west by west to the pond to get some *amœbæ* and——"

Dr. Foy had become very gentle at sight of Father Gregory.

Every one became gentle and mild in the presence of Father Gregory.

Those who did not actually become better, tried to look so, which, if an hypocrisy, was at least a tribute.

"Yes, Father," he chimed in, as he released his victim, "and the pore demented owld Biddy was goin' in the mornin' sun wid his ould turnip-head bare, an' him dhressed as ye see 'um—in a shameless, bedizened, purple night-shirt, majenta pyjamas insoide out, an' shtraw shlippers—the schamer!"

"Well, well—let him come with me and I'll find him a nice long overcoat and a pair of Durham's shoes," said Father Gregory, with his slow, sweet smile, "and then we'll both go to the pond and trap or shoot *amœbœ*. . . . I'll see he doesn't fall in or get his feet wet, or try and put a snake in his pocket for future investigation. Come along, Professor——"

"Sure, the baste'll be safe wid ye, Father dear, but it's an aggravatin' ol' Jezebel to be runnin' afther all day. . . ." And the warm-hearted doctor returned to the Club hospital and the bedside from which he had rushed at sight of his beloved Professor inviting sunstroke, fever, and ridicule. . . .

"Durham, my dear son," said Father Gregory a minute later, as he entered the office-room and sanctum of the Founder, Secretary, Manager, and Proprietor of the Chotapettah Club, and beamed upon that gentleman, a look of deepest affection illuminating his beautiful old face, "I want to borrow a pair of your shoes for the Professor, poor old gentleman. He's after *amœbœ*, whatever they may be, bareheaded, barefooted, and clad in the roomiest and bedroomiest of garbs. . . . No, my dear boy, don't get up; I'll take a pair from your room if I may. . . . Thanks so much. . . . It wouldn't 'pauperize' the old man either, if we didn't return them to you, for he'd never know, and I fear he has practically no clothes at all. . . . I don't think he'd remark the fact if he found a sack of sovereigns on his table—nor if they disappeared again. . . . Thank you so much," and Father Gregory faded quietly away.

He did everything quietly, unobtrusively, gently, perfectly; for all his movements were in keeping with his sweet and beautiful presence. . . .

"When I see Father Gregory or think of him," said Derek Mantin, the Man of Seasons, Poet, Artist, and Universal Lover, "I think of good women, of the high-bred French Abbés of old time; I think of the days of rapiers, velvet, lace, and dignity; I think of miniatures, of silver bowls of fine roses,

of Watteau pictures, of Dresden china, of gems and intaglios; I think of angels—for he *is* an angel—an angel with silvery hair, blue eyes, perfect complexion, tender, strong mouth, and delicate tiny hands and feet—and I gratefully thank God. . . .”

As Father Gregory softly closed the door, John Durham sat gazing at it, in reverie, awhile, and then murmured:

“What would the Club be without you, Father—noblest and kindliest and gentlest of men. . . . It is as though we had a Saint—or a woman—in the place. . . .”

“There’s a sorter pusson wants to see yer, Sir,” said Serjeant Bunn, Hall Porter, Steward, and Chief of Staff, knocking, entering, and breaking in upon his admired master’s reverie. . . .

“Bunn! How many times have I told you that only a fool and a cad judges by clothes and outward signs of position? The gentlemen who come here may——”

“Oh no, Sir, *’e* ain’t no gennleman—’e’s a Clarence! . . . That’s all-right, Sir. I knows a gennleman all-right, Sir—now. . . . ’E never wasn’t a gennleman nor never won’t be, ’e will, Sir. . . . ’E never toke off ’is ’at when I osk ’im inside, an’ when I gove ’im a cheer ’e sot on the edge of it uncumferble-like—where a gennleman born an’ bred an’ buttered would ’ave sot in a sorter you-be-damned-my-lad attitooed. . . . Bit of a Dago or a furriner I should say, Sir, sorter impident and trucklin’, sorcy and whinin’ both to once, like all them furriners. Uses scent ’e do, Sir. Makes the air niff with it. A mos’ niffairious pusson.”

Serjeant Bunn was a Character and an Institution, a beloved and privileged servant whose past-participles were much appreciated and sought after. He was also an ex-convict and unhanged murderer of great trustworthiness and reliability.

“Ask him to come in here, Bunn,” replied John Durham.

“Better ast ’im to wander, Sir. I knows the sort,” advised the Serjeant.

“Bunn!”

“Werry good. Sir.”

The worthy warrior saluted, wheeled right about “in three distinct motions,” marched to the door, left-wheeled with extreme precision and

exactitude, as of one who, though unjustly rebuked and rejected, will do his duty firmly and faithfully to the last, and proceeded in “quick time, head erect, and stepping short, thumb in line with the seam of the trousers” adown the great verandah to where, at the entrance, he had left the “pusson,” a rather shabbily smart, shifty-eyed Eurasian who seemed to find it impossible to be still. When not changing his feet he was moving his hands restlessly and plucking at his clothes, or fingering his sparse ill-trimmed moustache, while his head was as constantly on the move as that of an elephant.

“If ’e ’ad a tail ’e’d flap it like an ’oss in the fly-season,” observed Serjeant Bunn distinctly to the circumambient air, as he halted before the visitor.

“What’s thatt, mann?” inquired the latter sharply.

“I said as ’ow Mr. Durham’ll see you in the orderly-room, me lord,” was the untruthful reply.

The other glanced at him sharply, found his face vacant and innocent, rose from the edge of his chair, accepted the title as a tribute to his smart appearance, and replied, “Of course he will, my mann——”

“*Wot* name, me lord?” inquired Serjeant Bunn at the door of the office. “I on’y remembers the Clarence Marmalade part.”

“Say Clarence Marmaduke Mortimer Montmorencee, Esquire,” was the reply.

“I couldn’t, me lord,” answered Serjeant Bunn, “I’m on’y a middle-weight,” and, opening the door upon a sharp double tap, he announced loudly and with wooden face, as he stood aside, in best butler manner:

“Mister Clarence Smarm-a-Dook Montimortamoreamercy, Esquire,” and departed thence—apparently.

The door had a large keyhole and Serjeant Bunn a large sense of his duty to his master—about, he feared, to be fleeced.

Mr. Montmorency entered with alacrity, smoothing his smooth hair, straightening his satin bow, and arranging his features in a pleasing and ingratiating smile.

“Good morning, Sir,” said he, with a duck of the head, a flourish of a rather dingy hand, and a quick glance round the room.

“Good morning. Won’t you sit down,” replied John Durham, indicating a comfortable leathern arm-chair that faced the strong light of the window.

“Oh no, Sir, thank you, Sir,” replied the visitor, twirling his bowler hat and shuffling remorselessly.

“What can I do for you, then?” inquired the proprietor of the Chotapettah Club.

“Well, Sir, it’s like this, Sir,” spake Mr. Clarence Mortimer, surnamed Montmorency, with a pleasing mixture of *chee-chee* and Cockney accents, “I have heard that thiss iss a Club in which *pukka* gentlemenn who have seen sorrow and misfortune can get Chymbers at a very cheap ryte, and that the messing-rytes are even cheaper. . . . In fact I am told that they can live here free, while a bit under the weather. Now I am not ashymed to styte to a kind-hearted gent. like yourself thatt it’s my unhappee fyte to be there myself—in point of fact I’m afryde I’m clean broke and——”

“I understand,” replied Durham, “but there is no vacancy upon my staff at present.”

“Pardon me, Mr. Durham, Sir, but you don’t understand at all, it seems,” corrected Mr. Montmorency in an injured voice. “You myke a mistyke and a very grievous error altogether, Sir. . . . I am a gentlemann of birth and education. A thorough gentlemann, Sir, lett me tell you plainlee. . . . I was at Eton and at Oxford College and I was an Armee-officer until misfortunes overtook me. . . . I am a perfect gentlemann reduced by bad luck—a gentlemann in distress, although I once knew what it is to ride in a carriage and pair and to have champyne everee day of my life.”

“I was at Oxford myself,” observed John Durham, “and in those days there were many colleges at Oxford. . . . Perhaps you meant University College when you said Oxford College?”

“Why, of course, Sir, what else?” replied Clarence, “Oxford University College it was.”

“Ah—and which was your Regiment?”

“Do you doubt a gentlemann’s word, Sir?” inquired Clarence with pained surprise. He had evidently expected worthier treatment.

“There is not a shadow of *doubt* in my mind, Mr.—er—Montmorency, shall we say—for the present.”

Mr. Montmorency-for-the-present looked exceeding discomfortable.

“*Qui hai!*” called Durham, and the door was opened with suspicious alacrity by Serjeant Bunn instead of the *chuprassie* who sat at the receipt of orders, without the office.

“Bring me the Army Lis——” and lo! it was already in the perspicacious Serjeant’s hand.

“Knew you’d want it, Sir, directly I seen Mr. Clarence Mar-me-entry,” he remarked, with an air of innocent intelligence.

“Remarkable foresight! And did you know which issue I should want also?” inquired his master.

“All one to ’im, Sir,” was the unabashed reply, as the wily warrior retired.

“In what year did you leave the army and the regiment you have not yet named?” asked Durham, turning again to his visitor, whose restlessness had become a kind of St. Vitus’s dance.

“Look here, Mr. Durham, Sir,” protested that worthy, “I didn’t come here to be insulted; I caime for help. I’m an English gentlemann *pukka*, I amm ——”

“From the Presidency Police Court?” asked Durham.

“Police Court? . . . Who’s talking about Police Courts? If you don’t know an English gentlemann from a wrong ’un you’re no gentlemann yourself! What ever myde you think I ever been near a Police Court?”

“Well! not to waste your time further, Mr. Sharkey Spottle, I have been rather expecting a visit from you ever since my friend the Presidency Police Court Missionary wrote me that a gentleman answering, sometimes, to the name of Spottle, had been making kind inquiries about this Club. . . . Take my advice and go and work honestly. . . . Good morning. *Qui hai!*” and Serjeant Bunn again entered on the call, instead of the *chuprassie*, dispatched elsewhere.

No word spake the Serjeant to Mr. Spottle, son of a London book-maker and a Eurasian stewardess, but he made a gesture. He made it with a large and stiffly protruding thumb, swiftly, and with a jerk—in the direction of the door.

Outside he murmured, “*Chello*, Antonio.”

At the porch, Mr. Spottle, plucking up dignity and hauteur, turned upon his offensively watchful attendant and said:

“Mann! call my *ghari*.”

Did Serjeant Bunn take umbrage and decline?

He did not.

Leaning round a pillar, he deeply inflated his capacious chest, and, in a valuable parade voice, made the welkin ring with:

“Wottoh! without there! Bring up Black Merier for her ole patron,” and departed humming a little ditty anent Antonio, Sapolio, and Chokey-O. . . .

Returning to the office, ostensibly to flick the chair on which Mr. Spottle had not sat, and to return it to the position it had not occupied before his advent, the Serjeant coughed modestly and deprecatingly, ere remarking:

“I’m werry glad you wasn’t what I might call a fool, Sir, if I may be allowed to make so bold——”

“I am sorry you *are* one, Bunn, if I may be ‘allown’ to make so bold,” replied Durham. “I shouldn’t have given the rascal a farthing even if Mr. Hart hadn’t written to warn me that a Eurasian sharper named ‘Sharkey’ Spottle had asked him about the Chotapettah Club, and was likely to try and swindle me when he had finished his ‘time.’ . . . He describes him as the meanest rogue he has ever encountered. . . . Poor wretch. . . . But he’s not a Failure, Bunn, he’s a great Success I understand—as a swindler. I fear this is not the right type of hospital for him, in any case.”

“Well, ’e ain’t on ’is uppers yet, Sir, neether. ’E rolled up in a *tikka-ghari* as large as life, and ’e went away in it cursin’ amazin’ flooent—in spite of me a-callin’ it up for ’im most perlite. I’d like to ’ave Clarence as a rookie in my old corps for a month,” and the mouth of Serjeant Bunn appeared to water. . . .

John Durham worked on for an hour, writing letters, signing receipts, initialling bills, casting accounts, and generally carrying on the accountant and secretarial work of the Club.

Anon he laid down his pen, leant back in his chair, and sat musing. . . .

Should he give Luson notice to leave the Club at his earliest convenience, or should he give the fellow another chance, and permit him to choose between the Club and his disgusting income? Surely there was no more tainted and abominable money in the wide world than that earned by deliberately “suggestive” writing and drawing.

Fancy a man with the talent to write powerfully and draw beautifully, using that talent and education in pandering to the most vicious of vices and filthy of filthinesses—in making money out of man’s most terrible temptation and greatest weakness.

One could be almost reconciled to the ancient and horrible superstition of a material hell, a brimstone lake, outer darkness, and the "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth," when one thought of such an awful, deliberate, and persistent sin.

Was there filthier lucre in the world?

Luson must go. Luson was no brave, well-meaning, well-beaten Failure. . . . No weakling with an inherited vice too strong for him; no victim of ill-luck or ill-health. No lovable ne'er-do-well was Luson. Let him carry on his foul trade elsewhere, if he must. . . .

A gentle knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Father Gregory.

"Ah, my dear Father," cried Durham, "you come when needed, as always," and the strong, sad face lit up with pleasure and love. "Come and sit down awhile—you never rest. . . . I have just had a visitor, and his coming has made me think of yours once again."

"Oh? Some one like me?" smiled the old priest.

"No, Father. It was a case of association by contrast, and reminded me of that bright day in my life and the Club's history, when you arrived—'from Nowhere' as you insisted. . . . 'There's a gentleman to see you, Sir,' announced old Bunn. 'No name, but he's a *pukka* Sahib and a kinder sorter Pardre in one o' them black night-shirts,' and when you entered I knew you at once."

"Knew me, my son? Knew me?" interrupted Father Gregory, half-rising from his chair—while a look of intense surprise spread over his delicate features.

"Why, yes, Father dear. . . . I felt absolutely certain that we had met before, that I knew you perfectly—and the struggle to remember and to call you by name was almost painful. For one second Memory seemed to leap up like a flame and light me to the clue I wanted, and then, as I rose to my feet, stretched out my hand, and had the words on the tip of my tongue—to claim you—the flame died down and my mind was dark and empty again. But I *knew* that I really knew you, although I didn't know you, if you understand ——"

"I understand perfectly, my son," murmured the old man as his face resumed its natural and normal placid calm and sweetness, the face of one who has passed through the fire purified and refined, and found suffering a blessing.

"Yes," continued Durham, "and for months after you had come, every time I saw your face or thought of it, I was conscious of an unconscious groping for something lost—of a Memory *of* a departed Memory. . . . Even to this day and hour, Father, I feel that there is some bond between us, or that we have 'met in a former life,' as poor Derek Mantin would have it."

"It is simply because we love and understand each other, my son," replied Father Gregory, and his smile was an emanation of the Love that he loved, and of the kindliness and sweetness that informed his whole being.

"Yes, that was the great day of my life, Father," resumed Durham, "and I shall never forget my first sight of your face and the sound of your voice. '*I have just heard of you and your work, John Durham*,' you said, '*and I have come to put my poor services and purse at your disposal, if you will let me join you. I am a great Failure and Sinner—so I am well qualified for election. . . .*' "

"Yes, my son," rejoined Father Gregory, "and you replied, 'Come to-day, Sir, though I know well you are no Sinner and only in the World's poor blinded eyes, a Failure. You and I are old friends—in two minutes . . .' " and both men sat smiling at pleasant reminiscence. . . .

"And now I want your advice once more, Father," said Durham at length. "About Luson. . . . A parcel for him was put by accident among my post this morning and, without looking at the cover, I opened it . . . and found galley-proofs and illustrations of vile and beastly stories. He is a fine French scholar as well as an artist, you know. He came to me a broken, ruined, and drunken journalist—picked out of the gutter by one of my honorary 'agents' in Bombay. Drifted to India from South Africa, where he had been an Imperial Yeomanry trooper. He was on the free list here until I told him I thought he was well enough to use his pen and pencil again, and this is how he uses it. . . ."

"Yes—Luson——" replied Father Gregory. "I have had a most anxious eye on Luson for months. He has not talked to me at all—and it has been forced upon my notice that he is a secret drinker—who never by any chance joins Barronby's—ah—'*binges*,' nor drinks in the bar—and that he receives a considerable number of registered letters . . . and did so, when on your free list. As you know, I'd never spy on any man for any purpose, but there are things about Luson one can't help knowing—and deploring. I don't want to be unkind or censorious, but there's a smug sleekness and sly prosperity about Luson that's very foreign to our Failures' Club. . . ."

"Yes. I say he's no Failure, Father, and had better go and carry on his abominable business elsewhere, if he is too low an animal to realize his own filthiness. . . ."

"We've never yet lost a man unsatisfactorily like that, my son—and we won't now if we can help it. . . . Don't expel him. . . . Expulsion from school is a confession of failure on the part of the school—and *we* are a school you know, John. . . . A school for the dunces and weaklings and naughty boys. . . ."

"But a school should expel a boy who is a real source of contamination, Father," objected Durham.

"Just so, my son," was the quick answer, "but Luson is not that, here. . . . I fear we take a lot of contaminating—and his vile stuff does not enter the Club, of course, published. . . . No, he merely soaks himself, in secret, without leading others to drink—and he only contaminates the 'gentle reader' of French gutter-novelettes. Give me three months and then see whether Luson is to be ejected. . . . We're a home for incurables, John, and, if necessary, we'll have an 'infectious' ward, and put Luson in it, poor chap, rather than discharge him uncured. But that *won't* be necessary, you see if it is . . ."

CHAPTER II

THE *APOLOGIA* OF JOHN DURHAM, THE SON OF TRANSGRESSORS

Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows!
But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure tho' seldom, are denied us,
When the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.

BROWNING.

The Failures were many and the Lures were few. Among the former were Army men, Parsons, Barristers, Civilians, Schoolmasters, an Engineer, Business-men, Authors, an Artist, a Sea-captain, Journalists, a Professor, Merchants, a Doctor, and Gentlemen of no profession, including the son of a damaged and detrimental Peer. . . .

I, John Durham, am an incoherent rambler and a methodless historian—but my notes may be of interest. . . .

All were arrant Failures—save only Father Gregory, who was surely an angel from Heaven, though he was pleased to style himself the biggest Failure and Sinner of the lot. . . .

The Lures were Wine, Women, and Gambling—placed in order of merit or demerit—and one or other of them claimed nearly all. Two or three had followed other Lures or had merely experienced genuine and unremitting bad luck, while one or two were, mentally, a trifle weak.

The Professor, for example, was absentminded to the point of lunacy, albeit a brilliant scholar and clever man.

I myself am the biggest Failure of them all and am, moreover, what the righteous call, "a Child of Sin."

Yes, I was Born in Sin (and in a Lunatic Asylum also).

I have no legal status—no legal existence I believe—as a Child of Sin, and I am a Child of Sin because my mother, a brave and beautiful woman, the property and prey of an animal, loved my father, a brave and noble man who gave his life to keep his word to her. . . .

Well, well! Being an utter Failure as well as a Child of Sin, I have learnt one thing and acquired one lone and solitary virtue—Sympathy. And having come into very considerable wealth after losing wife and child by sheer stark starvation, I use it to help Failures of my own class in my own way.

Thanks to the work and wisdom and wealth of Father Gregory, who joined me just after I founded the Club, I have, at last, had some measure of success.

Being an expert in Failure and Failures myself, I know that even as all that glitters is not gold, so all that looks earthy is not common clay.

I also know that some failures *are* more glorious than some successes, although poets and prophets have made trite the truth.

What is more, I know that many a hopeless, helpless Failure is a sweet and lovable soul, if not a strong one; and that many a Success is a base and hateful creature who has succeeded by virtue of his vices.

The late Sir William Pooch, brewer, was a huge success, and a most notorious scoundrel.

But I do not close my eyes to the fact that we are no band of haloed saints, that nearly all of us have a very weak spot, and some of us a rotten one. We are a unique collection of "bad" men and selected losers in Life's race.

We have all failed—failed lamentably and utterly—but that is often, far more often than the World realizes, a matter of luck, and more often still, one of having broken the Great Commandment, "Thou shalt not be found out."

I loved them every one, even Henry Hoalke, and, so evil is my nature, I could not conjure up one shade of a sensation of horror nor kindle one spark of indignation in my sinful soul when I heard their confessions, witnessed their weaknesses, knew them for what the World calls wasters, if not criminals.

You see I know what a criminal the World itself often is, and how frequently a front of brass hides an interior of corruption, and how frequently a rotten crumbling wall surrounds a beautiful garden.

And does not the richest soil grow the rankest weeds? An acre of flinty-hearted rock may not produce a single weed perchance . . . but will it bear a single flower?

Some day the World will awake and send most of its criminals to Hospital and some of its sick men to Gaol.

At present there are thousands of rich rogues and poor knaves in magnificent private and public hospitals who have brought themselves there by fat self-indulgence, vile sloth, and gross or dainty filthiness; beasts who should be gaoled till skilly and labour cured while punishing, and the "gaols" should be gymnasia—Spartan gymnasia to kill or cure the self-injured.

Crime is always mental disease and Disease is often physical crime. Unfortunately in this marvellous topsy-turvydom, the physically innocent often suffer for the sins of the physically guilty.

Then punish the real physical sinner the more severely, and pity and help the poor "criminal" we have made.

I am not striving to achieve a cheap notoriety among the ignorant and unthinking by emulating our professional paradoxers, nor to be called a brilliant and original thinker by those who apply that name to all talking *poseurs* equipped with the bludgeon of destructive criticism—but if you accuse me, perhaps I cannot but plead guilty to indulging in a little special pleading on behalf of the losers in Life's race and of my poor Failures—some of whom are "criminals" and should have been in gaol—according to law as at present established.

You see I know them and love them, and have seen such unlovable scoundrels win success, wealth, fame, and honours.

But I am no logician and no economist, I admit.

Not every Failure is wholly despicable. The Founder of the Christian code of Ethics was himself a Failure and he was certainly a fine and noble gentleman, whatever else he was or was not, as surely the hardiest and most foolish atheist must allow. . . .

I never talked religion to any of my Failures and neither did Father Gregory—the angelic soul who made my venture a success. I had neither the desire nor the impertinence.

I believe there are Societies that give starving Failures a small meal and a large sermon and a "religious" service which they may not evade and

avoid, and I can imagine no plan better calculated to make religion stink in the nostrils of the unfortunate recipients.

Besides, I am not a religious man myself and I am not a Missionary. I am neither brave nor good enough to be a Missionary, and if I were one, I should not be working in India. I know the East and I know the East End and the needs of the latter are the greater.

I also know that far wiser and more competent men than I think otherwise—and I merely state my own belief.

As far as I personally am concerned, I am convinced that the cry of the children, the cry uttered in my own tongue, would be too loud and real for me to fancy I heard an unuttered cry from the other side of the world. . . .

I despair of human logic and common-sense when I read of a South Sea Archbishop, say, stumping England with a modest demand for £100,000 wherewith to build him a Cathedral suitable to the needs of his cannibal parishioners—and getting much of it. . . .

I cannot think that any of the noble missionaries who have left the shores of Britain for sunny lands abroad can ever have seen British slums in winter—when bitter cruel cold joined hands with rain and darkness to aid starvation in making men say, "There is no God. There *can* be no just and merciful God." No, I cannot think they ever saw these "bits of merrie England," nor that any person who ever sent money out of England could have seen them. . . . These are merely opinions and I live up to them by sending my mite from abroad *to* England for the conversion of the heathen—by way of his stomach and back and his need for comfort and joy. . . .

I would work there if I had the courage and strength and gift. No, I am no Missionary. I am not brave enough. I am merely a Failure and friend of Failures; and I am helping Failures here in India because I believe it to be the worst country in the world in which an Englishman can fail and fall. Worst for him and *worst for England*.

It is bad to be hungry and homeless in England; it is worse to be hungry and homeless in Paris, as well I know—but what is it for a White Man to be hungry and homeless in a land where every White Man should be a model, an example, a standard-bearer—where every White Man represents an Empire and stands for the Ruling Race, for the Governing Class, for the West? And do you realize that the safety, peace, welfare, progress, and happiness of some hundreds of millions depend upon the strong supremacy of, and respect for, that Race and Class in spite of the foolish talk of ignorant

and impudent Members of Parliament? You can fall low in England, you can fall into a deep, deep Pit and you can find the bottom of it tenanted by crawling thousands like you. . . . but let a White Man fall into the Pit in India and he falls and lies—*alone*, and millions of creatures, who should be able to look up and revere, can look down into it and jeer and sneer delighted, at the degraded damned-alive occupant.

Heaven help the country-born Low White, Poor White, "White Trash," in India—but above all, God help and deliver the fallen gentleman, the Lost White Man, of culture and refinement, from Home. God help him, for his lot is the most terrible on earth.

Surely no failures are so complete and awful as those of the gentlemen who "go under," in India—and become the scorn of the utterly scorned, the contemned of the truly contemptible, and who are lowlier than the lowest of the low.

I have seen some dreadful sights in my time—and the worst have been those presented by men of breeding and refinement existing in the Indian bazaar—in the gutters of the East. . . .

I have refused many men admission to my Club for many reasons—but never by reason of the depth of their degradation nor the blackness of the villainy that wrought it.

I judge not that I be not judged—or rather because I know temptation and most utter failure myself, and also because I know that no man, gently born and nurtured, *can* deserve the awful fate of those who fail and fall and "go under" in this country.

I hear, I hope, and I help—trying hard to avoid achieving the moral and material pauperizing of those I help.

I fear the Political Economist and Sociologist will write me down an Evil and an interference with the Economic Law.

Well, I try to be the latter and to avoid being the former. . . .

Also I have to admit that I cannot see the guiding hand of God in this terrible welter of injustice, waste, folly, and suffering, but I tell myself of the finite mind and the Infinite Purpose, and try to live in hope that the Purpose *is*, and that a living God of Mercy exists—with a larger heart, a greater love, a broader sympathy, and a nobler mercy than mine.

And when I think of Father Gregory and, still more, when I am with him, I have a feeling and a faith, apart from all mere reason, that, in spite of

all—*since there can be a Father Gregory on earth, there must be a good God in Heaven*.

I never felt so certain of it as when Tallant came—and I compared the man who came here with the man who left—for whatever Heaven there may be.

*   *   *   *   *

Poor Tallant, of whose salving I have written elsewhere, made a good end and, as Burke said, “died game.” His last words were his thanks to Father Gregory, a short prayer, and then a jest at himself and Life. I am more glad than I can say that I found him—and that he died in a clean white bed, in a bright and cheerful room, with men of his own race and class with him.

I’m also glad that his death was the means of introducing me to the real Burke—or a very changed one.

I had never understood nor appreciated Burke till poor Tallant came. It is a lesson to me—against first impressions and second thoughts, for both were wrong.

My first impressions of Burke were somewhat similar to those I received from the only iceberg I ever saw.

He struck me as cold, useless, and dangerous, like the berg; hard, changeful, and drifting, like the berg; beautiful, attractive, heartless, like the berg—but I can add another similarity now—with a great unsuspected depth beneath the surface, like the berg. My second thoughts were that he was a lazy and rather worthless remittance-man from Piccadilly and Clubland—one of the parasite class that is purely ornamental and has a fine scorn for every other class. He was so fastidious, so poised, so polished. In the death-chamber I saw him in a new light, and I saw that under the studied impassivity, the languid insolence, flippancy, and cynicism was a man, a warm-hearted, lovable gentleman capable of unselfishness, enthusiasm, and heroic deeds. Was it the illness or the Convent?

For poor Tallant died, after all, of cholera and not, as one would have supposed, of alcoholism and debility. Doubtless these rendered him an easy victim however. No one else took it, and I suppose Tallant must have got it from the unfiltered water he *would* drink at night from his water-jug, in spite of warnings, after finishing whatever else was available. Anyhow he was taken ill suddenly in the middle of the night and died next day. Dr. Foy, called by a servant, suspected the truth at once and, coming in search of me, met Burke on his way to bed.

“I am going to need the one drug I haven’t got in the place,” said he, “and a life’s going to depend on it. Who’d be the best man to ask to drive over to the town?”

“Seven miles by the *pukka* road, each way,” said Burke—“and a big heavy landau. What a pity there isn’t a saddle-horse in the stables. . . . Time of much consequence?”

“Life and death,” replied Foy. “Cholera . . . Tallant.”

“Poor chap!” said Burke. “A gentleman and a scholar. *Cholera!* In his condition too. . . . It’s the one thing I dread. Seen it. Here—give me the prescription or tell me what it is you want. . . .”

In an incredibly short time after this conversation, Burke entered the room where Father Gregory, Foy, and I were doing what we could by massage, acid drink, drugs, and hot-water bottles to relieve the agony of the patient.

“Thought you were going for it!” cried Foy indignantly.

Burke, monocled, smart, *soigné*, yawned and handed the doctor a package.

“You never drove to the town and back!” he said as he tore it open.

“No. Galloped,” was the drawled reply.

“What on?”

“The carriage horse.”

“It’s never been ridden in its life!”

“So I gathered when I mounted.”

“There’s no saddlery.”

“No.”

It transpired later that the man had ordered out the big strong waler I had purchased unbroken from the Calbay Stables, and trained to drive, mounted it bareback, cut short the long driving reins and, with his racing-spurs and quirt, had started it off at a mad bolting gallop through the pitch black night down the rough “short-cut” mountain road.

How many men would mount a fresh young carriage-horse and spur it, bare-backed, with no more bridle than the two ends of its cut-down reins and driving-bit—to fetch medicine for a stranger—even in broad daylight? How

many men would flog and spur a properly saddled-and-bridled horse, to which they were well accustomed, down a mountain track on a black starless night—to fetch medicine for a stranger? . . .

And he was still weak after the mishap that had kept him on his back for a month at the Convent.

Nor could we induce Burke to leave the bedside while life remained in the dying man. He held him in his arms during the terrible seizures, while Foy and I chafed the cramped limbs and Father Gregory applied fomentations. He certainly took the biggest risks ever taken by one who had a terror of this fell disease.

To Tallant, while that unfortunate brave creature was conscious, he talked gaily, encouragingly, capped his heroic jokes, and showed himself a man of wit, erudition, and culture.

When the end came he turned to me with his eternal yawn and drawled:

"Handed in his checks at last—thought he was never going to croak. . . . Poor dear old chap. . . . Good-night. . . . Good-night, Father . . . 'night Pilly."

I sought him out next day, thanked him and frankly apologized for having misjudged him as I had.

"Never a bit," said he, "until now. I'm just a Black Sheep, Durham, and a waster. But for you and your Club I should have taken a squint along the wrong way of my revolver-barrel, long ago. I am out of mischief here and shall stay out of it. Had enough to last me for the rest of my life—and I'm very badly wanted by half the police in the world not to mention a few South African Republics, the Mafia and a few little Governments of sorts. I am a Bad Hat."

"You did a heroic and altruistic deed last night, Burke," said I, "and you are certainly——"

"Look here, Durham," he interrupted in his most offensive drawl, "if you're going to slobber any damned sentimentality over me I am off—though my life isn't worth a week's purchase if I go loose again. . . . I am not a filthy dime-novel hero nor a stage noble-ruffian and gentleman-beneath-a-sinful-guise. I am a damned Bad Hat—and I'll be grateful to you to understand it and shut your head. . . ."

"Well, I'd like to shake hands with you, Burke, if you'll do me the honour and accept my apologies," I replied in my dull formal way.

"That or any other dam-foolishness that'll please you, Durham," he answered, and held out his hand. I was delighted to feel him hurting me exceedingly, and to receive back my hand, a poor crushed remains. . . .

A period of discomfortable self-consciousness settled upon us, as upon two reserved Englishmen guilty of giving expression to their feelings. . . .

". . . You have a fine collection of weapons, Burke," said I at last, partly for the sake of saying something, and partly because weapon-collecting is my hobby. As peaceful a man as ever avoided violence, I love the sight of a weapon—and the more it is a cruel threat in ingenious steel, a menace in hammered metal, and a fierce crystallization of cold passion, hate, and horror, the more do I treasure and cherish it.

The walls of the room were adorned with Ghurka kukeries, Sikh chuckras, Afghan daggers, Arab guns, Dervish lances, and knives, swords, pistols, spears, and other weapons of all kinds and all nations. . . .

"Well—I have never gone in for collecting weapons in the ordinary way," he said, "or I might have had enough to fill two museums besides what are in this room. Each of these has a history, or rather a place in *my* history."

"You have been about a bit," I replied, "to have seen all that lot in action! Will you tell me the story of one or two?"

"Yes—I've sought sorrow all over the shop—and found joy most of the time. Filibustering has been my hobby. . . . I'll tell you a few yarns about these little trophies if you like—provided you are prepared to believe what I tell you."

"I shall implicitly believe every word that you say Burke," I answered.

He bowed and lit a cigarette with airy grace—as he does everything.

"Then I'll tell you the absolute truth—though it is a pastime of mine to tell people lies, and then an actual fact, and watch them swallow the untruths and boggle at the sole real truth they get! . . . Yes, fact's a lot stranger than fiction. . . . But I shall put a strain on your credulity if you sit there long, Durham—for I can show you the rope that all but hanged me, the bullet that just touched my heart, the Masai spear that pinned me to a tree, the Black Hand knife that went to the handle in my back, and the Cuban *machete* that has left a notch in my collar-bone. . . . Does that choke you off?"

"Good Heavens, Burke—what have you been—or rather what *haven't* you?" I asked.

“Lots of both. I’ve been a trooper of the Queen, a Captain in a South American rebel army, or rather mob, fighting for one rascally President against another; I have been an American war-correspondent, a Klondyke miner, a British Yeomanry private, a South Sea deck-hand, a South African transport-rider, a gum-digger, a sheep-shearer, a cowboy, and that was the best of the lot, an orchid-butterfly-specimen-and-skin-hunter, and a damned scoundrel. . . . Does *that* choke you off?”

“What is the most interesting and thrilling trophy you have got?” I asked, ignoring the slurs on my faith in him.

“This,” he replied, and reached down from the corner of a fine old Japanese screen, from which it hung, a mass of braid, leather, string, and big feathers. From among the feathers he detached a small packet of the size and shape of a twelve-bore cartridge, the outer covering of which appeared to be of soft leather. “The whole thing is the war-kit of a North American Indian chief,” he said casually, “and in this little parcel is a wad of paper. . . . Read that . . .” and he very carefully unrolled and smoothed out an ancient, but clean and perfectly preserved, document written in angular French script.

It was a proclamation setting forth the current price of English scalps delivered fresh at Fort Ste. Marie and signed by a Capitaine Dubois, the officer in command. It was dated 1756 and looked almost new.

“I took this ‘fetish’ off the carcase of a Noble Savage who tried to get me and my outfit, up Alaska way,” he drawled. “Think of the things that little bit of paper has been in the thick of. Gives you a whiff of Fenimore Cooper and Mayne Reid, what? . . .” and I think it was the very strangest of all the strange things I have ever come across in India. . . .

This is a sample of the entertainment I received on my frequent subsequent visits to the room of Reginald Burke—whom I had thought a dilettante idler and *ex*-social-butterfly and loafer—and I came to like the man exceedingly, and to know him for the brave, determined hero-villain that he is. Some of his escapades are undeniably discreditable in the extreme—and some of his actions quixotically noble. He has been a libertine and he has acted with knightly chivalry.

Gambling in every shape and form, especially with his life for a stake, has been his Lure, and waste of opportunity his besetting sin. . . . The man might have been anything. When I tell him so he laughs and says, “Well, I have been a King—and had seven Queens to boot, Durry—let me rest on my laurels”; or else.

“What could I be better than a protégé of yours, Old Bird,” in his flippant way. . . . It appears that for a time he actually ruled a Central African tribe who were captivated by his monocle, revolver, and burning-glass.

Foy tells me that when in funds he loses, at cards, to his bosom friend Barronby, in a most clever manner, and that he performs numberless acts of kindness, absolutely unnoted and unacknowledged by the beneficiary, for the old Professor.

I think he is perhaps the strangest animal in my menagerie. . . .

The respectable and ill-fated Hoalke, it seems, lay groaning in bed when he heard the word *Cholera*, and remained there until the day after poor Tallant’s funeral. He then arose and fled straightway by train to Burrapore, and thence wrote to me imploring the loan of sufficient money to enable him to return. When he had received a sufficient punishment for his cowardice and folly I complied, and it was a very sulky Hoalke that came to report his arrival. . . .

Poor Tallant’s cherished manuscript proved a sad disappointment, for the beginnings of a great philosophical book, commenced many years ago, tailed off into lamentations, and ended in mere incoherence and blasphemy. The last entry—written in watered ink with a reed-pen, apparently—runs:

> I cannot live and I must not die,
> I cannot smile and I must not sigh;
> For should I die I’d wake in Hell,
> And should I sigh my heart would swell
> And burst.
> But if it burst I should be dead,
> And learn the Truth of what God said:
> “Thou thing, thou no-man, know the worst—
> In lowest Hades quench thy thirst
> With Flame.
> For, *in mercy*, I’ve waived my claim
> To put you again in the world—the same—
> The thing, the no-man, you were before,
> And punish you as you were punished of yore
> On earth.”

Perhaps both the manner and the matter may be forgiven to one who lived on bazaar-brandy—coloured methylated spirit.

Then followed such a screed of blasphemy, despair, and utter hopeless woe as made my heart ache and blood run cold.

Thank God the poor soul met Father Gregory—though at the cruel, bitter end of a wasted, ruined life.

He died a man quite different from the one who wrote that last blaspheming entry to which I have alluded—if its writer could be called a man, at the time.

CHAPTER III

FATHER GREGORY IS INDIGNANT

Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
Now if *thou* wouldst, when all have given him over,
From death to life *thou* mightst him recover.

The C.O.D. of the Chotapettah Club was in session in its private room. The C.O.D. was the *Cohort of the Damned* Society, and the most select and exclusive of all.

When Mr. Henry Hoalke wished to become a Member he was told that he was Damned all-right, but that the Cohort was one of, and for, Gentlemen who had borne arms in some capacity.

It had been instituted by Father Gregory, though not named by him, as one of his innumerable attempts to give the Members of the Chotapettah Club something to do and something wholesome to think about.

It met weekly, and each member in turn entertained the rest with an original speech, paper, recitation, address, song, "piece," or anything else of which he was capable.

Father Gregory was President and perpetual Chairman. Any member failing to take his turn and do his best automatically ceased to be a member. This provided terrible and anxious thought, labour, and effort, for many of them—which was precisely what Father Gregory intended. The results were beyond his highest hopes and expectations. The Society was enormously popular, always fully attended, and met in the greatest harmony of spirit.

Frequently a feeling of pathos and sorrow prevailed, and Father Gregory had noted more than one moist eye; for original compositions of such men as these, whether poems, music, tales, essays, or reminiscences, must be stamped with the seal of the composers' bitter experience.

Some of Mantin's songs had given Father Gregory the most poignant pain, and his own eye had been suffused as he listened to Mantin's poems.

"I call upon Mr. Burke to give us, as promised, an allegory called 'God, The Woman, A Man, and The Book,' " said he, other contributors being disposed of.

The Honourable Reginald Burke, tall and spare, with his handsome thin face, blue-grey eyes, hard mouth beneath a trimmed moustache, sunburnt skin, and the air of an athlete and a soldier, rose languidly to his feet and bowed to the President.

All looked toward him with interest and expectation, for he was an enigma. No man so silky, none so dangerous; no man so slow and soft and sweet, none so swift and hard and cruel; no man there who had been so far, seen so many things, done so much; none so reticent about it all. What a quixotic polished gentleman, and what a reckless wicked blackguard! Those who knew him best were puzzled most—notably his faithful admirer, Major Cecil Saxon Barronby. He knew that his hero Burke had done *this* and he knew that he had done *that*—and how the Devil could he have done *both*? Anyhow he had been a painfully good boy since his illness in the Convent.

Men settled comfortably down into arm-chairs, lighting cheroots or pipes, crossing feet over knees, and generally testifying to the expectation of "something good," for Burke was an orator, an unknown quantity—or rather an unforetellable one—and a man of remarkable ability, versatility, and wit.

He looked round the room, the permanent chin-strap mark shining curiously on his bronzed outdoor face, and, swaying lightly on his feet, both hands in his coat-pockets and a curious smile on his hard small mouth, plunged *in medias res*.

"The Man was very tired," he began, "and the World was a dark and dreary place. He had failed and he had been failed—failed by the Priests, by a Friend, by his Religion.

"He had been taught that Peace and Faith and Salvation came through a Book and they had not come through the Book—albeit the fault lay not with the Man, who studied the Book.

"So the Man was very tired and the World a dark and dreary place, as he had nothing to alleviate Sorrow and nothing to give Hope.

"He walked in Darkness upon ashes, ate Dead Sea Fruit, and said, '*There is no God*.'

"He knew no joy of Work, Friendship, Striving, Sin, nor of Life.

“There was no Peace in which he might live and no War in which he might die.

“He again went to the Priests in his sorrow and they said, ‘Pray, Praise, and Propitiate.’

“ ‘Whom?’ asked the Man. ‘I cannot pray to Nothing and hope for answer. There is no God. I cannot see the Light, I cannot hear the Word, I cannot feel the touch of a guiding Hand.’

“His companions were Pain, Vice, Cruelty, and Hate.

“Pain abode with him always and did him good, giving him strength but not comfort. She set her seal upon his brow.

“Vice dwelt near him and saw him when she could. She promised to bring her friend Happiness to visit him, but never did so. He found that she lied and was no friend of Happiness. She then promised to bring Pleasure, and did so; but the Man soon loathed her. Vice set her seal upon his eyes.

“Cruelty had lived with him in his childhood and had set her seal upon his mouth.

“Hate visited him daily and she set her seal upon his face also.

“The Man, in spite of Priest and Book, had his feet upon that road that slopes so gently down to Hell.

“The Man met Love, that beautiful Woman.

“He straightway fell at her feet and cried, ‘I know you. I have waited for you for forty years in the Wilderness. Now, I step out of the Wilderness, unless you bid me return thither, as surely you must, for this vile presumption. But, O Love! do not—or I must die! How dare I look at you? How dare I breathe this atmosphere? I faint . . .’ and he trembled, though his mouth was grim—stamped with the seals of Cruelty and Hate.

“But Love laid a beautiful and cool hand upon his brow, so lined by Pain, his good friend, and spoke softly in a sweet and gentle voice.

“What she said is for no other man to hear—but even as she spoke a glow tinted the sky, waxed and deepened until the whole world was illuminated and bathed in lovely light, and filled with Glory.

"And the Man, who had travelled roughly in the Wilderness for forty years, took one short step and went in that one short step further than he had travelled in the forty years. For he stepped from the Wilderness into a Paradise of Hope, Beauty, Peace, and Faith, and looking up he beheld God —whom he had denied.

"And Love, that most beautiful woman, drove him in her golden chariot far into the heart of Paradise and there set him down, and, as he worshipped her, she laid her finger upon his brow, his eyes, and his lips, and from them fell the seals of Pain and Vice and Hate and Cruelty—so that he was transformed.

"And then he cried:

" 'O Love! if I see you not again and if I am cast forth from this your Paradise—yet have I had mine Hour. I have been a God. I have lived greatly, purely, nobly. I have *loved*. . . .

" 'Upon the Memory of your touch I can live for ever—and know no meaner joy.'

"And turning his face toward Heaven the Man cried, 'Lord God Most High, Thou art, Thou ever wert, Thou wilt ever be. I have sinned and I have suffered. Also they have sinned who told me that Thou didst abide in written words and ancient shibboleths; in a Book; in the mouths and imaginings of Priests; in Temples made with hands—and in all those places where Thou art not. I now know that the . . .' but as he spoke, Conscience, narrow, warped, distorted, priest-trained, stood beside him and stabbed at him with a flaming sword of hissing stinking Argument.

" 'Fool! Impious! That Woman was a heathen goddess! That was *Love*. Turn from her. Flee from her. Repent ere it be too late. Avert thyself from her and in fasting, penitence, and prayer, repent through *This*' and Conscience held out to him a Book.

"But the Man stood up and appealed from Conscience to God Himself, exalted and exulting, and cried, 'O God, Creator of All, *Thou* didst create Love. I know not who made the Book that failed me. More, Thou didst surely create Love Thy greatest instrument and swiftest messenger. She has spoken to me with Thy voice. My Faith is now a mountain immovable, unshakable, and this blind, timid, priest-fed Conscience, I defy and deny.

Love has brought me to Thee, O Lord, *a Woman, Thy servant*. . . . And if I am wrong, O God, and this be the blasphemy poor Conscience says—fling wide the gates of Hell and I will march proudly in *and spend Eternity with Happiness, who will be there with me, for I have known Love*. . . .' "

Silence reigned in the room for many seconds after Burke had resumed his seat, polished his monocle, and yawned.

Father Gregory eyed him amazed. Was *this* Burke the fop, the drawling sayer of smart things, the supercilious elegant?

Barronby, with dropped jaw, stared at his friend. Was *this* his pal Reggie who made him roar with laughter till he felt weak as a kitten, with his smoking-room stories, and who knew every dive, hell, hall, and haunt of dainty vice in every capital of the world? Was this the duellist, the brilliant card-player, the blasé man of the world, the battered roué, the fighter, the cynic, the boon companion of the wine-washed "binge"?

Men once again wondered what Burke was, and was made of; till the spell was broken by a nasty sneering "*Bah*" from Luson.

Major Barronby rose to his feet, as every one turned angrily toward Luson.

"I beg to propose, Sir," said the Major to the President, "that Mr. Luson be kicked out of the Society. . . . Also out of the room *now*, and that I be deputed to do it. . . ."

A murmur of "Hear! Hear!" and some applause, showed that the "sense of the House" was with the gallant Major. And Father Gregory, who had flushed indignantly at Luson's insulting sneer, rose and replied:

"Let us rather remove the Society from the room and Mr. Luson," and, followed by the rest, passed out through the French window on to the lawn.

* * * * *

Father Gregory was indignant.

More, he was perturbed and strangely stirred.

Love had played a tremendous part in his life and, but for Love, he would never have been in the Failures' Club of Chotapettah.

He paced his bare, severe-looking room with twitching lips and furrowed brow.

Could this Burke know anything? Anything of what had happened thirty years ago, and a thousand miles away? . . . Nonsense—he was not born when it happened.

"God, the Woman, a Man, and the Book!"

Love! Love leading to Salvation! Had Father Gregory's love led to Salvation? . . . *Did* Burke know anything? . . . Who and what was this man, to hold such an audience enthralled with such a subject, and to shake Father Gregory's soul to its centre and foundations?

What did this young world-worn rake and rascal know of the Love that saves the soul alive? Where got he his beautiful allegories? . . .

Father Gregory went straightway in search of the Honourable Reginald Burke, ex-trooper of the Queen.

He found him enthralled, enwrapped, concentrated—for he had a match on with his good friend Mantin at "Angels' Visits" for a five-rupee note, and if he lost the consequences would be serious—probably leaving him without boots.

Each gentleman sat motionless with folded arms before a plate on which reposed a scrap of sugar-cane. They had the tense impassivity of crouching leopards about to spring.

A fly settled upon the sugar-cane of the Honourable Reginald.

He rose, picked up two five-rupee notes, sighed and murmured, "One bottle of bay-rum, one tooth-paste, and a new tooth-brush—or shall it be a small eau-de-Cologne? . . . Yes, that's it. Haven't had an eau-de-Cologne bath for months."

He had won his match and was disposing of the spoils. Fate, in the shape of a housefly, had befriended him. . . .

"Will you take a turn with me, Burke? I want to ask you about your allegory," said Father Gregory.

"Charmed, honoured, and delighted, Sir," was the reply, and the old man and the young took their way to "Father Gregory's Walk" beneath the banyan avenue.

"Where did you get your idea, my son?" asked the old priest.

"Don't know, Father," replied Burke. "Just came into my mind when you asked me to state the nature of my contribution at the beginning of the séance."

"Am I to understand that you had not thought it out nor prepared it?"

"I came to the room without a notion as to what I should do for my 'turn,' Father. It came into my head and I reeled it off."

"Can you do that sort of thing *to order*?"

"Yes—in the mood. . . . Since my illness. . . ."

Father Gregory's thoughts wandered . . . back to God's own garden near Simla and what happened there to a Man and the Woman. . . .

And what of God and the Book. Had God hidden His face because of the words of the Book? "Thou shalt not . . ."

"Make me an allegory now, of Love and a Garden," said he.

What was the riddle of this young man with the cruel mouth, the wicked life, and the beautiful thoughts and words.

"Give me a minute and let's sit down, Father dear," said the object of the priest's thought.

Burke buried his face in his hands for a few seconds, then, leaning back and looking musingly at the mauvely grey evening sky, across which long lines of flying-foxes and short rows of white storks strung out, he began:

"*The Cruel Gardens of Love.*"

"A Wanderer—travelling in waterless places over grey sand beneath a copper sky, blinded, athirst, aweary, deafened by the booming of his own blood, sick of the World, bereft of Faith, Hope, and Charity; bent, lean, and scarred—beheld afar off a garden.

"His face, grey, lined, seamed, lit up, and he struggled on with renewed courage.

"Beautiful to the eye was the Garden and, as he drew near, he saw bright flowers, ripe fruits, gushing fountains, smooth lawns, dark shady places.

"He quickened his steps and a flush of desire mantled his swarthy cheek.

"He reached the Garden.

"At the Golden Gate of the Garden stood a fair Woman.

“And the Man bade his Soul to cease from noticing that the Golden Gate was but gilded cardboard and that the face of the fair Woman smiled but with the lips.

“ ‘Come,’ said she, ‘enter into my Garden. Rest, refresh yourself, and sojourn. I will make music for you and give you delight,’ and she led him to a great mound of soft cushions of swansdown and satin beneath a glowing silken canopy, murmuring, ‘I am what men call Love.’

“And she brought him fruit and nectar, and made music for him as he stretched his weary limbs, sighed, and endeavoured to obtain rest, peace, and delight.

“But his Soul was sad and would not rest. It knew not peace nor delight.

“ ‘This perfumed air is enervating, languorous,’ complained his Soul. ‘These beauteous-seeming flowers have fleshly petals and corroding exhalations. These rich fruits are over-ripe and their scent suffocateth. The jewelled, hovering insects bear poison-stings. The Woman’s music drags me down. In this Garden I am like to die. I faint. . . .’ And the Man chid his Soul and gazed upon the woman who smiled at him with her lips, and gazed at him with hard, questing eyes.

“And he slept as his Soul fainted.

“When he awoke, his limbs and heart and brain were heavy, his eyes were dim, and he saw that his Soul was exceeding sick. The Woman brought him nectar that was over-sweet and cloying; fruits that were over-ripe and nauseating. The scented air was thin and insufficient. The soft, yielding cushions gave no ease but seemed to sap his strength.

“He looked again upon the Woman and saw that the gold of her hair was but brass, the bloom of her cheeks and lips but paint, the jewels at her throat and ear but glass; her pale eyes shallow, false.

“ ‘Give me,’ said she, ‘give . . .’ and he cried aloud:

“ ‘Know you *no* word but “give.” I long to give. I yearn and die to give. But what have I acceptable to *you*,’ and he strove to rise to his feet.

“Her hot hand seized his and prevented him in his doings.

“He sank back, but as he did thus his Soul shrieked aloud, ‘*O! This cruel, cruel Garden.* I am dying!’ and the Man sprang quickly to his feet and fled to save his dying Soul alive.

"By streams and fountains of nectar, by trees of blushing, glowing fruit, by beds of brilliant, shining flowers, by silken pavilions, dainty spread; by feasting bands of fauns and nymphs, by alluring, impelling scenes; by Temples of the Goddess Venus, by Groves of the God Bacchus, where he roared and rolled; by all things to which his body cried aloud, he fled, pursued by laughing, jeering Wantonness.

"And in time he reached the Desert again and even as he sprang through the Golden Gate of gilded paste-board his Soul revived.

"And he sojourned long years in the Desert travelling ever to the Horizon, ever on to the Horizon, the Horizon which is ever there, and never nearer.

"And in time, after many and cruel sufferings, he again beheld a Garden and turned toward it.

"And as he drew near he saw grand trees, stately and strong, and beneath them such flowers as violets, lilies of the valley, and primroses.

"At the Iron Gates between granite pillars, dignified, massive, everlasting, stood a beautiful Woman whose face was exquisitely fine, kind, true, and gentle.

"As he bowed low to her, she bestowed upon him a slow, gracious smile.

" 'I would enter,' said he.

" 'Why?' asked the truly beautiful Woman.

" 'Because my Soul cries aloud to me to enter into the Garden,' said the Wanderer.

" 'Enter,' said the Woman—'the Iron Gates are always open—and retreat is easy.'

"The Wanderer entered, but, as he trod beneath the trees, his Body cried aloud—for the stones cut his feet like knives, the grass-blades cut his feet like knives, the leaves of the trees and shrubs cut like knives, and the wind blew shrill, chill, biting, and bracing.

"But his Soul sang so loudly that he heard not the howling of his Body and its repeated cry, '*O! This cruel, cruel Garden.*' For his body could not see the things that it desired, and it knew anguish, longing, pain, and mortification. There were no fleshly flowers, no perfumes, no sweet nectar, no soft couches, none of the joys it loved. But only great and wonderful Beauty of sky and landscape; peace, dignity, and calm security.

"And the Body began to mortify as the Soul drove it on over the sharp-edged leaves till, with a great cry of, '*O! This cruel, cruel Garden!*' it died, and the Beautiful Woman turning said to the Traveller, 'Behold my Handmaiden.'

"And looking up he saw another beauteous form.

" 'Who are you?' he cried.

"And the answer was:

" 'I am Love and my handmaiden is Happiness. . . .' "

". . . 'fraid I've bored you stiff, Father dear."

Father Gregory, as they both rose, laid his thin, delicate hands upon the other man's shoulders and gazed into his eyes.

"*You* have looked on Love and therefore on Happiness, my son," said he. "Oh, may they both dwell with you."

"I have at last seen Love and Happiness . . . in a Convent, Father," was the reply, "and there they have remained. But Happiness has lent me her garment . . . and I am another man."

CHAPTER IV

A LURE

I know my soul hath power to know all things,
Yet she is blind and ignorant in all:
I know I'm one of Nature's little kings,
Yet to the least and vilest things am thrall.
I know my life's a pain and but a span;
I know my sense is mocked in everything;
And, to conclude I know myself a Man—
Which is a proud and yet a wretched thing.

How I got Tallant

With regard to my salving of Tallant I see that I wrote:

A new Member has joined the Club to-day, but I don't think he will stay long. He will be called away by that Messenger whose call is not to be denied, and depart to that bourne whence no traveller returns.

Why could I not have met with him years ago?

It would have been a grand salvage then—now I can only tow the poor derelict to the harbour in time for it to sink—a terrible wreck, and the wreck of so fine a vessel! . . .

A letter from that good man and true Missionary, the Reverend Robert Alexander of Shirinpur, took me to that ancient relic of a great city by the next train after its receipt.

Robert wrote:

> "Dear John,
>
> "One of the first things I find here is a case for you, if it be not too late. A gentleman and a scholar sits drunk, filthy and ragged, beneath the palms by the ford across which goes the little traffic of this place. He is starving—probably unable to eat in any case—ill, unshorn, courteous, blasphemous, and perennially tipsy—on penny-a-bottle palm-tree toddy, when unable to procure the coloured and sweetened methylated spirits of the bazaar.

"I believe he is partly supported by a native woman, and, when sober enough to hold a pen, earns a few coppers as a bazaar *chit*-writer and accountant. I have utterly failed to move him by prayers and entreaties, expostulations, offers of help, endeavours to shame him, and every other means of which I can think. Your experience of fallen 'gentlemen' is greater than mine, and though you, alas! rely on poor human weakness, and divorce philanthropy from prayer and religion, you may be able to do something. Nay, let me put it honestly—you may succeed where I have failed, for God moves in a mysterious way and uses different instruments.

"I have prayed over the poor creature—and he is still here—still blasphemous, still drunk.

"Come, my dear John, and use *your* methods—for whatever may be your beliefs, or lack of them, you have a great and Christian heart, infinite love and understanding, and much wisdom.

"Your affectionate friend,
"ROBERT ALEXANDER."

Poor old Rob! I could imagine his brave and foredoomed attempts and his deep distress—as he offered his tracts, prayers, expostulations, and exhortations to the polite blasphemer—the poor dying drunkard.

I packed some dirty ragged cotton clothes, a battered *topi*, some shameful boots, and a big flask of the finest liqueur cognac into my portmanteau—in addition to the usual necessities; flatly refused to let Father Gregory accompany me on what I foresaw would be a rough and possibly dangerous errand; put the secretarial work of the Club in charge of Dr. Foy, in return for his word of honour that he would be a toted abstainer until I returned, gave a few parting words of instruction to Serjeant Bunn, and caught the next train for the nearest junction to the far-distant city of Shirinpur.

After a long and dirty journey I emerged from my Intermediate carriage (the Club strains my resources severely and I have no money to waste on First-Class travelling and luxury) to find the Reverend Robert Alexander awaiting me on the platform.

I like shaking hands with Rob.

He shakes *hands*.

He does not lay a cold dead fish in one's palm nor a sorrowful pound of sausages.

I judge a stranger by his face first, by his handshake next, and then by his voice and carriage—but I could never really take to, nor admire, a man with a limp, cold handshake.

I never trusted Sir Arthur Arbur—solely by reason of his lifeless, offensive, flabby handshake—and when he went to jail for embezzlement and mean swindling I remembered it.

But I am wandering as usual.

Robert's face is leonine; it is brave, open, strong, and true, and not lacking in sweetness, romanticism, and sympathy; his handshake is a grip; his voice is low and clear and honest; his carriage is that of an athlete, a man, a busy forceful worker.

At his bungalow I lunched with him and Rutterson, that splendid doctor and devoted heroic Missionary—without washing the thick dust and grime from my face—and then changed into the dirty cotton suit, the greasy battered *topi*, and the shameful boots. I wore neither shirt nor socks—and looked a "mean white," a European tramp to the life.

"No. I'll go alone," said I to Robert—for I judged that in this case he would have rendered my errand fruitless by his mere presence.

"Well—you know best," said he, and sighed.

"You can't miss him. This wretched track, miscalled a road, leads to the ford, and you'll find him under the palms, close beside it—looking like a *fakir* in trousers. . . ."

With a bottle of soda-water, well frozen and reposing in a metal tumbler, in one capacious pocket and my pint of cognac in the other, I set forth—to beat the Devil with his own weapons if I could.

Truly, though vaguely, as I believe in "somehow good" and the ultimate triumph of Right and Truth, I *know*—and I grieve to know—that tract and prayer and exhortation are as efficacious against Drink as are arrows, spears, and swords against the quick-firing rifle and machine-gun.

I speak a terrible heresy, I know.

But I speak the terrible truth also.

When the bow-and-arrow beats the rifle, the text-and-prayer will beat the bottle.

I have sought out dipsomaniacs and I have lived with drunkards. I have wrestled with sots—and I failed when I attempted to reclaim them with mere words.

It cannot be done, and he who tries is as one who beats the air.

Words *versus* acts, habits, character, craving!

Pebbles versus Armour.

David and Goliath? Yes, *David* killed Goliath with a pebble. But I am not David—and neither are you, my friend.

I find I cannot kill armoured giants with pebbles from the brook. I cannot kill them with anything. But I can use their own great spears to trip them up—and with my puny hands bind them and hamper and hinder them for just a little space—until other weapons and influences can be brought to bear. . . .

He was sitting with his back against a palm, and I saw at a glance that there was not much to be done for him in this world. No, Rob, I could *not* take him for a "*fakir* in trousers." No native ever sits as he sat—with extended legs comfortably crossed, and folded arms. This was patently an Englishman.

Moreover he was singing—in excellent tune and gentlemanly accent, the highly unepiscopal song, written by John Still, Bishop of Bath and Wells, in 1600 or so:

Though I go bare, take ye no care
I nothing am a cold;
I stuff my (*hic*) skin so full within
Of jolly good ale and old.
Back and side go bare, go bare;
Both foot and hand go cold
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or old. . . .

"How does it (*hig*) go—I mean go (*hic*):

“I love no roast but a nut-brown toast,
And a crab laid in the fire;
A little bread shall do me stead;
Much bread I (*hic*) not desire.
No frost nor snow, no wind, I trow,
Can hurt me if I wold;
I am so wrapped and thoroughly happed
Of jolly good ale and old.
Back and side go bare, go bare.
And . . .

so the poor dog had none, the drunken little beast. Like me—I mean *I* have none, that is” he corrected as I slouched up.

“Want a letter in(*hic*)dited, I mean indi(*hic*)ted, that is to say (*hic*) drafted?” he inquired, and added: “I am a little *draughted* myself, but I’ll write you a letter in English, French, German, Italian, Latin, Greek, Hindustani, Persian, or Pushtu for the price of a bottle of toddy neverthe-*hic*-less.”

“Thanks, no,” I answered. “I can write my own letters in all those languages myself, and in one more—Spanish—if you’d like to communicate with any Señorita in old Madrid. . . . No. I came to crave the hospitality of your patch of shade and to quench my thirst, for I am a weary and

“My Clay with long oblivion is gone dry;
But fill me with the old familiar Juice,
Methinks I might recover by and by. . . .”

As I spoke this sorry stuff, his filmy eyes opened wider and seemed to clear, he started, half extended his filthy hand, and sat open-mouthed staring in astonishment.

When I finished he said, with a gasp that was almost a sob:

“A gentleman! Poor, poor devil! My poor, dear devil! Perhaps a brother Oxonian?” and seized my hand, pressing and patting it—while a maudlin tear trickled down his dirty face.

“Thrice welcome! Most, most welcome! But, alas! my (*hic*)hos—hos(*hic*)—hospit(*hic*)ality is limited to this green roof and umbrageous gloom. I cannot offer you Falernian—nor even toddy. The river is near—but I am told that water is not a palatable beverage! Thou mayst smell my boll, dear brother,” and here the creature produced a dirty, sour-smelling bottle that had contained his toddy—“but not a drop remains for thee.”

"I pay my footing, friend," said I, "and am in better case. Pour a libation to the gods who brought us together," and I opened my still-cold soda, poured a stiff "peg" into the metal tumbler, and diluted it with soda and restraint.

"Toddy is better than water and potato-spirit is better than toddy," said my victim—"at least, it makes you drunk quicker. 'I thank thee, Roderick, for the—booze.'

" 'And much as Wine has play'd the Infidel
And robbed me of my Robe of Honour—well,
I often wonder what the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the Goods they sell.'

Wassail! Drink Hail! Skald! and—er—chin-chin," and he drank.

Apparently my quotation had started the worthy Omar in his drink-sodden brain, for he gave me my fill of him. . . .

He drank, drained the vessel, looked at me and—burst into tears.

"*Cognac!*" he whimpered. "*Cognac!* Oh, God I thank thee! *Cognac!*" and he sobbed like a child. "An iced brandy-and-soda! I see Club lawns and fair women——"

Presently he mastered his emotion sufficiently to say:

"Beloved Vagabond! Angel in disguise! Have I had—er—my share? I mean—do you mean to give me another little taste? . . . See—I will enter into a bond to be your slave, body and mind and soul, if you will give me more. I will write for you, translate for you—sing for you—do anything, any crime, for you, if you will give me more, if you will give me a modi(*hic*)um —a—mod(*hic*)icum—a (*hic*)modicum, daily—I am your shadow and slave and dog. . . . Dear God! *Cognac!*—after years of toddy and dreadful bazaar-poison! Cognac! . . . From a tramp by the roadside! . . . Speak—am I having a new and glorious kind of D.T.? Am I mad, or dead, or drunk, or savouring mellow, aged Cognac? . . . Might I inhale the ambrosial odour of your nec(*hic*)tar your (*hic*) nectar from the flask itself? . . . I swear I will not steal any—only breathe the divine essence into my very soul. Or may I have the cork, a little minute. Give me the cork!—Don't trust me with the flask! No —for I

"Have drowned my Honour in a shallow Cup
And sold my Reputation for a Song,

I should rob my benefactor. I—who was a gentleman and am—oh, God! . . .” and he wept anew.

“You shall have more,” said I, and the poor creature wrung my hand.

He seemed to grow more sober as the brandy took effect.

“Would you think me rude if I suggested that it is a true sin and real crime to adult(*hic*)erate that nectar of the Gods? May I have your second princely gift unspoiled, unspotted, undiluted, and—er—neat in short? I have had an iced (*hic*) brandy-and-soda this blessed wondrous day—may I have a liqueur? A liqueur! Old Brandy! I should then like a third boon—speedy death!”

I handed him a small measure of neat brandy.

“Would that I could give you in return, mine eyes—my soul—nay—something valuable,” and he sipped the costly stuff and babbled, declaiming more of the philosophy of the Persian whose cheap shallow cynicism passes for wisdom and knowledge with “decadent” boys and sin-weary men.

“Wine!” he mumbled, “Wine! Oh, I live, I live, I am in Heaven! I am a God! Wine! . . .

“Thank God for Wine.

> “Come fill the Cup and in the Fire of Spring
> The Winter garment of Repentance fling:
> The Bird of Time has but a little way
> To fly—and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing!

Good ol’ Bird. Best ol’ Bird I’ve met since I went under! . . . Fill the Cup! . . . What can dissolve the strands that bind the soaring soul to earth, like Wine? What can wash away the Past and gild the rosy Now, like Wine? Fill the Cup!

> “Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears
> To-day of past regrets and future Fears.
> To-morrow? Why to-morrow I myself may be
> With Yesterday’s seven thousand years.”

This quatrain, with which FitzGerald takes liberties—beautiful liberties, the poor soul declaimed in faultless Persian, and then burst forth again in English with a torrent of hideous blasphemy which I have neither the power nor the desire to repeat.

"God sent us Wine," said I, "and *friends*, let us be thankful to God for those other things—and hope for more."

This changed the current of his thought and set him off again in praise of his Enemy.

"Wine! Friends! Yes. Thank God for them. I thank Him for thee and thy gifts, dear stranger. Drink!

> "Oh, make the most of what we yet may spend
> Before we too into the Dust descend;
> Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie,
> Sans Wine, sans song, sans singer, and—sans End.

Friends! Dear Friends! Shamed! Lost! Gone!

> "Lo! Some we loved, the loveliest and the best
> That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest
> Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
> And one by one crept silently to Rest.

Have *you* crept silently to rest, Perdita? Dresda? Sylvia? Sibyl? *Princess?* I thought my love for you was deep, but I—was never deep in anything but Wine. Gone! All gone!

> "And we that now make merry in the Room
> They left, and Summer dresses in new Bloom,
> Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
> Descend, ourselves to make a Couch—for whom?

In dry thirsty earth! The sandy, friable, dusty, thirsty earth of India," and here the wretch wept afresh.

"It is not fair!" he sobbed, "I never had a chance! Did I ask God for the poor, weak, drunken gentleman he gave me as father? I was *born* drunk! Why? Is it just, O God?

> "What, without asking, hither hurried, whence?
> And, without asking, whither hurried hence?
> Another and another Cup to drown
> The memory of this Impertinence!

Not fair! Not fair! But God has given Wine. Friend! give me a little more. I would give you my very life for it—if we could barter so. . . ."

I gave him more, he babbled more—and anon he slept.

I hoped he might have some other poet on the brain when he awoke, and meanwhile I studied this ruin of a man. . . .

Neither filth nor straggling beard, neither pimply blotches nor lines of dissipation and illness, could wholly hide the fact that it was the face of a handsome man, a man of breeding and refinement. The forehead was fine, the eyebrows arched, the lashes long, the nose thin and high-bridged, the mouth small. But congested capillaries, swollen cheeks, and blear-eyes completed the appearance of destruction begun by dirt, neglect, and the marks of intemperance and illness. The hands were small and shapely, the fingers long, the nails filbert—the hands of a man who had never worked, nor, for a long time, washed.

Beneath the ragged filthy coat, the chest showed that of a skeleton, parchment covered.

And this thing, this wreck, this refuse, had trodden the quadrangles of Oxford, was a scholar, had belonged to good clubs, had been that fine thing —an English gentleman!

I am no apprentice to the vile trade of politician, I am in deep ignorance, thank God, of the mysteries of High Affairs of State, and therefore I forbear to shriek about one small stone in the Temple of Politics, realizing that to tamper with it may be to dislodge that which may bring down the whole wretched edifice and crush the innocent luckless millions beneath. But from the utmost depths of my soul do I wish that Governments could make alcohol as difficult of access, in this country at any rate, as is cocaine—or any other deadly devilish drug! . . .

I pondered "Opium and Abkari" once again. . . .

Presently my remains of a man awoke, shivered, spat, with apologies, and asked me who the devil I might be and whether I wanted a letter written.

When he heard my voice he remembered me and poured blessings on my head. Was there any possible service he could render me in return for which I would give him more of that ichor of the gods, that divine ambrosia, my old brandy? Where on earth had I contrived to steal it? Could he possibly steal any?

"I could take you where you could get it daily," said I.

"Come on, Ganymede," he replied, and instantly staggered to his feet and swayed, mouthing:—

“Come let us go while we are in our prime
And take the harmless folly of the time!
We shall grow old apace, and die
Before we know our liberty.
Our life is short, and our days run
As fast away as does the sun.
And, as a vapour or a drop of rain,
Once lost, can ne’er be found again,
So when you or I are made
A fable, song, or fleeting shade,
All love, all liking, all delight
Lies drowned with us in endless—*hic*—Old—Brandy—
Then while time serves, and we are but decaying
Come, my Corinna, come let’s go a-maying
In the—er—paradise of pubs whence you came straying.

He! he! with that divine liqueur!” . . . and collapsed.

A native, of the servant class, turned from the track and approached.

Without salaam or salutation he squatted on his heels, flung a half-*anna* at the feet of the drunkard, and said, “Adwarnce mangta. Hamara Sahib pay cut karinga.”

“Want an advance and your pay to be cut do you, good youth?” replied the server of servants. “Thou too wouldst take toll of the future and live the day before it dawns? Then produce the other half-*anna*.”

“I need no postage-stamps—and paper is cheap,” grumbled the man. “Write—or I take my custom elsewhere.”

“Take it! . . . But no—I must have toddy this night or Hell’s gates close—and I within! Give me the other half-*anna* brother. The writing is good and the words eloquent.”

With a contemptuous cluck the man flung down another quarter-*anna*.

“Write quickly, Feringhi,” said he.

My fingers itched and the Old Adam rose in my unregenerate soul.

“Nay, brother—with nine *pies* I cannot buy my bottle of toddy! What is another *pice*, to *you*? Another little *pice*, brother, or I cannot write.”

The fellow spat. “Well do they call thee ‘the white *fakir*,’ ” said he. “Thou canst *beg*—if nothing else.”

Then he gathered up the copper coins and produced a nickel *anna*, equivalent to one penny. This he kept in his hand, remarking:

"Good. Now write that I desire five rupees advance, and will return the same in three months by receiving eighteen rupees instead of twenty for two months and then nineteen on the third pay-day. Make it clear, or you lose my custom and that of my caste-fellows in Shirinpur—and we are many."

My poor friend drew an ancient office-file cover from beneath him and took a small medicine-bottle containing ink, and an invalid quill-pen, from a hole behind him.

Opening the file-cover he disclosed a little very cheap stationery and a scrap of blotting-paper of callous appearance.

He wrote awhile and then handed to me, with a smile, the following letter—which I have, and shall keep, *in memoriam*.

> "Honoured Master and Arbiter of my Destiny,
>
> "If I may with great humility and diffidence dare to encroach upon your sacred time and noble energies, I would beseech you to read this petition from the dust of your feet.
>
> "Twelve times within the year, of your beneficence, you enrich me with a score of silver rupees—and the gracious charity is stamped upon my grateful heart.
>
> "Master! Next month give me but eighteen and the next but eighteen and the next but nineteen, I humbly pray and beg.
>
> "But that I may not presume to lessen your munificence, give me five to-day, or I am undone.
>
> "Master, I am your servant and my fate is in your hands.
>
> "This is the prayer to his Lord of the Slave.
>
> "Buldoo, *Butler*."

A good pennyworth I thought it—and likely to cause an opening of the eyes and mouth of its recipient.

It was placed in an envelope, addressed to Jan Ismeet, Sahib, by request, this appearing as John Smith, Esquire, and handed to the servant.

That person snatched it, arose, and strode away without a word.

“Hi! My *anna*! My *anna*!” screamed the poor scribe, and again scrambled to his feet and stood swaying, clutching at the air, grimacing—and, as the man hurried on—weeping.

The rascal knew the physical condition of the letter-writer, as well as his social status.

Who gives *annas* to dying dogs?

I never took a finer kick when playing Rugger with high hopes of my “International”—and I regretted that my foot was bare of its slopping shoes—by the time I had reached my fleeing scoundrel.

When I had exhorted him for the briefest space of time and he had returned, laid his badge-adorned *puggri* at the feet of the scribe, as well as a rupee, and with tear-streaming face apologized with eloquence, I bade him go—letterless.

I really lose my temper and see red about once a year.

“Dear friend!” quoth my sobbing protégé, “this coin shall go in a whole bottle of the finest bazaar-brandy and sixpence out. Of that brandy you shall have true half. The six *annas* shall buy six bottles of toddy and they shall ferment awhile. . . . No. . . . Four bottles of toddy and a two-*anna* glass bangle for my Dulcinea—known unto men as Sitabai Dhobiani. . . .”

He babbled incoherently and spouted verse in ancient and modern tongues. . . .

The sun sank towards the horizon, shining level in our faces. Cows and buffaloes wandered slowly homewards, urged by strange cries from their almost equally bovine herds. Crows and flying-foxes strung out across the evening sky toward the city and its gardens. My friend gathered up the implements of his trade and prepared to totter away.

“Alas! that I cannot ask you home to worthy bed and board,” said he. “My bed is a foul *charpoy* and I—er—don’t think I ever eat. But if you are homeless—there is a partially effective roof, and beneath it we can drink the brandy till Morpheus comes at Bacchus’ call and lays us happy on the floor wheredown we sit. . . . There are no chairs, I fear. . . . My Dulcinea will serve us. . . .”

“A bargain,” said I. “See—I will come home with you to-day and you shall come with me to-morrow.”

He eyed me askance.

"Do you live here, then? Why have we never met?" he asked.

"No. I don't live here—but if you will come with me to my home, you shall be my honoured guest awhile."

"Your Home!" he screamed.

He tore his arm from my grip with unexpected force and turned on me with blazing eyes.

"A home! . . . A dog's home! . . . A Home with a capital 'H'! . . . A damned almshouse! . . . And I shall be detained, prayed over, and preached at! . . . Spy and impudent meddler! . . . Canting, mealy-mouthed Missionary! . . . Humbug! Liar! . . . But no! *The brandy!* Who in God's name are you, and what are you? Dirty, and low, as I! A cultured gentleman! Offering me —beautiful brandy—and a *home*! Oh I am drunk, indeed," and the tears trickled down his filthy face again.

"Look you," said I. "I am a Failure—like you. I love liquor—as you do. I can take you where you shall have rest, peace—and this same brandy. Where you shall lie and read—read what you like—and rest till you are stronger. Then you shall work—more worthily—with your pen—and repay me. Come *now*—I promise you some of this brandy daily."

"Do you swear this is true? Do you swear you will not entrap me? Do you solemnly *swear* by God, that you will not shut me up in a bare, dull room and preach at me, tell me what I am, and what I already know—and cut me off from liquor—plunge me, living, into Hell! . . . Do you *swear* it?"

"No," I replied. "I do not swear it. I say it. Look in my eyes"—and I fixed a steady hypnotic stare on him—"and listen. I will befriend and help you. You shall be free and happy—and you shall have brandy."

"I believe you, dear friend," he replied tremulously, "I will come. . . . But if you cheat me and shut me up—Oh, my God! I'll die and haunt you. . . . Merciful Heaven. I have been in *gaol*. In gaol for a month—without liquor. Without liquor, man! Oh, I have been in Hell. *You* would not fling a living quivering soul into Hell? . . . No. No. . . . You gave me noblest brandy! I will go with you. Yes! . . ."

"Come now," said I, "come to the railway station."

"No," he answered. "No. My manuscript and—er—poor Dulcinea. The one soul who does not *pity* me! . . . No. Not now. . . ."

And we staggered on towards the outskirts of the town and lurched through the bazaar—jeered at, insulted, mocked by human animals as we

slunk along.

I think I have never seen a viler habitation than that we reached, after penetrating bazaars and slums each more appalling than the last—places where surely nothing in the way of draining or scavenging could have been done for centuries.

I was sick even before we splashed through the muddy sea into the den, surrounded by the lairs of tethered cattle, donkeys, and other domestic beasts, that this Englishman called "home."

It consisted of four filthy smoke-blackened windowless walls; a sagging broken roof of rags, thatch, corrugated iron, and pieces of tin; a mud floor, and a doorless doorway. Its furniture was a decrepit *charpoy*, or low bed-frame laced across with coco-nut-fibre rope, covered with a filthy patchwork rag, and nothing else except a couple of dirty, battered, cooking vessels.

Dulcinea proved to be a starved-looking miserable wretch, clad in one scant garment, the red cotton *sari* of a widow. Apparently she went abroad all day and returned at night with a few coppers earned by ten hours' hard labour, immersed—to her waist—in cold water, for a washerman. On this and what my friend got by letter-writing they existed.

Evidently, to the poor wretched drudge, the Englishman was a hero, a god, a master to serve, cherish, and worship.

I gave her money and bade her get the food she loved for herself, and anything that her lord would be likely to eat. Then having procured water I left my flask and cup with that individual, and, guided by an infant prodigy of impudence and cunning, made my way to the Sudder Bazaar and the European shops.

There I procured tins of essence of chicken, potted meats, biscuits, and a very decent brand of champagne, and returned.

In that foul, poisonous hole, we feasted and drank, and I entirely won the confidence and trust of the derelict—whose real name I found to be Austin Delaroche Tallant, and last *alias*, William Jones.

In that foul, poisonous hole I slept—or tried to—and next morning left it with my willing booty, the body of Austin Tallant.

The manuscript he brought, and Dulcinea he left—modestly provided for by arrangement with Robert Alexander.

We shall see what Father Gregory and Dr. Foy can do for him, poor soul!
. . . .

We have seen.

CHAPTER V

A FAILURE.—THE FUTILITARIAN

My thoughts hold mortal strife;
I do detest my life,
And with lamenting cries
Peace to my soul to bring
Oft call that Prince which here doth monarchise:
But he grim-grinning King,
Who caitiffs scorns, and doth the blest surprise,
Late having decked with Beauty's rose his tomb,
Disdains to crop a weed and will not come.

"If it will give you the slightest comfort, my son, tell me by all means," replied Father Gregory to the earnest appeal of Mr. Henry Hoalke that he would listen to the tale of the cruel misfortunes that had reduced him, a gentleman of position, to the indignity of being a permanent free-list member of the Chotapettah Club, or rather an *almost*-continuously free guest.

"I feel I must tell you, Father, that you may pity but not despise me," said Hoalke.

"Well, let us walk under the trees, then—it will be easier for you thus. . . . But I beg of you to be quite certain that you really want to confide in me, and will not regret it afterward. I hear no confessions as a priest, but if I can help, comfort, or advise as a man,—a Failure and a Sinner,—why, it's all I'm good for, my son. . . ."

"Let me pour it out, Father," replied the other. "Barronby says I've a dirty little soul, and it will cleanse it perhaps—and I feel cleaner and better when I am talking to you—as we all do—though I bitterly hate religion and the religious. . . . Religion! . . . Religion! . . . Ha! Religious parents began me, and drink finished me. Of the two the latter did me the more good. Yes, I had the advantage of growing up in a professionally pious and 'truly Christian' household—in which all happiness was sin and beauty wantonness. . . ."

"Oh, don't speak bitterly and unkindly of a good Christian home, my son, however narrow it may have been," urged Father Gregory.

“Bitterly! Unkindly!” replied Hoalke, “Why I can hardly bear to speak of it at all. I was tortured there body and mind. . . . I was starved physically and mentally, and I was thrashed to make me love the dear Lord Jesus more. . . . I was brought up on the stony, joyless, ugly ‘literature,’ beloved of the Elect, on beastly tracts and Sunday pious prints about Hell and Damnation, volumes of sermons by dead Divines who seemed to labour to prove that of all cunning, petty, and treacherous gods, theirs was the most discreditable. . . . Truly Man made God in his own image. . . . Yes, when my young soul was yearning and pining for the Beautiful and the Joyous, it was given prize Temperance Essays, the most intemperate and ineffectual of writings, and the sort of appalling and depressing trash that is given to poor little prigs for success in Band-of-Hope spelling-bees or for regularity at Sunday school. . . .

“I remember to this day with what fervent zeal my good and pious mother flogged me for bringing home *Andersen’s Fairy Tales* from the school library and proposing to read that profane work. I also remember the two days’ starvation inflicted upon me for asking if I might borrow a copy of the *Boy’s Own Paper*, from the same source. . . . Yes, it was a good Christian home—and it pretty effectually ruined me. It made me the sly, untruthful, cunning knave I am. . . . They preached that God is Love—and it was the very home of Hate.

“How they hated anything light and bright and beautiful! I suppose it was a kind of reproach. . . . My father would have flung me out into the gutter to starve, and glad of the excuse, if I had been known to enter a theatre before I was of age, and would have refused me admission to the house if I had done so afterwards. . . . My pious and religious father! . . . Curse him!”

“Oh, hush, my son,” interposed Father Gregory. “Remember he was your father.”

“I do—and I hate his memory as bitterly as I hated him,” was the reply.

Mr. Henry Hoalke seemed to foam at the mouth.

Father Gregory held his peace.

This was not the time for speech, and Father Gregory’s silences were apt to be very eloquent.

“And how I hated him! When I was eighteen years of age he assaulted me with his walking-stick for coming home, from a neighbour’s house, smelling of cigarette-smoke, which he was pleased to term ‘fumes from the

Pit'! . . . He darkened my life and made this world the Hell he was so fond of describing from the deal pulpit of his tin chapel. He turned the milk of human kindness to vinegar within me for ever.

"I cannot remember a single pleasure or relaxation that was not surreptitious. . . . I never had a friend, I never spoke to a girl, and I never had a non-religious book, save my text-books. . . . I was not allowed to go out of the house after tea—even on the beautiful summer evenings that filled my starved soul with longings and yearnings for beauty, for love, for joy. . . . I don't believe I have ever had a cricket-bat or tennis-racket in my hands, and I have certainly never kicked a football. . . . Until I drew my first income as an adult, I never spent a penny. . . . He made me a hypocrite, a liar, an envious stunted wretch, a morose misanthrope, before I was a man. . . . He made me a shy, nervous lout, and a clumsy, cultureless prig—bound to come to grief. . . . But there was one good result, if it were good—narrow, close concentration, and in sheer desperate boredom I worked like a horse—or rather like an ass, and won scholarship after scholarship—which the God-fearing pious man appropriated to his own uses—keeping me a skinny, ragged scarecrow.

"Yes, he took every penny of my scholarship money on which he could lay hands, and I, a great overgrown boy, some five feet in height, would slink down the road dressed in the clothes I had worn when eighteen inches shorter. . . . Before those garments became impossible I was going about blushing and quivering in shame and agony of soul—with my sleeves at my elbows, my trousers six inches from my gaping slopping boots, my coat unbuttonable by the strongest hands, and my skinny calves showing above white cotton socks. . . . On the Sabbath, I wore a bowler hat that had been my father's, and stockings that had been my mother's—by way of Sunday clothes—for 'Sunday clothes' was a part of the good man's ritual and religion. 'Father,' I would say to him, in desperation and such misery and fear of ridicule as no adult could suffer, the boys in the street point and jeer and laugh at me. They follow me along and call 'Guy Fawkes' after me. They ask passers-by to give them money for their Guy. Decent people look and hide a smile—and turn to look again when they have passed. At school . . .' and the loving Christian parent would reply:

" 'Haven't I thrashed that sinful pride out of your wretched carcase *yet*, Henry? Get me the cane. . . . Now go to your room fasting till Sunday, and think of the soul that dieth not, instead of considering the poor body that perisheth. Oh, take no thought for the morrow, wherewith ye shall be clothed

. . .’ and I would go to my room, fall on my knees and pray God to strike him dead and smite his soul to Hell. . . .”

Father Gregory slipped his arm through that of Hoalke and patted it soothingly and sympathetically.

“Yes—he was very fond of the fasting punishment as an adjunct to the corporal. It saved money, and the good man was a great saver. Why, when at last I was free and starting for India, he presented me with a bill for all I had cost him from the hour of my birth—and demanded that I should monthly send him a moiety of my pay until it was discharged—some hundreds of pounds—and I don’t suppose I cost him five pounds a year all my life, apart from the scholarship money he had stolen. . . . I promised and, as my boat left the docks, I sat me down and wrote him a letter telling him exactly what I thought of him. I’d like to have been present when he received it—the old devil! . . . I made it tolerably clear to the gentle preacher that all he’d ever get from me was my bitter curse. . . .

“And then the unspeakable joy of freedom! The revulsion of feeling and the determination to make up for lost time! . . . Talk of Sindbad the Sailor! . . . It is a wonder the swing of the pendulum did not fling me headlong into the Pit at once—instead of a year later.

“The blessed freedom! . . . I had begun life a quarter of a century after my contemporaries—and so cruelly handicapped. . . . Our wretched street and my text-books were all my world, and all I knew of the world. . . . Think of it—I had never spoken to a woman, had never tasted alcohol, never seen a good picture, never heard good music, never read a real book. . . . I had been to the theatre once, during my last year, with a stolen shilling of my own pay, and I had there cried ‘If this be the “ante-chamber of Hell” let me get quickly to Hell itself,’ as I sat drunk with sensations, colour, light, beauty, life, and novelty.

“Think of the education I had had! Never was boy worse ‘educated’ than I, and rarely did boy win more prizes showing how excellent his education was! Education—good God!

“What chance had I in a place like India? What chance would a toddling babe have, if taken straight from a nursery to the middle of Piccadilly Circus, and told that it was a free agent and might go whither it would and do as it pleased? . . .

“A year after my arrival at my first station—a fairly large one—I was invited to the annual St. Andrew’s Dinner, always a big function there, and

specially great that year by reason of the presence of a Scottish regiment in the garrison.

"I went, alas!

"Beside my plate, among the wine-glasses, was a tumbler full of some white concoction. I tasted it. Nectar! I had never in my life dreamed of anything so seductive. I finished it ere I had drunk my soup, and told my 'boy' to get me another.

" 'What! Another *punch à la Romaine*,' exclaimed my friend and host. 'You are a stalwart, Hoalke! And I thought you were a teetotaller. I am sure I apologize!' . . .

"I laughed loudly. I had been a teetotaller hitherto, and the smell of beer or spirits had always made me feel sick. Now I knew better! I had lost a quarter of a century—let me now make up for it by seizing every possible opportunity and occasion for pleasure and joy.

"Pleasure and joy! This drink was liquid pleasure and molten joy—and I drained my second glass.

"Then I tasted champagne for the first time, and, after drinking two or three glasses, I wished to rise and impress upon the company my settled conviction that all men who missed a chance of drinking wine were fools.

" 'Oh fools and blind,' I tried to say to them, and my friend, pulling me down replied:

" 'Full and blind are you? Well, you soon will be, anyhow, if you shove quaich-loads of neat whisky on to what you've already got. Good old teetotaller!' . . . and as I struggled with him that I might be allowed to rise and speak, he smote me a cruel and sudden blow beneath the ribs that reduced me to tears as he hissed:

" 'Shut up, you fool! The Commissioner is going to make a speech. . . .'

"The Commissioner of the Division, a distinguished Scot, made his speech, and at a small joke in the middle of it I roared my appreciation and laughed till I wept. My neighbours, eyeing me, grinned tolerantly and replenished my glass, or rather glasses.

"My friend wrestled manfully to keep me from rising until the Commissioner had left the table—but as soon as that official had headed a move to the big ball-room, where the pipers from the regiment were waiting, he abandoned me to my fate and washed his hands of me entirely. . . . After making my way with extreme care and precision of step to the ball-room,

and watching with drunken gravity the gyrations of an expert in the art of sword-dancing, I returned to the dining-room, procured two table-knives, and commenced to practise the steps *coram publico*, and to establish an opposition show to that of the soldier.

"I was quickly surrounded by a delighted and applauding crowd of revellers, to whom I explained that though, by the mercy of God, I was not a Scotsman, I certainly *could* do a sword-dance as well as any sandy-haired, ginger-whiskers among them, and was prepared to fight any man who denied it.

"I remember their howls of glee—for hitherto I had been a silly solemn prig and very unpopular in the station—when I sat me down to weep over a sense of defeat and failure, after attempting to kick with both feet at once—and the grinning face of a huge Scot of the regiment who assured me that all I needed was a few more quaichs o' whusky, and then I'd be able to fight anybody from the Commissioner downwards.

"I had them—and, the next thing I can recollect of my follies of that fatal evening, is crawling on hands and knees towards the Commissioner, a very tall, thin, pompous man, who stood in the middle of the great room watching the Highland dancers, and sipping from his glass.

"It had struck my fuddled mind that it would be infinitely amusing and gratifying to serve him as I had myself so often been served when the butt of the cheap school I had attended as a boy—and I proclaimed my intention.

"A dozen eager hands urged me on, utter strangers patted my horizontal back as I went on all fours, bade me be brave, and fled, stuffing handkerchiefs into their mouths, to double up in corners or fall gasping with laughter into long chairs in the verandah. Drunk as I was, I can see every detail of that scene with the utmost clearness—the unconscious Commissioner; the smiles or looks of wonderment of those who, ignorant of my purpose, watched me creeping on hands and knees; the purple-faced contortionists in my rear or in the verandah, watching my course from afar through distant doorways; the open-mouthed servants who should have been hurrying to and fro with drinks and cheroot-trays; the staring bulge-cheeked pipers. . . . And then a hush seemed to fall upon the assembly, in spite of the skirling pipes, as I reached the still unconscious Commissioner, swung back my straightened arm, and struck him hard, full, and true, across the backs of the knees—bringing him down instantly, clean as though shot through the head.

"As he fell backwards over me, I rose, ensuring that his head should be the first part of his person to touch the ground.

"His cranium duly smote the parquet floor with a resounding thump, and I, rising, joined the dancers and resumed my studies and practice of the art of doing a reel or fling.

"The Commissioner, it appears, was stunned for a moment—just recovering his wits as the General rushed up to him with extended arms crying:

" 'My *dear* Sir Angus, I never' . . . only to receive a tremendous smack in the eye from the incensed and pugnacious Sir Angus and an invitation to come outside and learn manners! . . .

"I was not dismissed *for* that, but undoubtedly I was dismissed on account of that—and no wonder. Sir Angus MacScott was a very vindictive man, and the most pompous official in India—and that is saying something.

"Doubtless my judges were influenced and my enemies helped, by the fact that I crawled half-way home that night—or rather morning—and fell asleep on a pile of stones by the wayside right in front of the Kutcherry—and was there seen in the morning by the Collector and all the office babus, a helpless log.

"On being dismissed I went to a distant part of India to start afresh——"

"You should have gone Home, my son," interrupted Father Gregory. "India is no place for an Englishman to 'go under' in."

"You are right, Father," replied Hoalke, "but I didn't realize it then. . . . Moreover I was loth to go back a 'returned empty,' a failure, and a ruined waster—and I was fully determined to retrieve the situation and succeed in some other sphere. . . . Like most other educated fiascos and failures, I turned at once to pedagogy for a living, and, with no great difficulty, I got a post as Head of a Grammar School for European boys and girls, and settled down to life in a tenth-rate hill-station. . . . I was not in Government Service, of course, and the social drop from Assistant-Collector and Magistrate was considerable. . . . I felt the change a good deal at first, and hated the life.

"It didn't last very long though. The Inspector of European Schools—upon whose good report depended the Government grant, without which the school could not carry on—visited the place, spent a couple of days about the school, and then—when I thought he had left the station—turned up again for a third day, and found the school in some disorder and me . . . very drunk."

Father Gregory murmured his consternation.

“Yes. I was fairly started on the downward path and, though not a drunkard, was frequently drunk. I had a craving for excitement, change, jollity—dissipation if you will—and everything that was the exact opposite of all that I had experienced for nearly a quarter of a century in England. I was not vicious nor really bad—but I was the released spring, the unchained prisoner, the swinging pendulum. . . . I felt I must have gaiety, freedom, fun, colour, beauty, frivolity, relaxation—dissipation, as I say, if you will. . . . Hence the relaxation, after the strain of the two days’ inspection, was a foolish and unwonted indulgence in whisky for breakfast, more after, and a state of dishevelled and noisy incoherence when the Inspector arrived. . . . I believe I called him a spy and a Judas, and endeavoured to eject him. . . .”

“Were you discharged, my poor friend?” inquired the patient listener to this tale of woe.

“I didn’t wait to be,” was the reply. “I hurriedly sent in my resignation and bolted. . . . Then followed weeks of waiting, advertising, searching for work, and general loafing. Also weeks of increasing embarrassment, shabbiness, and deterioration. . . . At last I got a post, but only as junior assistant, in a bigger and better school of the same type, and found myself on the social level of my Eurasian and Goanese colleagues. No great fall for a man brought up as I had been, but an unfathomable drop for an I.C.S. man and member of a fashionable and famous Club.

“At first, after the fright of my long period of waiting for work, and the shock of my realization of my new status, I took myself in hand, clutched at my vanishing ambitions, and determined to climb. But this wholesome frame of mind was short-lived, for I met and married the woman who was to prove the curse, or rather the final curse, of my wretched life. . . . Weary of the eternal and infernal drudgery, thirsting for pleasure, joy, and excitement, I fell an early and easy prey to the Castro girls and their wicked old mother.

“They were a family of a type not unknown in other parts of India—just ‘respectable,’ of indefinable status; not in want, but poor, and with no known and visible means of support. There were seven daughters, ranging in age from about fifteen to twenty-five, and two of them were married.

“They were absolutely immoral girls, in the sense that they were prepared to be so at the price of matrimony—without any question of affection for the purchaser. They all lived together with their mother and the husbands, and the house had an indefinably and vaguely bad name.

“It was a house in which men were not so much drugged and robbed as drugged and married. The girls were for sale to anybody who could pay the price—a wedding ring. Of the married daughters perhaps the less said the better. There are such families in India—and not wholly confined to that particular stratum of society. . . .”

“And you married one of these poor girls? Oh, I hope you took her out of such surroundings and treated her very kindly?” said Father Gregory.

“One of them married *me*,” replied Hoalke, and he continued, with an ugly grin:

“Kind to her! I have one pleasant memory of her—and that is the recollection of the thrashing I gave her when I left her for ever. . . . Thank God, I have that satisfaction! . . . She was absolutely impossible. . . .”

A look of the deepest distaste for a moment usurped the place of the usual expression of benevolent sweetness on the ascetic face of Father Gregory. He frowned, sighed, and asked:

“How did you come to be intimate with such a family?” adding, “It is usually the woman who is coerced, in my experience of unwilling marriages.”

“Oh, I drifted into acquaintance and was trapped into intimacy,” was the reply. . . . “One evening, as I sat dejected, miserable, and suicidally inclined, in the Gardens of the town, a scented bevy of dusky, powdered, bedizened, giggling girls approached. I saw them to belong to the class there known as ‘blue monkeys’—cheap, flashy, ignorant; European only in dress—but they were pretty, they were happy and bright, they were of the opposite sex, alluring, seductive.

“As they passed me, the nearest caught my eye, and, laughing, flung a rose in my face. I caught it, sprang up, and followed. They were ‘respectable’ as I say, to the extent that while yearning to sell themselves, their price was maintenance for life. This I learnt before long. . . . Introductions are superfluous with that type, and in a few minutes I was a friend of the whole gang, and escorting them round the gardens—to arrive, I discovered, at a pavilion wherein refreshments were procurable.

“From time to time we were joined by counterpart male specimens of the genus, smart, cheap, oleaginous, European only in dress. . . . One of the girls took my fancy more than the rest—she seemed quieter.

“She was—also deeper, slyer, more cunning and unscrupulous. As I loafed along with this gang, I mentally stood aside and looked at myself—

the erstwhile Civilian with his foot on a ladder that leads to titles, position, wealth, honours, and fame, now the companion and equal of mauve-faced, half-bred hussies and vulgar shop-and-clerk Goanese bounders, lounging, shouting, and giggling in a public place. . . . *And enjoying myself*. . . .

"Yes, I was on the down grade.

"Night after night I met these girls, and I soon found myself daily looking forward with eagerness to the moment when I could dismiss my form of young, second-class cads, and rush off to the wretched boarding-house I inhabited, change, and go in search of my 'friends'—the only females I had ever known. . . .

"I always walked beside the quiet one, Veronica, I called her Vera and, later on, just 'V' *tout court*, and soon grew fond of her, or rather of her shapeliness, her great liquid eyes, her allure, her warm, sensuous fragrance, and her quaint tricks and turns of speech. Remember that Woman was a Mystery to me, an unknown wonder, with all the attraction of the mysterious and unknown. . . . I forgot the hard little mouth when I looked at the soft great eye; I forgot the unmaidenly advances, the persistent pumpings as to my pay, prospects, and past, the hints and allusions. . . .

"Before long it was:

" 'Oah, yess! Ai laike you veree veree moch—you are soch a naice gentlimahn. . . . Soch a fonnee mahn! . . . Oah, doan't com with your feece soh neah, your moustache would teekle if you traid to kees me! . . . Oah! You *narty* mahn!' . . . and of course I would try to 'kees' her—and succeed. . . . One night I whispered that I was tired of being one of the gang —would she not come alone on the morrow? She smiled triumphantly and agreed.

"We met and prowled alone, sat under the palms in the moonlight, drove in hired gharries, and went to the marvellous dances affected by her kind, where they perform the *Dee* Alberts, Polka, Highland Schottische, and, with deep gravity, execute endless solemn Lancers, Quadrilles and other 'square' dances.

"At these wretched affairs, I sat glum and jealous as she flirted with queer, lank, smart youths of her tribe, who wore white dress ties with a kind of waistcoatless morning dress.

"So infatuated did I become during my brief madness, that I actually joined a dancing-class held over a shop in the Sudder Bazaar, and solemnly

gyrated and postured to the instructions of a little black ‘terpsichorean tutor’ as he styled himself. . . .

“And yet—I solemnly assure you—during all this time, during all the weeks of this vulgar entanglement and flirtation, I had never the barest, remotest idea or thought of matrimony. Such a notion never for a moment entered my mind. The girl was infinitely beneath me, *me*, formerly of the Indian Civil Service. If ever for a second I gave the matter a thought or looked ahead, there was no such cloud on the horizon of this pleasantness, no such goal or ending to this primrose path of idle dalliance. . . . I was enjoying a flirtation with a rather low-class Goanese girl of doubtful family, to whom my attentions and society were a great honour. . . .” Father Gregory, thorough-bred, seemed to sniff, but he held his peace . . . “and whose company I sought because I was utterly cut off from communion with my equals and shut out from the society of the class to which I had belonged. In her walk of life, to be a full-blooded white from England, of however poor a position, was to be a person of distinction and consequence, and she was as obviously proud of me as her sisters were jealous of her.

“The only other real European I ever encountered in their circle was a dissipated bandsman contemplating desertion from his regiment when it quitted the station. . . . No—I absolutely never so much as dreamed of such a thing as marriage into this family—it would have been unthinkable. . . . I was not in love—the girl being merely a distraction and attraction in a terribly sad, dull, and lonely life—and moreover, I was not in a position to marry if I had been most anxious to do so, and I have a natural and proper horror of finding myself the father of Goanese children whose grandfather was a cook or butler.

“No, if ever I asked myself ‘*Quo vadis?*’ the answer was ‘To the usual end of an idle flirtation—mutual boredom’—and gave the matter no thought whatever. I had a companion to relieve the awful loneliness and misery of my evenings and holidays, and that was all I wanted.

“It wasn’t all the Castro family wanted, however—as I was soon to learn to my cost.

“On several occasions Vera had pressingly invited me to tea at the house—a biggish dilapidated old bungalow close to the bazaar—but I had always shied off.

“Vera, as an amusing and admiring companion, I ardently desired; the Castro gang as acquaintances I did not. Moreover, I had once caught sight of Castro *mère*—and rightly regarded her face as one of Nature’s danger-

signals. She was a really bad woman. No—I shied off from the house as a horse does, by instinct, from something he vaguely suspects and fears, or as a wild animal will from the trap he does not understand but instinctively dislikes and doubts. Not that I actually thought of the house as a trap or connected it in my mind with matrimonial or other danger—I simply did not like the Castro gang and their friends, nor wish to be identified with them. They were vulgar girls, unprincipled, tawdry, bold and predatory; the mother looked an evil hag, and their set was a low one, heartily despised by that of the European shopkeepers, mechanics, and railway employees. They were utterly beneath me in every way . . ." again Father Gregory almost appeared to sniff . . . "and I had no desire to be mixed up with them. . . .

"But, one Sunday, as I sat at my tiffin of eternal curried vegetables and rice, in the dreary, dirty boarding-house to which my poverty condemned me, a note, written on the cheapest of coloured paper, in the most unformed handwriting and spelling, apprised me of the fact that Vera had sprained her ankle and could not meet me for the walk and tea that I had planned.

"However, her mother and sisters would all be out at church and visiting, from about five till rather late—and if I chose to come and see her for a little while she would be all alone and no one would know. Excellent! . . . So long as I had not to meet the gang of them, I should be delighted. The arrangement would save the cost of the tea, as well as giving more opportunity for secluded and private flirtation than that afforded by a public eating-place—a railway refreshment-room, in point of fact. I would go.

"I went.

"Walking boldly into the untidy, dirty, and deserted verandah I cried '*Qui hai*,' and was answered by a call from Vera:

" 'Arlrite. Com in heah. Ai am oll alawn,' and I entered what proved to be the 'drawing-room'—a tawdry hideous place, furnished, or rather crowded, with bamboo, wicker-work, dingy art-muslin, paper-fans, imitation rugs, and trash. . . .

"Vera lay on a cane settee, with her foot on a cushion. I had not seen her before with her hair down, and I realized that she was even prettier and more seductive than I had thought.

"Dressed in white cotton, with a big red sash, red ribbons, and a red flower, she looked as bewitching and attractive a piece of femininity as one could wish to flirt with. . . .

“Within a month I became the husband of a lazy, vicious, dirty, worthless woman, a source of income to her family, and for a time, its sheet-anchor, trump-card, and stepping stone—if you like mixed metaphors—of respectability. They insisted on my living with them, on the principle that one more mouth to feed would make no difference, whereas my income would make a good deal. . . .

“To them I was, in public, ‘our relative, Mr. Henry Hoalke, I.C.S., retired,—Oah, yess, *pukka* Eengleesh from Home of course, certainlee! . . .’

“For a time I bore my fate, insulted, exploited, and robbed; neglected, abused, and even starved; terrorized by ‘Oncle Haree,’ a huge brute, thick set and powerful—presumably some relation, a farrier-serjeant in the native cavalry regiment there, who almost lived in the house.

“And all the while that I was their wretched butt, there was a name-board on the gate with the legend *Mr. Henry Hoalke, I.C.S. (retired)* beside that of Mrs. Castro—and Vera had the impudence and stupidity to hang beneath it a ‘*Not at Home*’ box, with her name on it! . . .

“Before very long, however, I became so wretched in spirit, so feeble in body, so shabby in dress, that I was dismissed from my post—the very parents, shopmen, mechanics, petty clerks, soldiers, and subordinates—protesting against the retention in the school of so miserable and degraded a wreck!

“I drank too—stealing the liquor, bought with my own money, from the cupboard by means of skeleton-keys when the family were out, and frequently being accused, in my presence, to Mother Castro, by the filthy and impudent butler—a creature who had more regard and better treatment than was meted out to me. . . .

“ ‘I regret this step, Hoalke,’ said the Headmaster, a smug and conceited fellow who had never been outside the Presidency in his life, ‘but you really are a disgrace to the school. You are ragged and dirty; you do no work; your pupils defy and insult you to your face; you drink, and your family affairs are the talk of the place. You must leave at the end of the month, and I advise you to bolt without your wife and family. . . .’

“The insolent hound! But he was quite right. All that was wanting was the *means* wherewith to bolt. . . . I had not a farthing. . . . ‘Uncle Harry’ or my wife or the old hag would come to the school on pay-days, meet me at the door, and relieve me of my month’s money forthwith, and before I quitted the premises.

“At first I protested, refused, struggled, and it soon became a comedy(!) that the very boys would assemble to watch—until I was too broken to make any pretence of resistance and would always hand my salary to my wife at the school door, without a word.

“How could I bolt without money? Had it been possible, I should have done it long before. It was all I wanted to do, if I could only get the chance. But I was not strong enough to escape by tramping. I couldn’t face it, and, moreover, I should have been overtaken in an hour or two.

“Well! I begged the Headmaster to keep the fact of my dismissal a profound secret until the day it took effect, for I feared the Castro family; I feared the tongues of the women and the fists of the farrier-serjeant when it was discovered that, instead of a source of income, I was to become a burden upon them.

“On my last day—pay-day—I was in a state of terror, and dreaded the moment when I should have to confess that the money taken from me that day was the last that would ever be paid me at that school, and that I was a pauper, an out-of-work, a discharged failure.

“What should I do? What *could* I do? There was no chance of my getting any work in that place, and, in any other, the school authorities would want my last reference—which would be ‘discharged for incompetence, dirtiness, and drink,’ or something of the kind.

“If only I had the strength to march off and live, by begging, until I could reach some place where I could support myself by clerk-work or manual labour! But that was just what I had not.

“At the door, that evening, as usual on pay-days, waited my wife. She took my money without a word and I slunk off beside her—I in cheap dirty clothes with filthy collar, greasy tie, frayed shirt, and broken boots; she in cheap dirty finery.

“Passing between the cemetery wall and a high cactus hedge, she flung some insult at me that stung me to retort. In a second she had struck me across the face with the handle of her closed parasol. At the blow, all my suppressed rage, resentment, agony of mind and body, my sense of cruel wrong and shame, welled up, overflowed and, sweeping away my cowardice, weakness, and gentleness—left me a fierce madman.

“I returned the blow, sprang upon her, beat her, bore her to the ground, and, I believe, kicked her for some time—and then fled with my money. I

may have left her dead, for I was mad—a case of the *brebis enragé*! I hope I left her dead. . . .”

Father Gregory shuddered. “No, my son, you do not,” said he; “in your heart of hearts you most bitterly regret that you struck the woman.”

“I do not,” was the reply.

“You will, though,” asserted Father Gregory.

“Well, I sprang into the first tonga I encountered, and galloped to the station. By the mercy of God a train was due and I took a ticket to the nearest place on that line. Not till the train was in motion did I breathe freely and cease to think of the huge hands of ‘Oncle Haree,’ the farrier-serjeant—and probably the father of the whole gang.

“I travelled far beyond the next station of course, and alighting at a junction, I hid till the departure of the next train, took a ticket to the next station, and travelled to Bombay under a seat in a first-class compartment.

“I dare say ‘Uncle Harry’ traced me to the first station to which I booked, and would have caught me had I stopped there. As it was I escaped the Castros completely and, please God, for ever. And never again will I speak to a woman. I loathe the whole sex and despise and detest every member of it. . . .”

“And what did you do in Bombay?” asked Father Gregory.

“Drank and sank—sank and drank,” was the reply, “and my life there now seems a terrible nightmare round of infirmary, workhouse, and jail, jail, workhouse and infirmary. One day I begged of Durham in the street—and here I am. . . . I hate his damned charity and wish I could get away. . . .”

“Gratitude is *not* your chief feeling then?” observed Father Gregory.

“Oh, I’m a swine, all-right, Father. . . . I know it. . . . I ought to be eternally and unspeakably grateful to him, I ought to thank him and God daily—but gratitude is not my strong point—neither gratitude nor any other decent feeling. . . . Father, I am a low brute, a beast, a cur—but then I had pious Christian parents—damn them. . . .”

“I must leave you, Hoalke, if you behave and talk like this,” said the old priest quietly, “but you are not going to, are you? . . . We’ll have another talk this evening when you are calmer—and instead of upsetting yourself with the past, we’ll talk about the present and future. . . . Will you meet me under the banyans after dinner? . . . Good-bye till then.”

Hoalke glared at the retreating form of Father Gregory, tore at his beard with both hands, shook his fist, and then, throwing up his arms and turning his contorted face to the blue heavens, he cried with a dry sob:

“Oh God, why can’t I die. . . .”

That evening Hoalke and Father Gregory walked and talked in the moonlight and stood in the shadow beneath the great trees, and that night Henry Hoalke prayed for the first time in twenty years. Yet Father Gregory never preached and never advocated prayer.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN OF SEASONS

Of all the Failures I have ever known, I think I liked none better than Derek Mantin, and pitied none more.

He was a poet, a thorough gentleman, and a good man. Temperate, intellectual, moral, refined, brave, honest, and capable, his great failing, his besetting sin, his ruin, was—Woman.

It seemed to me that he had fallen desperately in love with every woman he had ever met; and had been interested in, and had glanced aside at, every woman he had ever passed.

Yet a less immoral person never lived, and I believe he was absolutely innocent of any sort or kind of wickedness and evil desire.

He was the universal lover.

And he was the honourable, high-principled devout lover—perfect, but that he changed the object of his devotion with incredible rapidity and frequency.

Naturally, he had got into terrible trouble, had been called—in the Press, law-court, market-place, and drawing-room—scoundrel, deceiver, callous betrayer, lady-killer, woman-hunter, jilt, male flirt, false-hearted rogue, and every other opprobrious epithet that can be hurled at him who loves and rides away.

That he had loved honourably, chastely, and ethereally counted not unto him for righteousness, and he had been severely punished by law and by horse-whip more often than one can easily believe.

Poor Mantin! He had been engaged more times than he could remember, he had been prosecuted for breach of promise more times than he cared to remember, and he had been assaulted more times than he dared to remember.

He had truly loved many maidens and honestly yearned to marry them; he had truly loved many married women and honestly yearned to go on platonically admiring them for ever; he had truly loved a widow and honestly yearned to let her marry him—a thing she deeply desired to do. The fact that he was very wealthy—or had been, before he paid so many

"damages"—was doubtless a great danger to him and served to render slippery the steep descent of Avernus.

Yet he had never married a woman nor been married by a woman.

Had he been less honest he would have been infinitely happier, and would have married the first woman with whom, at years of discretion, he fell in love.

But what would have happened then?

No. He was so honest that, when he found he no longer loved, he confessed his state in sorrow, shame, and self-contempt—and withdrew.

"Should a man marry without love, Durham?" he would cry when telling me some episode of the wondrous story of his life—a thing he loved to do—and immediately answer his own question with:

"A thousand times no! . . . A crime! . . . A shameful wicked sin and an intolerable ineffaceable insult to a woman—a cruel wrong, a swindle!"

I confess he baffled me.

He was so well-meaning, so sure he had done the right thing in every case, and the "cases" were legion.

Was a man to blame, he would argue, for falling desperately in love and acting according to the dictates of his pure and honourable passion?

Was he, again, to blame for the fact that his passion died a sudden death and came to a complete and final end?

Should he, once more, attempt to marry a woman towards whom he felt absolutely cold and indifferent—particularly as he knew he would be certain to be deeply and truly in love with another ere long? "A thousand times no."

It seemed to me that if he could have taken any one of the many objects of his adoration to the altar, during the period of his love for her, he would most certainly have done it, and would have jumped at the chance.

But the unfortunate, or fortunate, part of it was that while he loved the lady he rested in blissful certainty that this was *the* passion of his life, the one great and real love of his soul—the genuine mine of gold in which to dig for ever, after prospecting and abandoning many unprofitable veins and scanty lodes.

In the intervals between his loves, he knew himself for the changeful, fickle, inconstant thing he was—and felt thankful on behalf of Every-

woman that he had not married her. No. In love—there had been no time to marry, though the date had often been fixed, for he and she dwelt secure in the reality and permanence, the height and depth of his great and profound passion, and did not rush matters. Out of love—there had been no intention to marry, for he felt he could do the woman he had ceased to love no greater wrong than to marry her. Besides, when not in love he knew that he soon would love another—for awhile.

As I say, he baffled me—and when invited to do it I could not scourge him with reproach and condemnation. He was too transparently honest, pure-minded, and high-souled. A good poet cannot *really* be a bad man.

I suppose it was another form of the manifestation of that terrible thing the Artistic Temperament. Or was it sheer lunacy and madness?

Anyhow, he was an artist and a fine and true poet, though he never published, and he was full of the most beautiful thoughts, fancies, ideas, and ideals.

When, shocked, I said to him, before I realized his innocence:

"You loved married women! And would defend your doing so!" he would reply:

"Certainly! Don't be so narrow and prudish, Durham! Was it my fault that I fell beautifully in love with a beautiful woman? And where was the harm? Surely it is good to *be* loved—and, Good Lord! I know it is good *to* love. . . . When the thing came upon me and I realized it, I would always go straight to her husband and say:

" 'I love your wife! I love her platonically, purely, holily—as I loved my mother—as a Saint loves the Virgin.' Good Heavens, man, are we not *told* to *Love our neighbour as ourself*? . . . The creature!"

It appears that some of the husbands, poor astounded fellows, recommended him to see a brain specialist, some laughed consumedly, some sneered, some complimented him on his taste—and some kicked him out of the house.

Their attitude was the measure of their gentility and fineness.

A few, a very few, understood him and—for a time—thought their wives honoured and fortunate.

But, as in the case of each of the girls he had pursued with matrimonial intent, the passion died down as quickly as it had sprung up, and he announced the fact with candour, with regret, and with shame.

Naturally, bitter humiliation, mortification, jealousy, and rage were the frequent results, and Mantin more than once had it brought forcibly home to him that "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned"—or one who thinks she is scorned.

And when at last he came to me—mortally ill, broken, socially ruined, disgraced, shamed, heavily mulcted, it was a heart bursting with a sense of *injustice and wrong* that he laid bare to my puzzled and astounded sympathy!

Yes, sympathy. I couldn't withhold it. He was so clean, so pure, so delicate of mind, so honourable of purpose—and I thought of the scoundrels who had ruined homes, wrecked lives, thrust weaker vessels beneath the turbid stream to sink—and gone on rejoicing and unassailed. I knew the late, and Honourable, Sir William Pooch, and I know a great Man, with a coat of colour and fine tinsel, with a seat in high places and many suffixes to his name; hedged about with pomp, honour, and much circumstance—who is a Don Juan, a Gay Lothario, a deliberate wallower in filthy sin—unpunished and unreproached. He has killed the souls of women and the happiness of men. I think of him and I think of my poor innocent, well-meaning Man of Seasons—a butterfly broken on the World's wheel—and I wonder.

The poor joyous idealist, the perfect worshipper, the lover of the beautiful, the fine poet. Who is to blame that he was unstable as water; weak as water? It is certain he was also transparent as water, harmless as water, pure and clear and innocent as water.

Poor Derek Mantin!

He was a very profitable paying member of the Club while he lived, and when he died he left every penny that he possessed to me "as a token of my great gratitude and deep affection for my dear friend, the said John Durham, and of my desire to help him in his truly philanthropic work."

Let me hasten to say that, before I found my Club his heir, I loved him and understood him and pitied him quite as much as I did afterwards, and that his death was a real blow to me, a blow but very little softened by the helping gift.

To the very end of his life he was honestly and utterly unable to understand the enormity of his desertions, and when at last he fled to me it was as much to a refuge from opportunity and possibility of sinning as to a shelter wherein he could cower from the storm and hide his diminished head in shame.

His final innocent villainy, which had included a Lady of Quality, and vindictive temper, had been the last straw—or rather the last oak.

It had broken him, and he had hastened to put himself out of further danger and temptation in what later he termed, "Your Eveless Garden of Eden" . . . "Your *houri*-less Paradise" . . . "Your Retreat—where every prospect pleases and only Woman would make me vile. . . ." He was a residential member, and his room was one of the most charming of masculine chambers. It only just missed being effeminate and too dainty and pretty. But it did miss it, for he was a man of sure taste, and had the soul of a gentleman as well as of an artist.

One strange thing about him was his attitude to the women he had loved. He thought of them constantly, reverently, tenderly, and with regret, and he kept their photographs, miniatures, and pictures.

His room must have contained upwards of a hundred portraits of the girls and married women he had loved. At first I thought they were "scalps" and hated him for it, but as I came to know him I discovered that they were anything but trophies to him. Rather were they moral hair-shirts and scourges, and some of them must have been reminders of truly terrible scenes, painful episodes, private chastisements, and public humiliations.

Coarse-minded and coarse-tongued members who had seen them, referred to the collection as "Mantin's Harem," "Mantin's Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty," and "Mantin's Hundred Best Women." Certainly many of them were undeniable and manifest Beauties, some were of ordinary good looks, and one or two were plain, but all had "nice" faces, the faces of gentlewomen of high character. The breach-of-promise actions must have been the work of grasping or revengeful relatives. And there must have been broken hearts. Such sweet and gentle faces, many of them; there were none of the bold and bar-maidenly type.

Mantin was a gentleman and needs must love the highest when he saw it. That was just it—he needs *must* love and he was wholly incapable of loving for long. How the old scoundrel could have fallen away from some of those sweet and beautiful faces I could not fathom.

And what a dogged determination, in every instance, to do what he considered the right thing and to choose the lesser evil! Terrible as was the wrong done by the withdrawal, far more terrible would have been the wrong of matrimony without love, he thought—and he chose the more difficult, dangerous, and humiliating path. Poor Mantin! I can hear him now:

“Yes, Durham!” he would declare, “I loved her as woman was never loved before,” indicating an oil-painting by a modern Master of a beautiful girl, with a gentle high-bred face.

“Yes, I worshipped the very ground that Helen Bannerdale trod—until I met Angela Valmyre and knew I had made a mistake. . . . It was terrible. . . . I was engaged to Helen, and my mother and I were staying at the Bannerdales’ place for the shooting. . . . Then Angela came. . . . The moment my eyes fell on Angela, my heart almost leapt from my body. It wanted to spring to her feet and die. . . . It was Love at first sight, and though I struggled bravely against it I was helpless, powerless—I could *not* avoid loving her better than life itself, and thinking of her by day and dreaming of her by night. . . . Was I to marry my *fiancée*, Helen, while yearning for another woman, while my soul raved over another woman, while my whole being fretted and grieved and cried aloud for another woman—for Angela? . . . I am not a villain, Durham. . . . I confessed the truth to Helen, my *fiancée*, who fainted away, had a terrible interview with her parents, and fled from the house. I was assaulted and beaten by her brother as soon as I was clear of the estate and no longer on their property. . . . I could not retaliate of course. . . . Angela returned my love. This is Angela”—and he showed me perhaps the most beautiful face of the collection, and certainly the weakest.

“Possibly what she must have suffered at my other *fiancée’s* house, when I confessed that I found myself in love with her, may have helped. I believe women love what makes them suffer. Also she pitied me—and women love what they pity! . . . Poor Angela! . . . Durham—I *killed her*!”

“*What?*” I yelled, springing to my feet, under the impression that the fellow was speaking literally, and that I was harbouring another murderer among my Failures.

“I killed her, Durham. . . . Her heart broke when I ceased to love her—and she died. . . . I admit she was anæmic and consumptive—but it was my vile, abominable, unspeakable fickleness that really caused her death. . . . Better that though than marriage with a man who had ceased to love her! I would not do her *that* wrong. . . . Poor beautiful Angela! . . . She would not see me for some time after she left the Bannerdales’, but, at last, pitying my state, for I was mad for sight of her, ill with longing to hear her voice, she allowed me to pay my court to her and we became engaged. . . . A day or two after we were betrothed I saw a photograph in the drawing-room and took it up. Each day the face made a stronger appeal to me. I strove not to

look at it, but it haunted me, and at night I could see it most clearly—flaming against the background of darkness.

"I learnt that it was the portrait of an old school-friend of Angela's, and that she, the original, lived at Biarritz with an invalid mother, and that Angela corresponded with her at rare intervals.

"That night I found Biarritz on the map, I read about Biarritz in the guide-book, I looked up trains to Biarritz.

"I had Biarritz on the brain. I thought of it night and day. . . . When Angela said, 'Where have you been to-day?' I would reply, 'To Biarritz—I mean—er—Ranelagh.'

"At last I knew that I must go to Biarritz or to a lunatic asylum. . . . I must go at once. . . . I went and said farewell to Angela, who was naturally much piqued at my leaving her, caught the Folkestone and Dover Express, had a quick crossing to Calais, and soon found myself at the Gare du Nord. Crossing Paris in a taxi to the Gare d'Orleans, I took my seat in the luxurious Sud Express and endured the night listening to the wheels as they beat out the endless refrain—*Biarritz! Biarritz! Biarritz!*

"At that beautiful place, for a month, I spent the livelong day, regardless of all else, in searching for the original of the photograph. She was not at any of the many hotels I frequented, not among the gay promenaders, golfers, bathers, dancers, not at St. Jean de Luz. . . . I felt, at length, that she could not be in Biarritz. . . . She wasn't. . . . After spending the month searching, searching, searching, I returned to England and learnt casually from Angela that the girl and her mother had removed to Pau. She had been at Pau all the while!

"I had never heard her name even—and I had not told Angela that I went to Biarritz to find her. Why should I? When I found her I might not love her at all—might not even admire nor like her. But her face, the face of the photograph, haunted me, worried me, obsessed me. In time I used to go to visit *it* rather than Angela. I would go to the house when I knew her to be out, and sit and stare at the portrait by the hour.

"At last I could no longer conceal from myself that I had ceased to love Angela and was desperately in love with a face I had never seen in the flesh. Taking my courage in both hands I confessed the terrible truth.

"Angela's people brought an action for breach of promise against me—and if poor Angela suffered through me, I was terribly punished, and I suffered too.

"When all was over I hurried to Pau. On my second day there I saw her—saw her and cried, 'This is the love of my life!' I called at her hotel, using Angela's name, and told her that I loved her madly, devotedly, passionately, and implored her to be my wife. She left the room without a word.

"Next day as I sauntered dejectedly near her hotel, she passed with an elderly woman, wheeled in a bath-chair, another girl, and two men—foreigners.

"She spoke to one of these men and he immediately wheeled about, came up to me, and struck me lightly across the face with his glove. He then presented his card and asked for mine. I gathered that he was the *fiancé* of the girl whom I loved and had, according to him, 'insulted.'

"After lunch the other male companion of my beloved called at my hotel, explained himself as the 'second' of my assailant, and informed me that his principal desired my gore. I gathered that, from their point of view, I had committed an offence for which only my death could atone, had offered an insult that only my heart's best blood could wash out.

"I explained that I had done nothing of the kind, and pointed out that there was nothing insulting about an offer of marriage. My visitor, a Spaniard who spoke perfect English, replied, 'You come straight from being the hero—or rather villain—of a notorious breach-of-promise case and, a week before her wedding to a Spanish nobleman, offer marriage to a lady who has never set eyes on you before in her life—after introducing yourself by using the name of her friend—the woman you have vilely wronged! I hope my principal will kill you. If he fails to, *I* will!'

"Good Heavens! What truculence—and what a mess!

"I explained that I had intended no insult—nothing but an honourable offer of marriage to a woman whom—or whose portrait—I had long and honourably loved. Also that I had never had foil nor pistol in my hand in my life—but that if I had really offended the Spaniard and insulted the lady I was quite ready to be prodded at, or shot at, in atonement.

" 'Had I a second?'

"No, I didn't know a soul in Pau, but I could probably find a pal at Biarritz or St. Jean de Luz—if they'd give me a few days.

"Certainly not. I must accept the services of a Frenchman whom he would bring and introduce to me. . . .

“Well, they stuck me up under a tree with a long-barrelled pistol and told me to fire at the other man when a handkerchief fell. Naturally I was not going to add injury to the ‘insult’ I was alleged to have offered to my lady, so, when the silly handkerchief was dropped, I took a pot at a dicky-bird up in the tree. The Spanish gentleman, however, did his duty conscientiously and put his bullet into my lungs for a few hours and me into a French hospital for a few weeks.

“When I came out, she was married and living in Madrid—and I could only love her memory, deprived of the sight both of her portrait and of her face.

“When, in despair, I went to Madrid for a glimpse of her, I was stabbed in the back by a hired assassin. That cured me.”

“And you fell in love with the next pretty woman you met?” I would ask.

“I certainly fell in love again,” my wonderful Mantin would reply, “*Do you never grow hungry again because you have had a beautiful meal? . . . Do you never wish to see another picture because you are charmed with one? . . . Do you never read another book or poem, or see another play, because you have said, ‘This is the finest book, poem, or play in the world?’* . . . Do you wish to hear your favourite music for ever? Most men are mad, I think, Durham. Why is *one* woman to be loved? . . . One at once I grant you—even as one picture, one book, one poem, one play, one song, at once. One at a time—for the sake of full appreciation, concentration, loyalty, and decency—but, in Heaven’s name, why *only* one? Not that I thought thus while in love with a woman—but now that I love none at all, I honestly cannot see why women should be treated so. Have they less rights than pictures, books, poems, plays, and pieces of music? . . .”

I would leave the man—in speechless wonder—and ponder him again. Was he mad? . . .

Later on, as he lay ill, dying of the disease that carried him off, his only delight was to have me or Father Gregory at his bedside—to talk to me of the women he had loved, begging for my candid opinion as to his conduct in each case—and to talk to Father Gregory of everything else.

One lies to a dying man if one be a gentleman, and I lied to poor Mantin when I knew he could not recover—assuring him of my firm belief that he had acted rightly. So he had—given his temperament and convictions—and if he sinned in loving and ceasing to love, in waxing and waning, in burning

and growing cold—why, he suffered and repented. Does God ask for more? Nor can I find that Christ Himself ever appeared mightily indignant over actual sinners.

What said He to the Magdalen and to the crucified thief? To me it appears that His indignation and hatred were for the self-righteous, the *accusers*, those who dared to scorn the sinner—those for example who call their fellow-man a “Child of Sin,” because his parents dared to be a law unto themselves.

No. I comforted Mantin and held him guiltless. And, at times, my heart ached for the poor soul as I saw his distress at the bare recollection of things that had happened long ago. . . .

“And once—Oh, Durham!—I had to play the *rôle* of Joseph. Could *anything* more terrible befall a gentleman in this world or in Hell?” said he, with gasps, a few days before he died, as I sat beside his bed and soothed him to the best of my poor ability. “Oh, I tried to die on the spot, and, finding myself alive, I made some excuse and fled from the house. Poor, poor lady! How could she have so mistaken me! And when I reached home I tried to take my life. Durham, I *could* not. Think of the horrid sight one would be after using razor, rope, poison, or pistol. Think of being a horrid sodden corpse if one drowned oneself. Suicide is so ugly—so violent—so inartistic. What a shocking scoundrel I have been, Durham—don’t you sicken at the sight of me now that you know? . . . And, Durham—let me whisper—d’you think I might *dare* talk of my sins to dear Father Gregory? I’d love to—but how could I sully his ears—it would be like throwing mud on beautiful old porcelain. . . .”

“My dear Mantin,” said I, “Father Gregory has the broadest, noblest, finest mind in the world, and the most perfect love and tolerance. No one could shock or offend him in genuine confession, and *you*, my dear old chap, couldn’t shock—a woman. Tell him all you have told me—and more. He will give you comfort and peace.”

He did, and when the end came, Mantin died kissing his hand.

CHAPTER VII

THE UNLUCKY MAN

But noble souls through dust and heat,
Rise from disaster and defeat
The stronger;
And conscious still of the Divine
Within them, lie on earth supine
No longer.

LONGFELLOW.

"Poor old Mr. Pardie looks very decrepit, doesn't he?" remarked Father Gregory to Dr. Foy, as a white-haired, white-moustached old gentleman entered the big reading-room and slowly lowered himself with audible groans into a spacious leathern arm-chair.

"Yes, Father dear—poor old craytur! He has not been here long and he's not long for here. . . . Not so very old either, only about sixty," replied Dr. Foy. . . . "But it's a tough old bird to be alive at all. Had bad luck enough to break most men. I've known him a long time. . . . Fancy going Home after thirty-four years of India, finding all your people dead, coming back and temporarily investing every penny of your life's savings in a bank that 'goes *phut*' soon after, and pays just nothing in the pound! What?"

"Poor old man!" murmured Father Gregory. "Was he in the Madras smash or the Burmah one?"

"Madras, Father, and instead of having a comfortable thousand a month he's got about fifty! But for Durham he'd not have that, and he'd be in the bazaar."

"A merchant, wasn't he?"

"Yes, Public School and 'Varsity man. Very well off at one time too—when the pagoda-tree didn't take quite as much shaking as it does nowadays, and there were fewer to scramble for what fell. . . . Been a fine man in his day—and had just the divil's own luck, too. . . . He's the man who met his wife's funeral, you know."

"*Met his wife's funeral?*"

“Yes, I was Civil Surgeon at the place where it happened—Karimpur—and witnessed the meeting. Poor chap. Wonder he’s sane!”

“I don’t understand,” said the priest.

“Why, it was like this—he was one of the leading merchants at Karimpur and doing jolly well. Very popular chap, and so was his wife. Fairly doted on her and she would never go Home for a spell and leave him although money was no object. No children you see. Idyllic loife they led. The only time they were parted at all, at all, was when he took his week-end off for *shikar* once a month or went up country to look at some crop or something. . . . Yes. He used to go off after buck—about twenty miles away—over the border. He’d go on a Saturday afternoon and turn up Monday morning. He used to go with a horse and one of those hired transport-carts of the Mule Corps with his tent, grub, and kit. He’d make the *drabi* drive straight out into the desert to a likely spot, pitch his tent near some water, and generally make himself comfortable there with a ‘boy,’ a syce, and his shikarri. Then he’d roll up on Monday, sunburnt and dirty, with a buck or two and assorted dicky-birds. Sort of thing that keeps you young and wholesome. . . . Poor devil. He said ‘Good-bye’ to his beloved wife one Saturday morning—a holiday—and cantered off with his mule-cart following him. No one knew exactly where he was going—least of all himself.

“He hadn’t been gone long before I was called in to see Mrs. Pardie who was mortal sick, taken ill very suddenly. Cholera! The poor lady died Sunday afternoon. . . . You know how long a corpse is kept above ground in India. . . .”

“Yes, my son,” replied Father Gregory, “I have breakfasted with a man one morning and visited his grave the next. I have been at the funerals of people who were in rude health the same day.”

“Well. Mrs. Pardie’s funeral was arranged for Monday morning. The road to the cemetery winds out a moile towards the border. Just before we reached the gates Pardie came cantering along, reined in, raised his hat and sat bareheaded as the hearse went by—and then rode on. . . . *He had saluted his own wife for the last time and did not know it.* I felt sick—damned sick, excuse me, Father dear, I can tell ye. Then I realized that our messengers had missed him—and I scrambled out of the mourning-coach and ran after him shouting. . . . Too late!—Oh, my God—he got home before I could stop him. I’ll never forget it at all, at all. . . .” And alcoholic Dr. Foy—once

Colonel Foy of the Indian Medical Service and Civil Surgeon of Karimpur—blew his nose.

"Poor, poor fellow," murmured Father Gregory softly, glancing at the unconscious object of his sympathy. "Fancy living and keeping sane—and sober," he said.

"Yes. The old chap's a total abstainer and sane enough, if a bit prosy and boring. He dearly loves a gossip and to tell you his experiences and opinions. Don't start him on when you're in a hurry, though. He's like what's-his-name's Brook—goes on for ever. But ivery wurrud Gospel truth, mind ye—he couldn't tell a lie if ye paid him. If ye git him reminiscin' ye'll hear as almoighty extraordinary a tale of infernal luck as ever a man told, and all solid fact. The poor owld bhoy has attracted bad luck to him all his life like a lightning conductor attractin' thunderbolts. . . . Luck! Holy Virgin protect us! Luck! But I've got to go an' see poor Pontreuil, Firth, and Mantin. . . . Good-bye, Father"—and Dr. Foy bustled away.

The old priest sighed, raised his slight person from the capacious chair in which it seemed lost, and edged his way from table to table—alighting upon and abandoning magazine after magazine, like a beautiful black and white butterfly sipping from and deserting literary flowers—until he found himself, apparently by chance, close to the venerable Mr. Pardie, who read a dreary-looking back-number of an ancient journal, a contemporary of his young manhood. Into the nearest chair Father Gregory gently settled and, albeit he was the lightest and frailest of adults, he found that the once Reverend Montague Dalcane had preceded him, and that a spring within that stricken seat had sunk to rise no more.

"Dear me! A broken spring," said he, as he at length "touched bottom," and old Mr. Pardie looked up and, as all did when looking at Father Gregory, smiled.

Father Gregory radiated sympathy, inspired confidence, and impelled confidences. Obviously he was a tiny but limitless repository in which the stricken and harassed could store secrets and know them safe; a tiny but limitless reservoir of condolence which the tired and thirsty could tap and know inexhaustible. To see the man was to desire to know him, to know him was to love him. In his presence the taciturn became loquacious, the loquacious surpassed themselves; the suspicious became frank, and the frank grew utterly confiding; the sinner longed to confess and, confessing, felt cheered, rehabilitated, and at peace with himself awhile. He was a walking,

visible Blessing and a shining lamp of comfort to those in sorrow and in need. . . . And his mouth turned upward at the corners.

As if to bring his chair into more favourable relation to the light, Father Gregory edged to where, almost facing Pardie, he was in a highly convenient place for conversation—and angled for a conversational bite.

Would the gentleman—Mr. Pardie he believed—object to a punkah? Yes, Mr. Pardie. Not the least objection to a punkah—glad of it, in fact.

A newly elected member? Yes—joined quite recently. Beautiful morning. Nothing in the paper to-day. No. Now in the *old* days . . . Ah, yes. Always something in the papers then. The old days!—and the wily angler had landed his conversational fish.

Know India well! God bless Mr. Pardie's soul—lived here five and thirty years. Regret it? Bitterly. Had cruel luck.

Bad luck, eh?

"Yes," reiterated Mr. Pardie, "bad *luck*, and not bad management. If I told you a few facts, gave you a few instances, you'd be absolutely astonished, I assure you."

Father Gregory made sympathetic sounds and generally conveyed the impression that the chief desire of his soul was to sit at the feet of Mr. Pardie and imbibe wisdom and experiences at second hand.

"It began thirty years ago suddenly—quite suddenly—with my killing a little child, and it hasn't stopped yet—nor given me a decent breathing-space all along," said Pardie.

"Killing a little child!" repeated the priest in alarm.

"Yes. . . . India's a queer place. . . . I'd been a very happy and rather lucky chap at Home, and out here too, for four or five years. Then I seemed to come under some spell or other, and I think I must hold the world's record for bad luck and, as I say, it began with that child. . . . Judge if I was to blame in any way.

"I was taking a short holiday at the nearest hill-station to Parbutpur, a pretty little place called Raniganga. I had my trap up there, and a good horse who both hacked and trapped. One evening I was driving along one of the prettiest roads in the world with a beautiful wooded plain on my right hand and a magnificent valley, to which the hill-side dropped steeply down for thousands of feet, on my left.

“I was keeping a sharp look-out for orchids on the wayside trees, admiring the play of sunshine and shadow on the surrounding mountains, and singing in sheer delight and *joie de vivre*—a young, healthy, happy human, without a care in the world.

“Bowling along at a steady pace I overtook a small gang of hill-women of some aboriginal tribe—ugly sturdy creatures dressed in the minimum, and, surely, very little above the animals of their native jungle.

“One of them, at any rate, was below the average wild beast, for, as my trap drew level, she suddenly turned, ducked, and deliberately thrust the baby that she carried *underneath my wheel*, before I could so much as think, let alone act. I shall never forget the jerk and bump as the heavy trap and I went over that baby.

“The degraded, murdering savage had killed the child—probably her own—for the hush-money I should pay to avoid bother, or for the compensation that would be awarded her.

“A moment after it had happened, a swarm of jungle-folk had assembled from nowhere, and round me and the mangled child surged a crowd of those half-wild, naked fellows who live by collecting sticks in the jungle, by beating for shikarries, and hunting on their own account. All I could gather from their gibberish and jabber was ‘one hundred rupees,’ for they seemed singularly unanimous in pricing the poor little dead kid, that lay there with its neck broken—murdered for a trifle of money.

“Well, I turned ‘vicious’ and swore that if I died for it, I’d see the thing through, and the murderess in jail. . . . I pointed back, down the road along which I had come, and made my syce, who was in a mortal funk, turn the horse and trap round. . . . By showing the mob two or three rupees, shaking my head, pointing towards home, and beckoning them on, I gave them to understand that I hadn’t enough money with me, and that some of them must come along and get it.

“They *all* came.

“What I had in mind was the police *chowki* at the plague detention-camp that I had passed half an hour before the murder.

“I put the little body on the seat of the trap, made my syce walk, and by signs induced the woman to climb up behind, beside the child. Doubtless the opinion of the grinning mob of brutes was: ‘The fool is going to have the dead cub looked over by one of the white doctors who think they can do

miracles. He is going to give the woman a hundred rupees, and to give us *baksheesh* if we make enough hubbub. Come on, my brothers.'

"I think there is no beast on earth to equal the savage that has come in contact with the worst side of civilization and learnt its vices."

"You are right, my friend," agreed Father Gregory. "I have seen something of it, and have heard that the South Sea Islanders, Arabs, and Red Indians who have touched civilization have been defiled—beyond recognition."

"Yes. These hill-station savages were sickening. Well—by and by we came opposite the plague-camp and police-post and, with a cut at my horse that made him plunge, and a pull on the rein, I had him off the road and galloping to the police-hut before my motive was twigged.

"Also I grabbed the woman's arm, and I guess she knew it, by the way she yelled. . . . My escort simply vanished like the mists of the morning as they realized my objective. They disappeared into the scrub and jungle, down the hill-side, as suddenly and effectually as if they had been so many snakes or rats.

"I delivered my murderess and the little corpse to the police havildar, told him what had happened, and impressed upon him that I was going straight to the Magistrate Sahib and the District Superintendent of Police about the matter, and that he had better be singularly careful.

"Would you believe it, Father, I came out of that affair *with* 'a stain on my character,' and I doubt if the woman did!

"The case was tried by a black Jew, an ornament of the I.C.S., who hated Europeans like poison because he was generally, and very rightly, ineligible for, or blackballed at, the best Clubs.

"A cunning, clever devil if ever there was one! That vile hag appeared in Court grazed and scratched and injured by *being knocked down and run over* by my furiously driven trap, and she howled to Heaven for her slaughtered baby!

"It appeared that I had driven off laughing, but had barged into a big band of her tribe round the corner and that they, hearing her screams, had stopped me. About twenty of them bore witness to this, and one showed a bashed eye—cut by my ring—where I had hit him as they expostulated and asked for a little recompense!

“When I called my syce, the Magistrate, Aaron Soloman Moses Ezekiel, soon proved that he could have seen nothing where he sat, and all but asked what I had given him to lie in my favour!

“By the time Aaron Soloman Moses Ezekiel had done with me, I felt, and most people thought, that I had deliberately run the woman down, killed her baby, tried to escape, and when caught, had taken the bold course of accusing, to forestall accusation!

“It seemed a wonder that I was not prosecuted. . . . People were by way of shunning me for it, and some *cut* me! . . . How’s that for luck?”

The ever-ready sympathy of Father Gregory overflowed and bathed the still sore mind of Mr. Pardie with its soothing balm.

“And, believe it if you can, within a month I had killed one of my servants,” continued Mr. Pardie, now enjoying himself thoroughly with this perfect listener, this truthful gentleman who recognized a truthful gentleman.

Father Gregory groaned sympathy and condolence.

“Yes—a *hamal* he was, a one-eyed chap whom I kept on, after the loss of his eye, although he couldn’t see to do his work properly. . . . Poor chap—he had been a very smart and faithful servant, and I couldn’t bear to turn him off because of *his* bad luck. . . . I was in a position to sympathize with anyone unlucky.

“He wasn’t blind, but he was going that way, and always breaking glasses and knocking over things that were not conspicuous. It was pitiable to me who had known him at his best. . . . It may have been a good thing for him that I killed him. It wasn’t a good thing for me, anyhow. . . . It happened like this. I used to fancy myself as a bit of an athlete in those days, and I had an idea that the more you do in India, the more you can do; and the less you do, the less you’re fit for. So, in addition to various games and sports, I used to take a good turn at Indian Clubs every morning—before my bath. I used to go outside in my pyjamas and do it in the cool shade behind the bungalow.

“I had learned all I could from books and gymnastic-instructors and was inventing swings and circles of my own, and I sometimes used a mighty heavy ebony pair, with ivory ornamentation and brass caps and bands, for ‘strong’ work, to wind up.

“One morning I was having a last strenuous bout after trying some tricks, when there was a hideous *crash*, and my right club flew from my hand.

“The poor *hamal* had come silently round the corner, barefooted of course, blinking, from the sunlight into the shadow, behind me—and my club had caught him fairly on the temple!

“He died with hardly a twitch, and there was I, ‘the man who killed the baby,’ alone with the dead body of one of my servants. No one had seen the accident and there, clubbed to death, lay the man with whom I was known to have been angry, the day before, for smashing a valuable vase—a man whom I often scolded and threatened, though God knows I would never have fined or dismissed the poor chap.

“Luckily I knew the Civil Surgeon and the Superintendent of Police, well. They were friends of mine, and I went to them both and told them the truth. They believed me, of course, and nothing was said officially. A lot was said by the Vernacular gutter-press, though, and, by the time they’d done with me, I was a sort of combined Pharaoh, Herod, Gilles de Retz, and Jack the Ripper—and no possibility of a successful libel action, of course.

“I went away, and before long my luck took me and my damaged reputation into that disgusting Dirty Linen Basket, the Divorce Court. And I was as innocent as a babe, as innocent of that type of villainy as I had been of the ‘murders.’ . . .”

Father Gregory patted the arm of the speaker and said nothing. The touch of the delicate, transparent hand seemed a soothing caress.

“Judge you, Father,” continued Pardie; “I was then at Sudderpur and, the weather being terribly oppressive and relaxing, I took advantage of a Monday and Tuesday Bank Holiday to get a five-day change to a little hill-station within three or four hours of that city, and some two or three thousand feet above it.

“It’s a jungly little hole—or was then, but a change is a change. It is within sight of the eternal snows, and I always think that, wherever you are in India, it’s a jolly good tip to go somewhere else for a little while, just as often as you can.

“So off I went to Lankhallwar on the Thursday, with a dressing-case, a novel, and the hope of rest, peace, and benefit.

“The place practically consists of the ‘hotel’—a collection of little bungalows, all, with one exception, more or less ancient, decayed, and decrepit.

“The exception is a house built by the hotel proprietor—a long low building consisting of a dozen rooms in a row, all opening into a common

verandah, and not otherwise communicating with each other.

"I secured one of these rooms, had a wash, changed for dinner, and strolled over to the dining 'hall,' which had once been a barn or stable, I believe.

"Here the guests assembled for meals, coming from the more distant bungalows in a quaint vehicle like a bathing-machine, drawn by two huge bullocks and termed a *dumney*.

"Most of us preferred to walk, preceded at night by a servant bearing a hurricane-lamp, for the place was notoriously snaky.

"In the dining-room I found some thirty or forty guests and, next to me, the couple who, with their child, inhabited the end room adjoining mine, in 'New Chambers.'

"She was a pretty, plump, jolly little soul, and he a dull, ugly person with a bad face, holding some rank or other in the Supply and Transport Corps. He looked as though he ate and drank too much.

"The lady addressed me with the cheery informality of hill-station hotel etiquette, and accused me of being the new boy and their neighbour. We chatted gaily throughout the meal, but her lumpish and taciturn husband gave his whole attention to the business of eating and drinking, and spake never a word from first to last. He was not in evening-dress, and I gathered that he was catching the night train for somewhere or other. . . .

"At breakfast next morning, my fair neighbour inquired as to what I was going to do that day—golf, tennis, stroll, drive, take out a gun? I asked her advice as I was a stranger.

" 'I should say—a novel in the verandah till lunch, a nap till tea-time, and then I'll take you round the links if you are a golfer,' she replied.

"I voted the programme admirable, and thanked her for the kind offer to introduce me to the fearful and wonderful Lankhallwar Links of which I had heard much.

"I loafed, I read, I slumbered, and I had a nine-hole round with Mrs. Broane and found her no mean opponent.

" 'I'll beat you to-morrow,' said she—and did it.

"I strolled or played golf with her daily, to church with her on Sunday—and felt sorry so cheery, simple, pleasant, and honest a little woman should be the wife of so unattractive a boor as Broane. . . .

“On Tuesday night, at some ungodly hour, I was awakened by piercing screams from next door, and heard Mrs. Broane’s voice calling, in heartrending accents, ‘*Mr. Pardie, Mr. Pardie! Oh come! Come quickly! oh! ——*’ and sobbing and shrieking unintelligibly.

“Of course I hopped out of bed, rushed into the verandah, opened her door and dashed in, clad in my pyjamas.

“She was standing, in her night-dress, on her chair, swaying perilously, with her little sick daughter in her arms—white as a ghost, and only keeping from fainting by sheer will-power.

“Skedaddling round the floor, looking for an outlet, was a beastly great cobra!

“It appears that she had got up in the middle of the night to warm food for the invalid, and had disturbed the snake in the act of drinking milk.

“She had sprung for the girl, snatched her from her bed, jumped on to the chair, and howled for help—very naturally.

“Grabbing a golf-club, I slammed the door lest the beast escape, and went for him. I swiped at him, missed, broke the club, got another, and saw him dart into the bathroom. By the time I had got in there with the lamp, he had found what he had wanted, and I caught sight of the end of his tail as it flickered out of the hole through which the water drained away, and by which he had probably come in. Rushing back like a demon to get a whack at him in the verandah, down which he’d have to bolt some distance, I flung open the room door, and rushed—into the arms of Broane!

“ ‘Not so fast,’ said he coldly, with a nasty, evil smile.

“ ‘I’m after a snake,’ I panted.

“ ‘So am I,’ he replied, seizing me.”

Father Gregory started, caught his breath, and murmured, “The villain!”

“I don’t know to this day whether he honestly believed us guilty, or whether he merely seized the admirable opportunity of getting rid of his wife. With him were his ‘boy’ and the tonga-wallah carrying his kit, but lest these witnesses should be insufficient, he raised his voice and soon brought more.

“Then with his evil, brutal tongue he lashed and goaded me into seeing red and going for him, then and there.”

“Oh, the villain, the villain!” moaned Father Gregory.

"He was a strong, active fellow, but for once he had met a stronger. It served his purpose, however.

"After the trial, Society held me a scoundrelly wrecker of homes and assaulter of wronged husbands. A Don Juan. . . . A Bully! . . .

"My 'murders' were raked up, and I was a 'murderous adulterer' when not an 'adulterous murderer'—and precious few folk believed the truth—that I was absolutely innocent. . . . How's that for luck? . . ."

Silent sympathy emanated like a visible aura from the old priest, enveloped the narrator, soothed and comforted him—and encouraged him to pour forth further woes, wrongs, injuries, and sorrows.

"And so it went on," he continued. "In small things and great I had unbrokenly evil luck.

"If I 'fancied' a horse because I knew something about him and backed him heavily, he'd fall at the post while winning in a common canter.

"If I was 'in at the death' or winning a point-to-point, or within grasp of a pig-sticking cup, I'd break a stirrup-leather or a girth. . . . Nobody could ever get a misfire cartridge after miles of stalking, or sitting up all night for a tiger like I could.

"And as for anything a bit speculative in business—I very soon learnt to run no risks, and to avoid anything with an element of chance—where my luck could have an opportunity.

"I only won a sweep-stake once, and that was after heavily backing myself to lose. I had thought like an ass that I could get back on my luck a bit.

"But these are the merest trifles. . . . At last I thought my luck had turned, and that I was going to be as other men, when I met the sweetest and noblest of women, fell in love with her, proposed, and was accepted. We were married and I was as happy as the day is long—for a while. But I was a fool. I was being lulled into a false sense of security and happiness—I was being fattened with joy for the cruel maw of Fate—and one day—*I met her funeral*—Oh, my God, my God," and the old voice broke.

"Hi! *boy!*" cried Father Gregory. "Go away and get me last month's *English Review* from the Library. . . . Close that window. It is? Yes, I mean—open it. Yes, exactly—er—open that door. Bless my soul," and he bustled and fussed without glancing at the poor old ruin of a man, fighting pitiably for self-control, the tears streaming from his eyes. . . .

Fifteen minutes after, the pair were patrolling in the cool shade of the trees, the senior and bigger man holding and leaning upon the arm of the junior, as he cackled with the easy laughter of the old at the jests and cheery conversation of his new-found but already beloved friend.

CHAPTER VIII

COLONEL PATRIC FOY, I.M.S.

But I failed to die
As formerly I failed to live—and thus
Grew willing, having tried all other ways,
To try just God's. Humility's so good
When Pride's impossible.

I really don't know what I should do without Foy. He is indefatigable, a fine physician, a great surgeon, infinitely amusing, a warm-hearted, generous soul, and my right hand here. He is indispensable in fact. He would be Surgeon-General, a proud father, a happy husband, and a famous man now but for—whisky.

As it is—he is just poor boozy old Foy, physician-in-ordinary to the Failures' Club and house-surgeon of its hospital. Dear old Foy—best of impulsive, hot-headed, open-handed fellows; for all his faults he is a good man and a true gentleman.

Yet I first saw this highly accomplished doctor and scholarly gentleman, this well-bred ex-member of a most distinguished service, in the dock of the Chief Presidency Magistrate's Court at Calbay—charged with being drunk and disorderly, resisting the police, having no visible means of support, and assaulting a worker of the Young Men's Christian Association, who long and bravely strove to help and redeem him.

I was sitting on the Bench, by courtesy of my dear old friend, Walterson, the famous stipendiary of Calbay, a man who has given me many an opportunity of usefulness to good fellows in distress, and introduced me to many predestined members of this Club.

Poor Foy! In the dock he tried to talk like an Irish labourer, and to pretend he was a navvy brought out to India by a firm of railway-contractors. He was not a sufficiently good actor to deceive Walterson, however—and neither his face nor his hands were those of a labourer. I would have pleaded for him with my friend, but that I knew I should never again have the opportunity of such impropriety if I did so. . . . I took certain notes of times and places, however, and when poor Foy was a free man again, I waylaid him.

As usual in such cases, I was met with suspicion and distrust.

"If ye want to save my sowl aloive, ye're wastin' yer vallyble toime," said he, keeping up the pretence of being a "low white." "Oi haven't got a sowl for ye to save, and Oi'm just the rotten remains of a dhirty hound."

"Don't waste time and talk nonsense," replied I. "You are an educated man and a gentleman. I don't care tuppence for your soul, and haven't the slightest wish to 'save' it. All I want to do is to offer you a few days' hospitality, until you find suitable employment."

"An' phwat wud Oi be doin' for ut?" he continued. "Psalm-smitin'? Divil a wan! An' phwat's more, Oi'm a good Catholic, though a bad man, glory be, and that's more than y'r honner is."

"Oh, drop it, my dear chap," I protested. "You are no more a labourer than I am. Come and have a drink and a chat. I want you to do something for me, too, of course," and I took his arm.

"My dear Sir," answered Foy in his natural voice and accent, "you are exceedingly kind and well-meaning, and I'm most grateful. But might I mention two little matters—or perhaps three? In the first place I am a murderer, and should make the acquaintance of Jack Ketch rather than that of a gentleman; in the second place I am a beastly drunkard, and propose to go forthwith and lay body and soul in soak; and in the third—I am not an object of charity. Good morning, and very many thanks."

He turned on his heel—but I am not easily rebuffed—officious meddler that I am.

"Look here, Foy," said I. "Come and lay your soul in soak, if you must, in the decent privacy I can provide—and in the decent liquor. I'll put no obstacle in your way, and I'll guarantee your safety, comfort, and freedom. . . . Better be a hog and a log at my place than in the gutter, and better recover in my charge than in that of the police. What's your tipple?"

"Whisky," he replied, eyeing me with wonder, hope, and suspicion.

"Then I'll give you all you want of the finest matured old Irish whisky that ever recalled peat-smoke and pot-stills to an exile. Come on."

He came.

"What's your point?" he asked, as I hailed a *ghari*. "How do I repay you? . . . I am coming with you because I can't be much worse off nor fall much lower. But I am hanged if I see your game. I'm not worth converting, and I'm not worth robbing. . . . Pray pardon me for talking like this—but I

must admit that it's unusual in my experience for the Good Samaritan to offer—er—whisky instead of the Word."

"My point is that I'm a rotten Failure and prize Sinner myself," I replied, "and I am grateful for any chance of helping others. Let me put you up while you look round. You'll be able to repay me all right."

"I am a murderer," said Foy.

"Probably I should be one too," I replied, "given the same provocation. . . ."

I never did a better day's work than when I got hold of Foy, whether for the Club, for myself, or for Foy.

I have been unable to cure him of drunkenness, but his periods of total abstinence lengthen, his daily performance while he is "moderate" is not discreditable, and the number of his excesses diminishes.

I began his "treatment" by putting him in charge of the Club in my absence, and exacting his promise that he would touch no alcohol of any kind until my return.

He kept his word faithfully but suffered many things—and made up for lost time. He was perfectly ready, nay delighted, however, to accept the charge a second time on the same conditions, and I lengthened the period of my absence. I have never said a word to him about drink, save on the occasions of my going away, and then I speak as though concerned solely for the interests of the Club.

If, later on, he will be my *locum tenens* while I go to England for a year, he will be cured, I hope—as I shall formally request him on my return to extend his year of abstinence indefinitely.

Foy is a man worth saving—a splendid chap. He treats me as a revered and beloved parent, though I am years younger than he is. The Professor, who is old enough to be his father, he treats as an idolized child.

Poor Foy! His beloved whisky has served him ill. It brought upon him the truly terrible calamity that laid his life in ruins, and to it he turns for such reparation as it can make—and finds a brief oblivion.

He hugs the chains that have bound him in hell, he kisses the ghoulish mistress who has slain his happiness and dragged him to the bottom of the lowest depths.

Some day I fancy he will break the chain and cast the mistress from him.

Poor Foy! I wonder how many have suffered as he must have done, in that awful Burmese jungle.

Fancy a man of his temperament being able to dig a grave for the wife and child his own criminal weakness had slain, and to place them in it with his own hands!

The beautiful young wife he worshipped!

What some men can go through, and retain their sanity, often fills me with appalled astonishment.

Poor dear old Foy! Like many scholars and a few doctors, he had found the "imperative necessity" of a stimulant in times of over-work and stress. Of whisky he had always been moderately fond, and during the strain of a great epidemic, he had found it necessary to add medicinal doses of whisky, "to steady the nerves," to the dietetic whisky he took at table, to the evening whisky he drank as a pleasant habit, and to the whisky with which he quenched genuine thirst, or refreshed himself when weary.

The "medicinal" doses that were to "pull him together" grew in strength until they became neat, and Foy divided his whisky into that which he "took," and that which he "drank." He "took" whisky before an operation, he "drank" whisky at meals, and between them, and at night.

In India he suffered much from thirst, and there was no drink he could bring himself to touch save whisky-and-soda.

By the time he married beautiful little Eileen Desmond, he was conscious that a dozen-case did not last as long as it ought to last a Civil Surgeon.

Yet Foy had never been drunk in his life—though he had been the wild ringleader in many an uproarious merry "binge" at Trinity, Dublin.

He was never in the least intoxicated nor in the slightest degree "the worse for liquor"—but he drank whisky at his late breakfast, preferred a whisky-and-soda at tea-time, had several in the Club bar before dinner—and kept no count of those that accompanied the post-prandial cheroots.

He only took the neat doses before operations and at very busy times such as when plague was raging in the city—or, worse—when cholera was devastating the cantonment.

And beautiful little Eileen, whose king could do no wrong, delighted to see that there were always sodas on the ice, and that the butler rushed to his room with the tray, the moment her lord came into the house. She loved to

measure out his peg in the silver peg-measure and laughingly invite him to "say when," as she poured out the soda. She soon picked up his funny phrases and would say, "Oh! *Have* I drowned the miller?" or "Is it to be long or short, Paddy?"

So Foy gradually but steadily exceeded—but was never known to be in any sort or kind of way, intoxicated or fuddled—until they went to Burma.

Here a strange thing happened to Colonel Patrick Foy of the Indian Medical Service.

At the new moon his ordinary strong desire for whisky suddenly became a terrible craving, and he could not refrain from drinking himself comatose. He could not cease to drink until he could not raise his glass to his lips.

Some department of his fine brain had failed, and he had a monthly fit—a fit he could no more ward off than can the epileptic his seizure—a drinking-fit that could only be terminated by the physical inability to drink more.

Before they had been in Burma a year, he knew himself for a dipsomaniac, a confirmed drunkard, a creature who must have an orgy, a drunken bout, each time the new moon appeared—or go mad.

Yet—on the whole—he drank less in a month than he had formerly done. He tells me he is certain of this. Before his transfer to Burma he was not content with less than two dozen-cases a month. When the new moon began to affect him, he would shut himself up, empty three bottles, and not drink more than a dozen during the remainder of the month, after recovering from the drunken bout.

He must have had a wonderful constitution—for he is a fine man yet.

Beautiful little Eileen only knew that Paddy was becoming subject to periodical headaches and nervous attacks, and had to take to his bed every new moon. It was a grief to her that he shut himself up and would see nobody, neither her nor a doctor even, but of course Paddy knew best.

Men at the Rangoon Club began to talk, and some would grin when it was stated that Colonel Foy was seedy—down with one of his periodical attacks of nervous depression—which always came with the new moon.

"He ought to go home and see a nerve specialist," said one lady to her husband.

"Yes," replied the brutal male, "and get him to shut him up where he'd have perfect quiet—and no whisky."

Nevertheless, Colonel Foy, I.M.S., continued to do splendid work, both in his official and private capacities, and wealthy patients came to him from afar for consultations and operations.

But *if* "Love and a cough cannot be hid," drink can be hid still less.

People talked—and a certain Surgeon-General heard them talk, as did one or two men who, though private gentlemen in the Rangoon Club, were, in their public capacities, rulers of men and of many.

And one and all of them were fond of beautiful little Eileen Foy of the black hair, blue eyes, and roses-and-cream complexion.

It was thought that change of scene would be good for Colonel Foy, and he was sent first to Bhamo, and thence on a prolonged tour in wild and lonely places.

They happened to be on board a steamer of the Irrawadi Flotilla when the new moon appeared, and Colonel Foy engaged another cabin for his private use, and shut himself therein for three days.

From Bhamo he took Eileen into the wild jungle.

One night she got a terrible fright, for she woke in the dark to hear her husband fighting for his life in the room where they slept.

A dacoit, attracted by tales of the White Man's guns and valuables, had crept up the ladder—at the foot of which the faithful watchman slept—and had awakened Foy by endeavouring to get his watch and chain from under the pillow. As the thief had sprung back, drawing his *dao*, he had overturned the lamp.

More by luck than judgment, Foy had caught him by the wrist and throat, and was not stabbed nor slashed, and when help came the strangled Burman, who was half Foy's size, was dead.

So was poor Mrs. Foy, nearly—and her husband realized that their first-born would see the light, very prematurely, in a hut in the Burmese jungle—under about as unfavourable conditions as could be conceived.

They were separated by several days' journey from the nearest civilized man—by more from the nearest civilized woman which was worse, *and it was the last day of the lunar month*.

I need say no more.

Poor Foy could no more help drinking then than he could help breathing.

Blame him those who will—and despise him those who look down from the summit of a high pedestal of virtue and ignorance.

Ignorance, I say. He was no more to be blamed than is the maniac who becomes violent at full moon and requires special watching.

Nothing on earth could have kept him from alcohol save physical force —and that would very likely have been fatal.

And supposing he *had* been responsible—think of the punishment. . . .

With his own hands he buried them, when he recovered from his orgy.

He would doubtless have taken his own life too, but it appears that he went mad and wandered in the jungle for months, fed by Shan villagers and passed on—respected as a lunatic, a being all savages regard; and the most tragic feature of this awful tragedy is the fact that when he recovered his reason, the monthly obsession had left him. The new moon affected him not at all and he had no craving whatever—merely the old love of whisky—and this he indulged as he could.

And he who had gone into the jungle Colonel Foy with a beautiful and devoted wife, emerged from it a "wild man of the woods," a filthy, emaciated, half-naked tramp, a "low white" of the lowest, bearded, with long matted hair and the claws of an animal.

By the time I got him he had been most things and suffered more.

I don't think Father Gregory has ever mentioned the word "temperance" to him—much less "abstinence," but I have noticed that he avoids our good Father like a guilty dog when he has been exceeding, and that when he dines at the same table he drinks soda-water or nothing. . . . I must get him to dine at the Father's table always.

CHAPTER IX

THE FAITH OF MONTAGUE DALCANE

Because I seek Thee not, O seek Thou me!
Because my lips are dumb, O hear my cry,
I do not utter as Thou passest by,
And from my life-long bondage set me free!
Because content I perish far from Thee,
O seize me, snatch me from my fate, and try
My soul in Thy consuming fire! Draw nigh,
And let me, blinded, my salvation see.
If I were pouring at Thy feet my tears,
If I were clamouring to see Thy face,
I should not need Thee, Lord, as now I need,
Whose dumb dead soul knows neither hopes nor fears,
Nor dreads the outer darkness of this place—
Because I seek not, pray not, give Thou heed!

A. A. Proctor.

Profound peace and unbroken silence brooded over the spacious rooms, broad verandahs and wide staircases of the Chotapettah Club, and the peace of sleep and brief oblivion over its storm-tossed world-weary inmates.

With one exception.

In his room, Father Gregory knelt at his *prie-Dieu* and, with scorn for a portion of the creed in which he had been bred, prayed for one who was dead, as well as for many who were alive, beginning with John Durham and ending with himself. For himself he begged absolution in the matter of a great and terrible sin. It was Father Gregory's custom to do this daily, before dawn, and to devote the remainder of the day to helping, comforting, amusing, and watching over the members of the Chotapettah Club. . . . But few of the professionally religious could have approved the good Father's spiritual state, however little fault they might have found with his Works, for Father Gregory was grievously unorthodox and full of doctrinal error.

For example, he held work to be the most acceptable form of prayer; and that verbal prayer, praise, and adoration were far from essential to "salvation"—a word he detested. He regarded God as a sane broad-minded

gentleman who must surely detest ritual and love right intention and action, hate flattery, and cherish but little regard for the recording-angel.

And he knelt him down humbly and then spoke to God straightly as one gentleman speaks to another, and not as a lying court-bred slave to a dangerous oriental Potentate who has him in the hollow of his murderous hand. . . .

The sun rose, if not precisely "like thunder," at any rate "out of China crost the Bay," and bred life in the silent purlieus and precincts of the Club.

With a great clattering that jarred cruelly upon the Sabbath peace, Ganpat Hamal threw open the big lattice-work doors of the lattice-walled main verandah.

Squatting on his heels, the gentle—very gentle where work was concerned—Ganpat commenced to sweep an acre or less of marble tiles with a rag the size of a lady's handkerchief.

In time he had collected before him a tiny corps of fluff-balls and impalpable entities of nebulous amorphous dust. But it was a *corps de ballet*, and its membership did not progress in relation to the progress of Ganpat Hamal, for with every breath of morning zephyr, the lighter-hearted and more buoyant recruits danced gaily away to the tracts whence they had been conscribed.

Ganpat Hamal *always* "swept" against the wind. Was not the entrance the entrance, and a very proper starting-point—and if it were the will of the gods that the dust return—who should oppose the will of the gods? . . . Anon, Ganpat Hamal encountered a slight light wicker-chair of few ounces weight. Laboriously he drove his dusty flock beneath it and around it, and flapped at each of its four obstructing feet. He did not remove it, of course, for he was a religious man. Had not the high gods willed that it should be there? Ere long he reached a whole long row of such chairs, arrayed against the wall, and by the time he had worked his crouching way to the end thereof, he was without a following—or rather a preceding. Not a grain of dust or ball of fluff survived the passage perilous. But Ganpat Hamal bowed him to the will of the gods and knew that ere he reached the bitter end of his pilgrimage of chase, there would be more. There was.

Feeling that results were poor at half the journey's distance, by the dining-room door he incautiously raised the big mat to get a little haul for his encouragement, just as a puff of real wind swooped down the verandah

and scattered all its hidden treasure. Some of it he prevented in its doings and imprisoned beneath his inadequate weapon of offence.

Toiling onward, at the end of an hour, and as the clock chimed seven, he reached the far end of the gleaming track of marble, and there gave another example and proof of submissive fatalistic piety.

For even as he murmured, “Go forth, unclean devils,” to the small army of his patient collection, and prepared to drive it over the four-foot precipice to the lawn below, a wanton breeze leapt at it, overcame its puny resistance, and squandered it to the four corners of the great corridor.

Many a man, especially many a hasty restless Englishman, shows anger and annoyance when he sees his patient work undone. Let such a man learn a lesson from the humble gentle Ganpat Hamal. No shadow of a sign of chagrin crossed his face, and no expletive his lips. Indeed a diet of rice, at one meal a day, does not lend itself to expletives on the part of the consumer.

Ganpat Hamal, with meek and holy resignation, merely flapped his duster in the breeze and sought his next sphere of usefulness.

Could he take a rest on the scene of his useful labours and safely light the remains of last night’s *bidi* and enjoy a well-earned smoke?

No, it was late, and that Concentrated Extract of Virulent and Violent Devils, Serjeant Bunn Sahib, might catch him and be unpleasant with his boot.

Ganpat Hamal loved a man who could surely catch him in crime and try, sentence, and execute him, with a rousing toe-up, and bear no malice nor cut his pay. What Ganpat Hamal loathed was the master who nagged and fined —forgetting that a fine of eightpence to Ganpat Hamal was more than a fine of ten pounds to himself, in cash, and equal to two days’ starvation in punishment.

Still, one may love a man and not love his just and proper kicks.

No. Better not light the charming and seductive *bidi* that makes the European who comes within a furlong of it feel sick, for Bunn Sahib would be about soon, and would woodenly refuse to believe that there was no connection between the only man in the verandah and a powerful stink of *bidi* in that same verandah.

He would pretend to go in search of the palmleaf brush with which he ought to be armed, and squat behind the go-down for a bit, to “drink smoke” and socially converse with other busy souls.

“ ’Ullo, ’Orace!” broke in the voice of the object of his thoughts, with startling suddenness, “ ’ave you swope the verandy or ’aven’t yer? And did you done it with the tail of yer shirt or the fray of yer pantaloons? . . . ’Ave you molk the orspittle cow for the Doctor Sahib or ’aven’t yer? ’Ave you toke away that broken glass I shoo yer las’ night, or ’aven’t yer? Or ’ave you sot and moke poetry ever since you left yore feather bed, ’Orace?” . . . and with a swift and truculent change, a horrible scowl, and a step in his direction, Serjeant Bunn hissed,

“ ’Op, you idle ’ound, or I’ll *breathe* on yer!” and Ganpat Hamal fled, much stimulated by the friendly notice of his Sahib.

For Serjeant Bunn *was* his Sahib of course, and of infinitely more importance than one John Durham, the mere Proprietor of the Club. To him “Durham Sahib” was a name, and the rule of that person an idea or less than an idea.

The Oriental desires, and must have, Personal Government and the reign of an actual and tangible Master, just or unjust. He prefers the former to the latter, but he prefers the unjust rule of a Man to the just rule of a System or a Code—a fact that appears to escape the intelligence of the Member for Upper Tooting when interpreting the Oriental after a month’s study.

When the Member for Upper Tooting and his good colleagues have got this fellow-citizen the vote, and presented it to him and his few million tortoise-brained, tortoise-souled, tortoise-bodied brethren, he and they, looking around from the height of their tortoise-stature and murmuring “What can do?” will lay it at the feet of the nearest Personal Governor—Serjeant Bunn or Jones Memsahib or Mister Chatterjee Chuckerbutty, Pleader, M.A., LL.B.—and beg to be excused.

“ ’Orace is a bloomin’ rest-cure on’y to look at ’im,” observed Serjeant Bunn, proceeding to visit and encourage the various indoor colleagues of “Horace,” and insist upon the desirability of sweeping carpets before dusting tables and of banging mats to leeward of dining-gear and cleaned areas.

“Mornin’, sir,” said he with a military salute to Major Barronby as that gentleman sauntered out to the garden for his *chota hazri* pipe—a solemn and unfailing daily rite.

The Honourable Reginald Burke was wont to say that Barronby was the only man in the world whom he envied, and that he envied him only two things—his pipe, and his ability to enjoy it in the early morning. Many a time, on his remittance days, Burke had endeavoured to buy the pipe from

his friend—sometimes when it was about the only thing he had not sold—but without success. Though reduced to two garments and a pair of slippers, the free list, and an empty tobacco pouch, the Major was not to be tempted, and had refused ten pounds jingled in gold before his eyes and ears.

"It's not worth it, you know, Barry," Burke would say. "No pipe could be worth it."

"Then don't offer it," the Major would reply, and when the wondrous day dawned that Burke's ten rupee note on Signorinetta brought him in a thousand, and he asked Barronby to name his own price for the pipe and learnt that a thousand sovereigns would not buy it, he remarked:

"Oh, sorry, Barry—didn't know a girl had given it you."

And Barronby had replied, "How the devil did you know that?"—a question that had moved Burke to laughter.

Yet Burke could not be aware that inside the lid of the case was a little silver plate on which was inscribed the legend, "To Cecil from Cynthia," or that his Cynthia had said in those happy days when the world was Heaven, "You are to think of me every time you smoke it, Tiny" . . . or how angry he always felt when fellows wanted to buy it from him. . . .

"Morning, Father! Morning, Padre Sahib!" he cried as Father Gregory and the once Reverend Montague Dalcane emerged upon the lawn. "Early worms get caught by the bird, what?"

"Yes," tittered the fat Dalcane, "but we are genuine early-risen worms, and you're probably just coming home. . . ."

Montague Dalcane hid a constant gnawing regret, grief, and terror, beneath a cheerful countenance and a screen of little jokes and pleasant small-talk. A popular, good-natured, ever-helpful man, everybody's friend, and supposedly at peace with himself and the world. . . .

"No, Father," he was saying, as he and the little silver-haired priest paced the lawn beneath the trees, at the far and secluded end, "I can't say that it came suddenly, though the realization of it did. . . . That came all in a flash—and stunned me. . . . I don't think I have fully recovered consciousness yet."

"And what brought about the sudden realization, my friend?" asked Father Gregory, releasing the skirt of his long surtout, black, rope-encircled, many-buttoned, without which no man had ever seen him at Chotapettah, and placing his hand inside the arm of his companion.

“The simple proposition, made from my pulpit, by the Bishop, that the Mission should get a dam built across the nullah near the church, and then pray earnestly, insistently, and with faith, for a good monsoon—for what would be *quite* unusual in those parts—a monsoon of heavy rain,” replied the ex-clergyman.

“I am afraid I do not see . . .” began Father Gregory.

“No, Father,” interrupted the younger man, “*you* wouldn’t see anything so stupid, so childish, so unreasonable, and yet so fatal. But, even as the Lord Bishop spoke the words, my idle mind, my stupid, gross perversity, my irreverent—and yet not irreverent—nature, reversed them, and a voice within me said, ‘Why not wait for the monsoon and then pray earnestly, insistently, and with faith, *for a dam*!’ . . . I cast the thought out, as blasphemous, irreverent, improper, and again and again it returned, shrilling in my ear, ‘Surely if it be right, reasonable, and proper to pray for undue rain wherewith to fill your nullah and give you a supply of water, it is equally right, reasonable, and proper to pray for a dam—to hold it in.’ I spurned the thought and drove it from me, and again and again it returned with, ‘Surely the Power that can interfere with its own Laws and compel Nature, can erect a dam! Surely a human feat like the building of a barrier is a trifle compared with the superhuman feat of bringing rain, when conditions are not favourable. . . .’”

“I was in agony of mind—for I knew that the words were true and reasonable.

“ ‘Impudent blasphemer! Arguing fool! Blind, faithless, earth-bound materialist! I groaned, and the vile inner voice spoke coolly, clearly, convincingly.

“ ‘Tell me. Since you can pray for one miracle and impossibility—why can you not pray for another? Why not pray for the miracle that will save money and labour? Pray for the dam and wait for the rain, or, better—pray for an elevated steel tank, filter, water-pipes, cisterns, and taps. . . . And if there be no limit to the Power and Goodness—pray for these and rain too, and be done with it. . . .’

“I felt that I was going mad; that familiar, comfortable, pleasant things were falling from me; that the barque of my fortunes, that had so long sailed over placid seas of acceptance and easy belief, was being driven upon rocks of Doubt and Darkness and Agnosticism.

" 'Rain often follows prayer,' I said; 'whoever heard of walls being raised by prayer?' and I was answered at once.

" 'Would the rain have fallen elsewhere but for the prayer—or have remained in the sky? . . . If faith can move mountains and precipitate raindrops—cannot it move bricks? . . . Pray for the dam, I say, and wait for the rain. Pray *and see whether your prayer is answered*.'

" 'Get thee behind me, Satan!' I cried, and, as I said the words, I knew that this was the beginning of the end and that all would soon be over—Hope fled and Faith dead, and that if I were an honest man, I must at once speak to the Bishop.

"My poor honesty impelled me, and, as he entered my house, I blurted out, 'Why not pray for the dam and wait for rain, my Lord? . . . It would save us much money and be just as easy to God. . . .' "

Father Gregory appeared to suppress a smile.

"After a few questions His Lordship left my house at once instead of sojourning with me as he had intended.

"I wrestled with my doubt, I prayed, I fasted, I got brain fever—and I all but died. . . . When I arose from my illness I found that I had lost all Faith in dogma, in religion, and almost in the divinity of Christ, and the merciful goodness of God."

Father Gregory took the speaker's arm without remark.

"Clever men have reasoned with me . . ." continued Dalcane.

"How stupid of the clever men!" remarked the old priest.

"Eh? What? I beg your pardon, Father?"

"I said, 'How stupid of them.' "

"Why?"

"What has Faith to do with Reason? No man in this world was ever *reasoned into Faith*," said Father Gregory.

"Father, I would give my right hand, my eyes, my life—to recover my Belief and Faith!—Will *you* not reason with me, give me help, arguments, proofs. . . ."

"No, my son," was the prompt reply.

"Then what am I to do?"

“Wait—and *hope*. Above all, attempt no reasoning. Reason is the Enemy of Faith—the poor, dull, conceited, blind, little ignorant Enemy of Faith.”

“And I am to do *nothing*, Father?”

“Nothing but *hope* and wait patiently. . . . Meanwhile try to see God in flowers, sunsets, dawns, moonrises, butterflies, good women, and all beauty. . . . Look at this, my son . . .” and Father Gregory pointed to what seemed to be a stem and leaves of dried grass, lying on the balustrade of the verandah. . . . It moved. . . . It was a large insect—the thin body, some three inches long, in no way to be distinguished from a piece of grass-stalk; its long antennæ perfect little grass-blades, sere and yellow; its long legs perfect filaments of hay. Until it moved it was nothing but a branching blade of withered grass—a most marvellous and perfect example of protective colouring and imitation.

“There is more of God in that than in many Creeds, my son,” said Father Gregory. “You have read too many books and been decoyed from the good God by good men. . . . Leave books-and-thought: turn to Nature-and-thought. . . . Come from man’s leaves in the library to God’s leaves in the garden, and I’ll prophesy—though prophecy is ‘the most gratuitous and foolish of all error’—sometimes—that, before long, you shall find ‘tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.’ . . . Cease to worry and to fear, my son, and above all, cease to *reason* and, because you are pure in heart, you shall certainly ‘see God.’ ”

“Father,” said the formerly Reverend Montague Dalcane brokenly, “I am in hell. I have lived long in hell; and day and night I have seen and heard the words, ‘Abandon hope all ye who enter here.’ . . . I shall see and hear those words no longer. . . . For if you cannot give me Faith you have given me Hope. . . . To know you is to be ‘almost persuaded.’ ”

“And I can give you more, my son,” replied Father Gregory.

“Once upon a time *I* said, ‘There is no God. There *can* be no God, or I should not be allowed to suffer so’—for I lived through such a time of agony that my mind failed and I became a lunatic and was confined as such. . . . When I recovered and became sane I said, ‘No—there is no God, and Christ was merely a good man—a social reformer and dreamer, with more mystic faith than common-sense,’ and for years I was even as you are now.

“Like you, I strove to find Belief through Reason, and like you, and Everyman who has tried to do so, I failed—failed hopelessly—in misery and

despair. And then I abandoned poor silly Reason—and contented myself with yearning, longing, and hoping. Then all was well—and now I do not reason, I cannot reason, but I *know*. . . . I wonder if you have heard of the remark of a great Englishman on the subject, when an atheist attempted to argue with him on the question of Faith? 'I never reason about the unreasonable,' said he, 'but when you can shake a few hundred letters in a bag and then cast them down upon the ground in a complete and perfect poem of surpassing beauty, wisdom, and truth—*then* I will begin to reason as to whether this Universe has a Creator.' . . . No, my son, I cannot reason, I do not reason, but I know. And so will you, in time, if you truly desire."

"Father," said Dalcane, "I will reason no more. I will wait and hope," and with working face and bursting heart, the man who hid Despair beneath a fat and smiling face, hurried to his room, cast himself down by his bed—and clamoured aloud to the unanswering heavens.

CHAPTER X

FAILURES' DREAMS

Being your slave, what should I do but tend
Upon the hours and times of your desire?
I have no precious hours to spend
Nor services to do till you require.
Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour
Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,
Nor think the bitterness of absence sour
When you have bid your servant once Adieu;
Nor dare I question with my jealous thought
Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,
But like a sad slave, stay and think of nought
Save—where *you* are—*how happy you made those*!

"Good arter-noon and many on 'em, Sir," said Serjeant Bunn, as I entered the Club on my return from a visit to the Calbay Workhouse.

"Good morning, Bunn," I replied, for the hour was a few minutes past midnight. "All well?"

"Puffeck peace an' joyful as a funerial bell, Sir," he assured me, as I approached the glazed pen and counter behind which he lurks with all-seeing eye, when not prowling in search of what he may improve, or whom he may chastise for leaving room for improvement.

I am convinced that in this country no servant loves you if you never harry and excoriate him. No English servant would stand Bunn for a day and no Indian servant would willingly leave him.

"Dr. Foy quite well?"

"Barley-water and lemon all the time, Sir, absoberlutely."

"*Bunn!*"

"I said he was werry well or better still, Sir."

"Anyone to see me?"

"Two, Sir. Usual sort. A werry worried-looking gent who'll come agin, and a 'Aughty Augustus who I don't think *won't* come agin perhaps not."

“Is Major Barronby about still?”

I had some news for the Major and wanted to speak to him.

“No, Sir. ’E ain’t. ’E’s in ’is little cot as well I knows it—’avin’ put ’im there, and ’im unwillin’. After Father Gregory ’ad gone to bed Major Barronby tumbled off the water-cart ’e did.”

I had already encountered this elegant and allegorical phrase in America and knew that the worthy Serjeant alluded to a moral rather than a physical *débâcle*.

To fall off the water-cart was to fall from teetotalism or moderation—a reprehensible descent in the opinion of Serjeant Bunn, an ardent and life-long abstainer.

Serjeant Bunn had been naughty enough in other ways, however, and had “done a lot of time,” as he said.

“Was it a bad fall?” I inquired.

“ ’Orrid, Sir,” was the reply. “Clean off the cart ’e was. Nor ’e couldn’t get back neither.”

“Did he fall or was he pushed?” I asked, knowing Barronby to be a fairly moderate person, as a rule, between remittance-day “binges.”

“Fell, sir. ’E fair flung ’isself off,” was the grieved reply, for Serjeant Bunn loved all “his gentlemen” save and except Mr. Henry Hoalke, who, he contended, was not a gentleman at all.

“And did he fall alone?” I pursued.

“No, Sir. Mr. Mantin came down with ’im. . . . Pushed? Might say *’e* was posh, if yer like! Major Barronby ain’t no secret drinker. Not ’e. And ’e won a quarter-dozen o’ champagne from Mr. Mantin ’e did, at Spondoolicky, and ’im and Mr. Mantin ’ad seven glasses apiece and gove some to Revering Dalcane, Mr. Fitz’awke, and Mr. Wrothe. . . . Awful ’appy they was and I put ’em both to bed. . . . It was a little whisky finished ’em. . . . The Major e’s goin’ to appint me ’ead gardener at Barronby. ’All *when* ’e in’erits and gets it—and me not knowing a carrot-bush from an onion-tree. It’s been the Dream of ’is Life to do it ’e says. Likewise Mr. Mantin gove me a trouser-button to spend ’ow I liked and tol’ me not to make a beast o’ meself. It’s *’is* Dream to see me ’ung for a sot! Yes, Sir—they was very merry, and perfec’ gentlemen in their cups. It’s true, Sir, that saying o’ the French ‘*in wino verily*.’ . . . You can allus tell the real man when ’e’s awash—the blaggard comes out and the gennleman comes out. . . . It’s the only good there is in

booze. . . . We ’ad a ranker in the old corps, and we never knew ’e *was* a gennleman-born till ’e got drunk. . . .”

I wondered what Barronby could have wagered against so vast a stake as three quarts of champagne. Something of equal value I was certain—and yet I knew him to be absolutely penniless until his next quarterly remittance arrived from home, as he always was within a week after its receipt. I would go and see Mantin in the morning and scold him for corrupting a respectable Club with his wealth, and causing the downfall of members happily kept virtuous by chill penury. . . .

“Come in,” cried Mantin, with his mouth full of toast, “Hullo, dear old bird! Didn’t know you were back. Come last night? . . . Have a cheroot.”

I accepted Mantin’s excellent cigar, though I had ten in my case, but I had no intention of smoking it before breakfast.

Mantin is comparatively wealthy and I know that some of the free-list Members only get the casual cheroot I offer them. I fill my fat case—which holds ten as I say—and empty it first in my morning stroll round the Club. When I see some poor chap sitting smokeless after breakfast, I stop before him, enter into conversation, and select a cheroot from my case. Just as I am returning the latter to my pocket I remember my manners and say, “Have a weed?” . . . Then I pass on, replace the unlighted cheroot, and so *da capo*. Having done this nine times I light the long-suffering cheroot. Much the same sort of thing happens after lunch and dinner. There is no pauperism about offering a stonybroker a cigar—but I won’t have fellows writing *chits* for anything but necessities while on the “free list.”

That same list does not pauperize—for a man must live—and the theory is that I shall be repaid later, but I don’t believe in bills for luxuries. . . .

“I hear you have been breaking the Club rules in my absence,” said I. “Rioting and inciting to riot, demoralizing the virtuous, and introducing a golden serpent into this Eden of the Unblest.”

“What are you driving at, Johnny?” he asked, in obvious surprise. “I have led a godly, righteous, and sober life. Hardly left the Club, and not set eyes on a woman. Except that rather dainty little Eurasian girl at Rightaway and Mademore’s place over at Burrapore where I went on Saturday. By Jove, she has a really *beautiful* pair of eyes. Limpid! I——”

“You couldn’t put her photo *here*, Mantin,” said I, glancing round, and his soaring spirit fell to earth.

“I shall not go in there again, old chap. I had a dream last night,” he said.

“No, don’t,” I counselled, and added, “How did you come to drown the souls of Barronby and yourself in champagne?”

“Oh, that’s all right,” he replied. “It was a good game and Barronby won. . . . Spondulicky. . . . I happened to remark in his hearing that my head ached with reading and I’d give anything if somebody would read me a volume of Swinburne. Barronby thereupon offered to play me for a quarter-dozen of Bollinger against his promise to read a whole volume of Algy when called on. . . . He won—two to seven. . . . He’s awful nippy at Spondulicky.”

For the benefit of the uninitiated I may state that Spondulicky, or Catchpenny, was a favourite pastime of the Club—though I personally could never feel its fascination. To play it one required twenty-five coins and much practice.

The player, standing on one foot and raising his right fist till the back of it lay on his shoulder, placed a coin on the upper surface of the raised right forearm, close to the elbow. With a sharp downward grab he then caught it in the right hand.

His opponent then did the same.

The first player then used two coins, the other followed suit, and so on, the number of coins increasing until twenty-five were in use—or one of the players had dropped seven coins. There were legends of men doing it with rupees and catching all, from one to twenty-five, but I never saw it done.

There was a ridiculous set of rules written out and framed in the billiard-room. They were incredibly numerous and meticulous—and provided for the bestowing of a Spondulicky “blue” upon him who attained a certain proficiency. A “Blue” could wear his *topi* in the public rooms, where others uncovered, and hind-side-before in the grounds, to distinguish him from common men. I remember a great tournament “Military *v.* Civilian,” which ended a little unpleasantly in the disappearance of a rupee, the property of the Spondulicky Club, and the flat accusation of Hoalke by Barronby! . . .

“How are you feeling to-day?” I asked Mantin.

“Oh, worlds better, old cabbage,” he replied, “and I had such a lovely dream last night. Lovely! I did curse when I found I had really woken up and couldn’t go on with it.”

“A ‘Dream of Fair Women.’ doubtless,” I hazarded.

“Oh, charming! And *so* real! I wonder if I shall ever see her. I’d give my soul to—but of course not—in this life—I’m dying. . . . But this dream! . . .

“I suddenly found myself driving through a Russian forest in a sumptuous sleigh, drawn by three horses, harnessed abreast, and sitting beside the loveliest girl in the world—a Russian. . . . Real aristocrat. . . . And look here, Durry—it’s dam-funny, but I *must* have lived this experience in a former life. I have never been anywhere near Russia nor heard a word of Russian, and yet I *recognized* the place and the language and *talked* it. . . . I had been there before. . . . And what’s more, I have never seen a Russian sledge nor, so far as I know, a picture of one—and yet I dreamed all sorts of details that I’m certain I didn’t know about when I went to bed last night.

“I didn’t know before that there were three horses of which the middle one was between shafts and the others free, nor that the driver held three reins in each hand, wore a kind of muff on his head, an enormous sort of dressing-gown, fingerless gloves, and sea-boots.

“I didn’t know there was an arched iron contraption with bells on it, spanning the shafts over the head of the centre horse. I didn’t know the driver stood up most of the time, nor that he used a short-handled whip with a long lash. And I knew nothing of the shape and appointments, runners, and harness of a sleigh.

“By Jove! I can see the moonlight on those frosted trees now, and the black shadows on the silver snow! And I can hear the curious singing of the runners over the snow, the muffled thud of the horses’ feet, and the silver tinkle of the little bells. I can feel that biting air yet. . . . By Jove! Russian sleigh-horses have only one pace, and that’s not a trot either. It’s a dooced hard gallop.

“Comfort and luxury in travelling! We were *buried* in furs. Priceless furs, too. Sitting on bearskin, sitting under bearskin, wrapped in furs, dressed in furs. I had rummy great fur-lined boots even, and a saucy fur hat—awful doggy.

“And the Princess! . . . Violets—on fur—near violet eyes, Durham! . . . Real beautiful Parma violets on her fur toque, at her throat, on her great muff—and real beautiful violet eyes. . . . Innocent eyes—but infinitely kind and interested, and ready to love the lovable.

“And I *felt* lovable in that dream, Durry. I was purged and purified. I felt strong and big and brave, and I looked it. I wanted to fight for her and die

for her. I'd as soon have died as lived for her. I was a God in human form. . . . One can talk like this to you, old bird, and let one's self go. . . .

"Yes! *Beautiful!* Why it gave one pain to see such beauty. It was agony to think that one must either possess it or not possess it—marry her or lose her.

"Which would have been worse—to 'domicile and domesticate' her and grow accustomed and blasé, or to lose her and turn one's life to a great empty ache, a living pain?

"And I dared to make love to her.

"I said, 'Princess, I am in love with you,' and she laughed and said, 'You have told me that before, Ivan Derekovitch,' and I *knew* we had met in a former life when I was John and my father Derek. . . . We have all been Johns or Dereks for centuries. . . . 'And what have you answered before?' I asked, trembling with love and hope and fear. . . . 'I have answered that I loved you, too, Ivan,' she murmured, putting her tiny fur-gloved hand on mine.

" 'And will you marry me, Princess?' I stammered.

" 'You have also asked me *that* before, Ivan,' she answered.

" 'And what have you replied, Princess?'

" 'That lovers should not wed, Ivan, when they love as *we* do. Marriage is a tragic ending to worship, ecstasy, divine madness—and you agreed with me, Ivan. You said, manlike, that to be doomed to drink no drop of anything but champagne, and to eat no morsel of anything but caviare, would be fatal. *And we agreed to drive all a moonlight night once a year, Beloved—so long as our souls were young and filled with life and sweetness, and we had our high ideal and loved as nobles should—nobly, and beautifully*,' and a tear stood on her cheek and fell, a frozen diamond, upon the fur.

"Durham, it was real. I have *lived* it. I was born fated—fated to love, and I shall never dream nor love again before I die—and I shall die soon. For she said to me, 'I have a dreadful presentiment to-night, Ivan. Something will happen. We shall be parted,' and I swore that our souls should never be parted at least, and would dwell out the Hereafter together where there is no marrying. I held her tiny hand. I drowned my soul in those untellable lakes of beauty, her great eyes, I kissed her beautiful mouth and my heart stopped until I almost died—and then came The Wolves!

"I told you I felt brave and noble, Durham! Well, I gave my life for her. . . . Oh God! Did I *really* do it in a former life? . . . Was I once *really* brave and noble and great? . . . What wouldn't I give to know that I once did a really fine thing! . . .

"Just as I had kissed her and sworn that I only lived for her love, and that life was nothing to me but a weary time of waiting, I heard The Wolves, and so did she.

"Now I've never seen a wolf in my life, Durry, nor heard one. Yet now I know exactly what the great grey timber-wolf of Russia is like, and I know his awful howl. . . . Lord! the song of a questing pack is a thing I don't want to hear again.

" 'You must save us, Mikhail Mikhailovitch,' said my Princess to the driver, and the fellow reminded me of that picture of the Roman chariot race. He stood up again, and I don't think his right arm dropped for miles. He systematically cut at each horse's neck in turn, quite regularly, impartially, and with such skill and force that before long they were all three bolting, mad, racing each other—and not in the least under control. By Jove, it was the most exhilarating experience *I* ever had! And the way the beggar steered was amazin'—for it was no Nevske Prospekt that forest track, I can tell you.

"And without turning round, this Mikhail Mikhailovitch stooped, opened the lid of his seat, and took out first one, and then another, great heavy horse-pistol, and held them out behind him, for me to take. Then he held out a brass box with a screw lid.

"Believe me, Durham, I have never, in my life, had a flintlock fire-arm in my hands, nor ever had a look at one, and yet I knew exactly what to do!

"I pulled back a kind of steel clamp opposite the hammer, and shook out the powder from the pan that it covered and closed, when down. Then I rubbed it well, shut down the clamp, and pulled the trigger to see that the flint was sparking well. It was a good sharp flint and worked admirably. Opening the brass box, which I knew contained powder, spare flints, and a strong sharp-pointed instrument, I cleaned out the touch-hole in the pan, refilled the pan with dry powder, closed the clamp, cocked the hammer, and shook the powder in the barrel well down to the touch-hole.

" 'That priming is reliable, Princess,' said I, and I doubt if I have ever used the word 'priming' before in English even—and now I used it in Russian. . . . I remember many of the words I used, and have written them

down in English characters. If they prove to be real Russian words, Durham—with the meaning I gave them in my dream—I shall die of sheer wonder and joy and excitement.

" 'How steady and cool you are, Beloved,' replied my beautiful friend—and so I was, absolutely calm and unafraid.

"The other pistol did not spark, and I found that the screw of the little vice that held the flint was not well home.

"Passing the sharp-pointed instrument through the hole that was bored in the top of the screw, to get purchase and leverage, I tightened it up and made it satisfactory.

" 'Don't have that glove off for more than a minute, Ivan,' said the Princess. . . .

"The pack gained on us, and at length, after flying down a longer 'straight' than usual, I caught a glimpse of them just as we turned a bend. They looked like beetles on a tablecloth, but they sounded like lost devils from hell.

"Turning again to her, I saw that my queen was weeping—and I knew that it was for me and because of her presentiment. It was not because we were ten versts from a village, with its dogs and shelter, and the wolves not half a verst behind us, but because she felt that she and I were about to part.

"And she clung to me and said we would die together—she would not live if I were dead. . . .

"Was there time to stop and climb a tree before the wolves reached us? . . . No—the intervening and quickly decreasing space was only maintained by hard galloping, and the pines were trees to be climbed with difficulty by an athlete and not at all by a woman clad in furs. . . . Besides, we should have died of cold and starvation even had there been an accommodating ladder handy.

"Cut loose one of the horses and shoot it that it might delay the wolves?

"No. That was an expedient only to be employed when close to safety, and I remember thinking, with a grin, of a story I had recently heard at Moscow of a man who cut one of his three horses loose, only to see it gaily gallop off to the safety he himself only attained by the skin of his teeth. When he reached the village with the wolves snapping at his coat-tails the doomed sacrifice was enjoying its dinner!

"No. We were too far out for a brief respite to be of the slightest use—at such a cost.

"The wolves gained on us, and ere long the trees thinned and we left the forest, entering upon a great featureless plain, an illimitable sea of glistening virgin snow. There was nothing to be seen save sky and snow, except the striped posts that, half-buried, marked the road, and the wolves behind.

"They looked bigger than beetles now, by Jove, and I could see glints of moonshine on teeth and eyes.

"Durham, I *have* been hunted by wolves. I swear it. I *must* have been. I know how they do it.

"It is not the same sort of thing as the hunting of a pack of fox-hounds. . . . There is a leader, and the bulk of the pack follows behind him—perhaps because he is the fastest, perhaps because he is in command as it were, and if one draws level with him he snaps at it. Then others fan out to the flanks and keep about level with the leader, but don't pass him even when a curve of the road gives them the chance of getting ahead on the chord, as the quarry takes the arc. The leader is cunning enough to take the straight line across country when the road bends, and the flankers wait on him; and the tail of the pack is composed of old 'uns, mothers, cubs, or limpers, and makes more row than all the rest, those that do the actual catching—division of labour, p'r'aps.

"Oh yes, I have been chased by wolves, all-right, in some former existence. . . .

"I comforted the Princess and felt uplifted, happy, exhilarated. I knew I was to die for her. By and by she said, 'You might get one now, Ivan, splendid shot that you are,' and I looked, and the brutes were within a few yards.

"Nasty! They look away if you catch their eye—and come on the faster. They know they've got you. . . . Devils of cunning and ferocity. . . . And their mouths, Durry! . . . Lolling tongues, beastly teeth—and beastlier breath. Ugh!

"Well, I knelt up and rested a horse-pistol on the back of the sleigh—there's no jerk nor bump about a sleigh running over hard-frozen virgin snow at the gallop, and the thing weighed about as much as a modern twelve-bore—and waited. Nearer and nearer, and, suddenly, the leader *sprang*, and I pooped off at him in mid-air, and more by luck than judgment

got him fair. I dare say the pistol was stuffed full of slugs, but I *may* have got him with a single ball. . . . I should like to know. . . .

"It was all so *real*. . . . It wasn't a dream. . . . Nothing silly nor impossible happened, as it always does in dreams. I was simply living over again an actual incident of a former life. I *know* it—and I shall die soon.

"Well, as the beggar touched earth, his old pals behind rolled clean head over heels trying to pull up and grab him, and in a second the pack was a pile—a heap of snarling, fighting, struggling wolves, and we got a clear furlong start before some of those who realized they had no chance at the leader's carcase took up the hunt again. I don't suppose it was five minutes though before the whole lot were after us again. . . . Next time I fired it was into the 'brown' of them, and we got another respite. . . . I couldn't reload. Servant-like, the worthy Mikhail had been careful to start with loaded pistols and careful to forget bullet-bag and powder-flask, though he had brought the priming-box. . . . I told him he would pay for his carelessness with his bones, and he offered to jump off then and there, if I could drive. . . . I couldn't. . . . I had never driven a sleigh and three horses in my life, and, in any case, I wasn't going to perch up there with my back to my Princess while wolves were leaping at her. Why, I might find I had driven to safety, if I didn't overturn the sleigh, and had arrived *alone*.

"No. I had a better plan than letting a servant die for my queen, and I turned to tell her that she *must* let me go, for it was as much her duty to live as it was mine to die—and I found that she had fainted.

"So much the better. . . . I pulled the furs well over her, adjured Mikhail to save his mistress, and sprang sideways out of—*bed*. . . .

"Oh, Durham, I cursed and cried when I found that it was a wretched broken-down Derek Mantin tumbling out of bed, instead of a tine and noble Ivan Derekovitch Mantin leaping from a Russian sleigh to give his life for a beautiful woman whom he worshipped. . . ." And the poor fellow broke down and wept.

I slipped from the room—to send Father Gregory to him. Poor Mantin! He's ill-equipped for struggle with a world such as this.

Passing the Professor's room, I was arrested by the sound of a truly heartrending groan. I stopped, knocked at the half-open door, and asked if anything were the matter.

"Oh, come in, my dear Durham," cried the Professor. "I am delighted to see you. How are you this morning?"

He was clad in my overcoat and a pair of vast trousers.

"I'm in aggressive health and spirits, thanks, Professor—but I fear you are feeling ill?"

"*I?* Not in the least, my dear friend," replied the eccentric scholar. "Why should you think it?"

"I heard what seemed to me a groan of agony or grief. . . ."

"Oh, I was only lamenting the Curse," was the mysterious reply.

"What Curse?" I inquired.

"The Curse of Sex, and the particular Curse under which I have laboured all my life—or since I was about three years of age," said the Professor, with the most lugubrious air and mournful shaking of the head, as he collapsed, sighing heavily, into a chair.

Here was a marvel! The Curse of Sex. . . . I had not supposed that the Professor was cognizant of the existence of Woman.

Was the man in love? Had he a wife who had suddenly discovered his hiding-place? Had calamity come upon a daughter? What could he mean? And what was the "particular Curse" under which he had laboured so long?

"How does the Curse of Sex come to trouble you, Professor?" I asked.

"It has been the dream of my life to be a Woman, Durham," replied the astounding man, "and, knowing *that* to be impossible, to be able to go about in female garb—petticoats and things, you know."

Was his brain really softening?

"And the 'particular Curse' under which you have suffered since you were three?"

"An ancillary and corollary Curse, my dear Durham—*Braces*."

"What?"

"Braces. . . . Since I was taken from the blessed petticoats of happy infanthood, I have been under the spell of the Devil who inhabits Braces. Never in my life have I been able to find my braces. . . . Not once have I, in fifty years, left my bed without the dreadful certainty of a hunt for those vile braces. . . . Many a time have I gone to lecture or to church without them—

and with the *direst* results. . . . Once before Royalty and the Royal Society. . . .

“Durham! *Could* you get me a gross of pairs, and have them nailed up round the wall? It has been the dream of my life, too, to own a gross and feel safe for a month. I have never been able to afford it. . . . I think I shall prepare a thesis and send it to the Psychical Research Society. No mere human agency can have been hiding them, daily, all these years. . . . What? . . . Turned over? Down inside my trousers, Durham? *So* they are. . . . *So* they are. . . . I *am* so much obliged to you, my dear friend. . . . But I need hardly say *I* did not turn them inside! . . . No. . . . I distinctly remember now!

“Last night I determined to circumvent the Curse and to be able to find them this morning so that I could slip out early, before Foy caught me, and, after much anxious thought, I hit on the brilliant scheme of leaving them attached to the trousers, for *they* never go astray—I will say that for them. . . .

“I did so, and you see the result for yourself, Durham! . . . Oh, if Foy only knew the *bitter* cruelty of calling me Aunty and Old Geeser and other feminine terms . . . when I would give *anything* to be a woman in sober earnest. . . .”

“But *why*, my dear Professor?”

“I understand that they do not need to wear——”

Again I fled.

CHAPTER XI

MAJOR BARRONBY'S STORY

When does the morning dawn?
When the strength that glows through sorrow and storm
Awakens the sun in thy soul.
So thy bosom warmly embraces the world
In this cause:
To be truly good to each and all.
Then it is morning
Bright clear morning.

Björnstjerne Björnson.

"No one knows better than I that right and wrong are not absolute, my son, that circumstances alter cases, and that a crime here may be a virtue there," replied Father Gregory. "I myself——"

"*You*'re such a good chap, Father," burst in Major Barronby impulsively. "You are absolutely *sans peur et sans reproche* yourself, and yet you're so full of tolerance and sympathy for such sinners and scoundrels as I. . . . God! I wish I were like you, and then I shouldn't have wrecked my life as I have—nor a woman's either, which is much more to the point. Do you think that *any* kind of 'crime' may be excusable under certain circumstances?"

"Certainly," was the prompt answer; "more, I believe circumstances can arise that make 'crimes' not only excusable but make them virtues—make them such necessities, in fact, that their non-commission would be the real crime. . . . Of course, we are all self-deceivers, and too often the wish is father to the thought; but I am convinced that occasions arise when it may be an honest man's duty to lie, to steal—to murder even. Though it's not a doctrine I'd go about preaching indiscriminately."

"Could circumstances ever justify the breaking of the Seventh Commandment, Father?" asked the Major, who was evidently in deadly earnest and gripped by strong emotion. "Can a man ever be justified in breaking first the Tenth and then the Eighth and then the Seventh Commandment—in coveting, and then stealing, and then living with, his neighbour's wife?"

“There you put the least likely case, Barronby—the least likely to be justifiable, I mean. And the case in which men are most clever in self-deception.”

Barronby groaned. His sins, which were many, always lay most heavily upon him the morning after a “binge.” Even while he groaned he congratulated himself upon his accurate remembrance of the order and content of the Ten Commandments. There was no intentional harm in Major Barronby, but much potential.

“I don’t think it is the slightest breach of confidence, Barronby—indeed, I am sure it is not—to tell you that our own host, the noble-hearted, generous Durham, is what the world calls a bastard—was born ‘in sin,’ a love-child; nor is it wrong for me to state that I have the firmest belief, nay, that I am absolutely certain, that his parents were justified. . . . Her husband-by-law was an unspeakable, unimaginable brute, and Durham’s father attempted to save her. It cost him his life. He was the bravest and noblest gentleman who ever lived—and his son is like him.”

“And the woman, Father?”

“She was not a wicked woman, my son. She committed the ‘unpardonable sin’ in the eyes of the world, but she believed she was justified, and I believe God, who alone knows what she suffered, will condone her guilt.”

“God bless you, Father, for saying so,” cried Barronby; “what’s good enough for you is good enough for me. . . . I’ve never been a religious chap, Father, and I don’t know exactly what your religion is—but, but—if it would give you any pleasure to convert me, I’ll join you like a shot.”

Father Gregory’s sweet mouth curved in a sad slow smile as he affectionately took the arm of the man whom forty years of life, in all parts of the world, had left an impulsive, unbalanced boy—a huge child, with the appetites, irresponsibility, and selfishness of a child, but with the child’s generous impulses, frankness, and good intent.

“I’d raise a finger to change no man’s religion, my son,” he replied, “provided it gave him an ideal, and insisted that Faith is worse than useless without Works. . . . As you know, I never preach, and if I am ever foolish enough to give advice on demand, it is as to Conduct, and not as to Dogma or forms of belief. . . . Conduct is the acceptable prayer—believe me.”

“That’s it, Father. ‘Do the straight thing, honour the King, keep watch and ward, and trust in God,’ as my old father used to say. It’s doocid hard to

know the straight thing sometimes—let alone do it.”

“Conscience is a sure guide, my son.”

“And if Conscience tells you to do the thing that the law gives you ‘time’ for, or men chuck you out of clubs for?”

“Then do it—if you’re quite sure it *is* Conscience and not Desire that speaks—as we have already said.”

“Well, will you give me your opinion in a case, Father?”

“For what it’s worth, my son, if you want it, and are sure you’ll not regret having spoken.”

“I don’t suppose you know anything about women, Father, do you?”

Father Gregory smiled. He seemed amused at the remark.

“Take it that I know enough of the hearts and ways of women to be able to form an opinion in the matter, my son,” he answered.

“And I suppose you have never loved?” he continued, adding hastily, “Of course, I know you love us all, rotters though we are—but what I mean is, I suppose you have never loved in the lover’s way, never been married, never had a child.”

“I have loved in the lover’s way, I have been married, and I have had a child,” was the reply—a reply that evidently astonished Major Cecil Saxon Barronby, late R.F.A., for he ejaculated—

“Lord love us, Father! Who’d have thought it! . . . One somehow sort of thinks of you as straight from Heaven, y’know—straight from Heaven into a grand old monastery and straight from there to here. . . . Kind of celibate ascetic, and above all our petty feelings and troubles and desires.”

“Very foolish ideas, my son. . . . And I don’t quite see how the celibate priest is to understand human troubles, trials, and temptations; the hopes, fears, and feelings of men and women, lovers, fathers, and mothers. . . . But that again is purely a matter of opinion, and some of the noblest and most useful souls upon this earth have been celibate priests, and monks, ‘sisters,’ and nuns. . . . I have infinite respect for the Jesuit Fathers, for example.”

“Well, anyhow, you will understand my case all the better, Father, if you’ll let me bore you with it, and give me your opinion. . . . I’m not a thoughtful chap, nor good, nor religious, but I think of my two Cynthias every day of my life”—and the heavy, somewhat animal, yet wholly boyish face, looked wistful, tender, sad.

“I wonder if it would shock you, Father,” he added doubtfully, eyeing the beautiful gentle face, some eighteen inches below his own scarred and bulldog countenance.

“The truth honestly told for a good purpose will never shock me, my son,” replied the priest.

“Well, it’s a tale of love and elopement, Father, so stop me if you’d rather I didn’t go on. The bare idea of elopement must be very repulsive to you.”

Father Gregory made no reply, but his face wore a curious and, for him, almost cynical, smile.

“Now, believe me, Father, women were never one of my sins. No attraction whatever. I had never dangled after a girl in my life, and I loathe flirtin’ and dancin’ and so on. If I want exercise after dinner I put on a sweater and shorts—and go for a run. I don’t prance round a hot room in a stiff collar and starched shirt, graspin’ a perspirin’ female. . . . Don’t suppose *you* ever danced, Father, what?”

“I have danced, my son, and enjoyed it,” was the quiet reply.

“Well, I haven’t, so I suppose I shouldn’t say much about it, and I haven’t sought the drawing-room and the society of women at all. . . . I hate them out with the guns, and I don’t like ’em in the hunting-field. As for taking them on *shikar* and exploration trips—I’d sooner take a barrow-load of monkeys drawn by commissariat mules. . . . I jolly well avoided them—flappers, girls, married women, and widders—and did uncommon well without them. . . . And then one day I saw my Cynthia—and it was love at first sight.

“I tell you, Father, I made up for lost time in loving; and Cynthia avenged the sex on me pretty amply. I was as dotty as a mooning boy in his first attack of calf-love. . . . It was at a place called Mahableshwar over in the Bombay Presidency, Poona way. . . . I saw her at a garden show at Government House, and was drawn as her partner at some bally clock-golf binge. I had never played clock-golf nor any other golf in my life—but when I saw who was to be my partner, I sort of fell down and worshipped clock-golf then and there, for her sake. . . . When a seasoned man gets it in the neck, he *gets* it, you know, Father, and this was my first—and last—attack, and I a seasoned Captain.

“A mooney young subaltern can get it pretty bad but, Oh Lord, Sir, I was absolutely insane about her. . . . I made *poetry* about her within a week of

seeing her. . . . I did. . . . I know it to this day. She used to recite it and nearly die of laughing. It began:

> Thou lovest an angel named Cynthia,
> Go thou in and try to wintheeher—

and I tell you, Father, I was losing weight over her before ever I dreamt that she was married. She was, though. . . . To a worthy old buster, a Member of Council in the Eastern Provinces. I tell you I got my revolver out, loaded it, and tramped out to a wild bit of jungle near Elphinstone Point there, where my body wouldn't be found—and left a letter to say I'd been called to England and must send in my papers.

"Well, it wasn't till I put the thing in my mouth that I suddenly realized that if her husband was a Member of Council he must be old enough to be her grandfather, and she was bound to survive him by centuries, she being about eighteen then. Instead of blowing off my head I stood on it, and then went back to the Club and burnt the letter, feeling silly. . . . Then I simply just haunted Cynthia and couldn't keep away. . . . I'd have tramped on foot from Mahableshwar to Poona in twenty-four hours, to get a glimpse of her, if there had been no other way. . . . It took me virtuous, too, Father. . . . I turned teetotal, gave up smoking, and neither backed a horse nor touched a card until the end came. . . . I seemed to feel I was making myself less hopelessly unworthy of Cynthia when I was living as clean as a priest. . . . Yes—it was Cynthia, Cynthia, Cynthia, morning, noon, and night, without ever a thought for anything else—and I just existed, somehow, through the long hours that separated the brief moments when I could see her.

"I used to get glimpses of her in the Tabbies' room at the Club, at shows at Government House, at the polo-matches and races, or riding and driving out to the Points there. Sometimes I met her at dinner, of course, and once a good pal of mine got me next to her at dinner. . . . If I live to be a hundred I'll never forget the first drive I had with her. I told her I loved her, platonically.

"And when I had to rejoin at Bangalore, I tell you I nearly broke leave and chucked the service—and I just peaked and pined. . . . One day"—and here the Major guffawed and Father Gregory smiled with amused sympathy—"instead of bawling 'Retire' to my Battery, I shouted 'Cynthia.' . . . It took time to live *that* down I tell you, and I had to turn nasty with one or two chaps. . . .

"But that just expressed it, and summed up the situation exactly. *Everything* was Cynthia, and I had to see her or give up eating and drinking.

I exchanged into a Battery near her husband's head-quarters in the Eastern Provinces and just lived to see her. When we met again she seemed quite delighted to see me, for she had always been awfully amused at me, and she used to laugh the whole time I was with her. She was laughing at me, you know—not because I was witty—and her husband was the dullest dog I ever set eyes on. He was very bald and fat, as ugly as sin, as old as Methuselah, and as heavy as lead. He shaved with the scissors and had only one eye. But he was good to her in a fatherly way, though he practically lived in his Office, and hated to entertain or accept hospitality. His idea of life was to get up at seven, work till dinner, and then go straight to bed. . . ."

"He never ill-treated her in any way?" asked Father Gregory.

"No, Father. I must say that for him. He was never in any way actively unkind to her. He merely neglected her and kept her more or less in the house, except for her morning and evening rides. . . . It was negative unkindness, you know, selfishness and thoughtlessness. . . . Fact was, the old bird was played out, dead-alive, and senile."

"But he was never cruel to her?" insisted Father Gregory.

"No—he wasn't."

"Ah," said Father Gregory.

"Well—to cut a long story short—she slowly grew to love me, and at Ootacamund she found it out, and I guessed it from her letters. . . . We had seen each other almost daily for a couple of years and then, when she went to the Hills, the sudden separation left her lonely and miserable.

"I got leave and joined her there, coming up quite unexpectedly as a jolly surprise to her. . . . I came upon her suddenly and she—she—kissed me, before she knew what she was doing.

"We were there for three months, and her old blighter of a husband only wrote to her once. . . . And, mind you, Father, we were absolutely innocent. She was as pure-minded and virtuous a woman as ever lived. . . . Then came the time to go back, and she found she simply could *not* rejoin the old snuffler, and I found I could not let her.

"We decided to go away together—to go to New Zealand for a few months and then, until the end of my furlough, to my old dad at Barronby Hall, one of the finest men who ever lived, a real sportsman and a brick. I knew he'd stand by us.

"We did it more or less openly. I told my C.O. exactly how matters stood, and he strove his utmost to dissuade me. She told her bosom friend, the General's wife, and she begged and prayed of her not to go. The same evening we started for Madras—and then crossed to Rangoon, proposing to go up the Irrawadi and back, before going on to New Zealand.

"In Rangoon I learnt from the *Weekly Times of Asia* that Cynthia's husband had—died of heart failure on the morning of our flight.

"There had been no need to bolt. We were free to marry, had we known it, *before we started*.

"We were married at Rangoon at once—but we never lived the scandal down, and it nearly killed my little Cynthia.

"Certainly it preyed on her health to the extent of predisposing her for death.

"We got the cold shoulder everywhere. . . . Folk said she had fled from the bedside of her dying husband and, while he cried out for her, had bolted with her paramour. . . . The old beggar had died in his Office-chair, with his wife's letters unanswered, and never knew of her flight, seeing that he was dead before we went. He never cared one jot for her or her happiness. . . . I caught one chap saying it. He didn't say anything at all for some time after. But you can't thrash people for not calling on you and for failing to see you. . . . The women were the worst, of course, and Cynthia suffered terribly. We suffered for each other—and more than once we saw people, carrying on guilty intrigues, received everywhere so long as they were not found out.

"Then our little Cynthia was born and we found comfort.

"Father, she was God and Heaven and all the angels to us. I worshipped her as I had worshipped, and did worship, Cynthia, and couldn't bear her out of my sight. . . . She grew up a marvel to us—a flower, a lily—so clever, so amusing, so lovely. . . .

"One day I saw her salute the King's portrait and murmur something; and never a soul had told her a word about him. . . . She loved King Edward, whom she never saw, as she did us, and used to stand in front of his picture and stare with big, solemn eyes. . . . And she loved Nelson too—and went wild with joy when she found a picture of him in her books, or an anecdote. And the marvellous thing is that no one ever told her anything about Nelson. She simply took to him as she did to the King, when she found his portrait somewhere and read about him. It was such an obsession that when we were

at home I took her to the Painted Hall at Greenwich and showed her all the battle-scenes and pictures in which he is represented, and the portraits of him at different ages, and the picture of his fight with the bear.

"I shall never forget it. . . . Talk of a saint in church, of a Child-Madonna in the presence of the Angel of God. She was in a reverential trance, and seemed hardly able to breathe for joy and rapture. And the tears stood in her eyes at the sight of his coat, wig, sword, watch and things. I could hardly get her away, and I missed my lunch as it was. . . . Father, she was my good angel and I was a good man while I had her. I loved her mother just as much but—there was the Sin . . . and I suppose the Puritan would call our love reprehensible. . . .

"But what could be said against my worship of the child? Surely *that* was blameless? I lived for her. We had a perfect understanding of each other and she capped my jokes, and we were—what is it?—'twin souls with but a single thought'—and then—oh, God!—she died. . . .

"*Why*, Father, *why*? . . . She was my good angel—she was a light and a star. *Why?* . . . The cruel, stupid . . ." and the strong mouth and heavy chin twitched and worked under the heavy moustache.

Father Gregory took the big man's arm and pressed it without speaking.

When he was calmer he proceeded—"Yes, she died, and her mother died of grief—and I got drunk—and lived drunk for months, cursing God. I plunged into every dissipation I could think of, and when I was ill and sober, I shook my fist at Heaven, and started afresh. . . . The cruel, unnecessary, stupid——"

"Hush, my son," said Father Gregory. "Think of what she was spared and thank God for taking her to Heaven away from it all."

"*Father!*"

"Yes, my son. . . . Thank the good, merciful, all-wise Father who saved your little Cynthia while she was a spotless child and took her from this abode of woe and sin—wherein we are tried and purified—without trial or need for purification. She never knew sin and never knew unhappiness. Be *thankful*, I say, and leave this selfishness."

"Selfishness!"

"Yes! Think, my son. Try and see it from my point of view. Wait and hope. The day will come when you will fervently *thank* God for saving your little Cynthia. . . . Tell me—when it does."

“I have cursed God,” said the Major sullenly.

“Think not of that, my son,” was the reply. “God is not the vengeful Devil that men make out. He understands. *He* understands. . . .”

“Were we criminals, Father? Did we do a great, unforgivable wrong?” asked Major Barronby after a long and speaking silence had reigned between the two men.

“My son,” replied the old priest, “I judge no man. Much less do I judge any woman.”

CHAPTER XII

TEN YEARS LATER

It was what Major Barronby termed "Our Annual Beano," the Anniversary Night of the Chotapettah Club—and the Club was celebrating its First Decade on its Tenth Birthday.

On these anniversary occasions, the Founder was host and gave a magnificent dinner to the entire Club, unlimited bottles of the champagne of France, and unnumbered boxes of the cigars of Havana.

After dinner, bar and billiard-room were free to all, and no man could ask for what his soul desired and not obtain it to the full extent of his accommodation. . . . A story, probably quite untrue, was current, that on these occasions Mr. Henry Hoalke filled, first himself, and then his pockets—and was not to be seen from dinner till daylight without *two* cigars alight in his mouth.

After dinner, speeches, cheers, and uproarious hilarity, it was the custom of the Founder and Father Gregory to withdraw, of Dr. Foy to see all invalids and ancients safely to bed, and for the fun to wax fast and furious till sleep, dawn, or reaction so thinned the number of the revellers that the celebration died, gradually and gracefully, a natural, if not beautiful, death, with the light of a new day.

For this great and special occasion of the Tenth Anniversary, the *chef* had been urged to surpass himself, the cellar had been reinforced with the finest champagne procurable, and a startling order had been sent to the import tobacconists at Burrapore.

The Club had been decorated, under the direction and supervision of Father Gregory, of course, as never before—and was a perfect garden of roses, a sweet-scented picture, a bower of Flora.

In the great verandah a huge iceberg, rose-wreathed, divan-encircled, reposing in a marble basin, cooled the air and charmed the eye.

Never would the Chotapettah Club complete its First Decade again, and never would it surpass the magnificence and beauty of its Tenth Anniversary celebrations—not if it lived, as its Founder prayed it might, to observe its Centenary.

It had been decided that the members who had belonged to the Club from the year of its inception—now, including Father Gregory and the Founder, only six in number—should each make a short speech following that of the Founder and his two annual toasts, "The Club" and "Departed Members."

Father Gregory would also, as usual, propose the health of the Founder, and drink it, too, in his annual glass of champagne. "Departed Members" were members dead and gone—for no single individual had ever, in the history of the Club, ceased to be a voluntarily subscribing member, when he had found his feet again and gone out into the world to resume the struggle and succeed at last—as many had done. . . . And in the opinion of all, the *chef* was undoubtedly surpassing himself, had taken the fullest advantage of the Founder's *carte blanche*, and given the fullest heed to his remark that any dish had better not be than not be noble.

The turtle had surely been intended by a relenting Fate for the Lord Mayor of London; the fish had leapt in English streams and into the ice that had borne them straight to Chotapettah; the pheasants had whirred rocketting over English woods; the wines been warmed by Phœbus for Bacchus' self.

Harmony, joy, peace, hope, and goodwill sat with the Members of the Chotapettah Club—while love and gratitude to great John Durham and sweet Father Gregory infused every heart.

Even Mr. Henry Hoalke looked kindly, expansive, fine almost. And every single member—some by means best known to Father Gregory—wore full evening-dress. . . .

"Well, Barronby, this is the tenth of 'em, what?" said the Honourable Reginald Burke, as he set down his glass. "Wonder how many more you and I'll see together, old son—only six of us now—you, me, Fatty Dalcane, Hoalkey, and dear old Father Gregory, besides the Founder."

"Yes, wonder how many of us Old Originals will be here next time. . . . We're getting on, Reggie, getting on. . . . I'm a lot the wrong side of forty, and you're doocid near me—although you don't look it. . . . No, old bird, I'm demmed if you've got a grey hair, or shed one. You don't look a day older than when you joined."

"I'm not," replied the other. "Pure in heart and contented with my lot. Fat lot. What? No, my virtues will see me here for the fiftieth, I fear, as well as the tenth, Barry. Here's to you, cherub."

“ ’Scuse my drinking with you again, Reggie,” answered Major Barronby, “it’s up to us to go easy till the speeches are over and Father Gregory gone—and I’ve just laid the right foundation. I wouldn’t mar this evening by ‘wasteful and ridiculous excess’ for all the gold in India. . . . Not till the Father’s gone,” he added hastily.

“Nor I,” agreed Burke, “and if Hoalke gets drunk and noisy before the toasts and speeches, we’ll fling him in the pond to cool, what? . . . He is a smell with a hide on it. I dislike breathing the same air. It is *ecœurant*. It would be scandalous and shameful to get tight.”

And he, too, amended his statement with the remark, “There’s a time for all things—though mine is past now,” and he thought of a Woman in a Convent.

“Certainly,” agreed the Major. “Besides, I should forget my speech. Been composing and learning it all day. Now, *you’ll* give us something worthy of the occasion, by Jove. . . . Impromptu too. . . . I’d give something to speak like you can. . . .”

“Yes, Sir,” said Mr. Henry Hoalke to his neighbour, a newly-joined young planter who had lost his all as a result of tremendous labour, skill, foresight, and enterprise, in coffee-planting. “Yes. Formerly of the I.C.S.—a gentleman and a Civilian. I have had my losses, too, and my own ill luck. You have lost your money, I understand, through no fault of your own. I have lost both money and position. . . . Have I been a Member long? I am one of the *original* Members, my dear Sir. One of the *founders* as it were. Yes—this is the tenth of these annual celebrations in which I have taken part. You will hear me speak presently, as one of the Old Guard, the Fathers of the Club. . . . I hope you have got what you like there? . . . Let me know if you want anything.”

Mr. Oscar Forthway, ex-planter, bankrupt, and beggar, gathered that Mr. Hoalke, I.C.S., was one of the hosts, and congratulated him upon the remarkable sumptuousness and refinement of the feast.

Mr. Hoalke graciously acknowledged the acknowledgment.

“Yes, my tenth,” he repeated, and, after a pause, resumed: “I speak with all kindness and hospitality, of course, when I say it, but I sincerely hope you may enjoy no more of these annual festivities, my young friend. I hope you may arise—ah—phœnix-like from the ashes of your past, and rebuild a fine edifice of success upon the ruins of failure.”

“Thanks, indeed—but I am afraid I’m done, Sir,” was the despondent reply of the unfortunate young man. “I am broke financially, and I’m broke body and soul. . . . Got no heart left in me. I’m simply beat to the world.”

“Oh, never despair, never despond,” answered Mr. Hoalke, who had done little else for upwards of a dozen years. “If at first you don’t succeed, suck, suck again at the Egg of Life—he! he! Don’t make up your mind to stay here, a dreadful depressing place where every man is a has-been or a never-was—an awful place, a Dog’s Home for Men.”

“I’m dog enough for it, and to be grateful for it,” observed the young ex-planter warmly, and with difficulty suppressed the words, “and you appear to have been dog enough for it, too—for the last decade or so.”

Being young and foolish, albeit world-beaten, Mr. Oscar Forthway still entertained the sentiment of gratitude and would have given his right hand for John Durham, and his life for Father Gregory. . . .

“Yes, my dear old friend,” replied the once Reverend Montague Dalcane to a remark of his neighbour, the ancient Mr. Pardie, “one more year in the haven—the happy haven under the hill. . . . God bless the man who constructed it and the saint who helps him manage it. . . . Yes, my tenth, and I say to-night, as I have said nine times before, on these occasions, when I look around on the faces at this board, ‘Where would all you folk be now but for John Durham, and where would your souls go but for Father Gregory—who never preached in his life?’ Yes, it’s a wonderful firm this of Durham and Gregory, of which one partner saves bodies and the other souls—though, by the way, I have never heard Father Gregory use either the word ‘soul’ or the word ‘save’ since he came here! No, not in the ten years. . . . No. . . . It’s like going to the hills—where you grow better day by day, just by virtue of breathing the air, resting, and watching the scenery—and no doctor has to drug or diet you—you grow better in spirit here, day by day, just by breathing the same air as Father Gregory, resting in his presence, and watching his face and deeds. There is no need for him to diet or drug your soul with dogma, exhortation, or preachment. He is a cure in himself. . . . Let me crack you some nuts. . . .”

“You might crack a nut and I might eat it—but who is going to *digest* it?” replied Mr. Pardie. . . . “Yes, that’s exactly it. Father Gregory does you good by being Father Gregory. It is like living with a grand cathedral, the Taj Mahal, or a great and glorious picture—except that they are inanimate and he is instinct with life and work and noble energy. Why, when I——”

Dr. Foy tapped sharply with a knife-handle upon the table and silence fell.

In the midst of it John Durham arose, glass in hand.

"Gentlemen," said he, as all stood up and took up their glasses in anticipation of the toast, "The Chotapettah Club"—and every man there answered, "The Chotapettah Club," raised his glass, drained it, and sat down again.

Conversation and laughter gradually broke out afresh and, in a minute, were as general and cheery as ever.

In the midst of it Mr. Henry Hoalke suddenly flung an orange at Dr. Foy, lurched to his feet, and commenced in a raucous voice to howl a "comic" song of his youth, which had suddenly sprung into the recollection of his fuddled brain. "Dr. Foy," he bawled in his harsh, strident voice:

"Dr. Foy, the stout ol' boy,
While dancing on the stairs for joy
Fell down on his crumpet
And roared like a trumpet,
'Oi'm wrecked intoirely, ship ahoy!' "

The Honourable Reginald Burke turned the cold impassive glare of his monocle upon the singer, pointed his finger at him and emitted a curious low hiss.

"Sit down," he said softly, as the ex-Civilian paused for breath.

Mr. Henry Hoalke turned towards him—and sat down suddenly.

"Beastly cold night for a swim, Hoalke," he murmured silkily in languid voice and casual manner, and added, as he reached for a walnut, "I'll ask you to sing later on."

Mr. Hoalke warbled no more—until all had left the table (and Burke bade him go and drive the shamed jackals from the garden with a song).

Anon John Durham arose again and, in a moment, one could have heard the fall of a pin in the big dining-hall.

"Gentlemen," said he, in solemn accents and grave manner, "to the memory of Departed Members—Mantin, Stilent, Tallant, Dermott, Lulleyne, Luson, Fane, Fitzhawke, Pontreuil, Wrothe, Hanningby, Ruthven, Desmond and the dear old man we all knew as The Professor."

The toast was honoured with the deepest feeling, and Dr. Foy, who, with a view to approaching duties, in the way of marshalling weaker vessels, such as old Mr. Pardie, to their rooms, ere a worse thing befell, had been, for him, abstemious—did nevertheless shed an unashamed tear as he murmured, "To their Memory, and may the blessed saints be good to *him* and the Heavens be his bed. . . . Wonder if he behaves absentminded Up There," as he thought of his loved and lost Professor.

"D'ye think we shall have the same personalities and appearance and ways in Heaven, Father?" he suddenly asked his white-haired, fresh-faced neighbour, "I somehow couldn't bear to see the Professor clothed in glory and in his right mind. The owld Professor I know, and look forward to meetin', blinks, and he twitches his old silly nose and mouth like a bunny-rabbit—and that's the bhoy I want to meet—and none other. If I see 'um with his foot through his gowlden crown, and his angel's robe tied together with his harp-strings, where he's lost the buttons, and him a-using his gowlden trumpet wrong end up and sittin' on the music he ought to be perusin' anxious-like, the crayther, and peerin' about for it—that's me dearr owld bhoy an' Oi'll yell 'Auntie, Ol' Hoss, come to me arrms ye divvle'—and if he's there wise an' solemn an' devilish holy—whoy, begob me heart'll be bruk an' Oi'll slink off to Purgathry an' see if Oi've a pal left to me, at all at all"—and Dr. Foy drained his tumbler of usquebagh at a draught.

"He'll be absolutely as lovable there as he was here," replied the priest. "He'll be our own dear old Professor without change, save that he'll have no worries and pains. Of *course* we shall all have the same personality and appearance there as here, and be our own selves in every way—except for those improvements we shall all welcome. I wouldn't wish to go there at all if some one who is waiting for me there were to be other than the same. It would be the most cruel and unspeakable disappointment the mind of man could conceive. . . ."

"A woman, Father dear?" asked Dr. Foy quietly.

"No—a man, the noblest soul God ever made," replied Father Gregory.

Major Barronby, who had been listening thoughtfully to this conversation, with his heavy face resting upon, and shaded by, his hand, turned to Father Gregory and said:

"God bless you, once again, Father. One has to believe what you believe somehow—and I wouldn't give a damn—I beg your pardon—to go to Heaven, if my little girl were not to be the little girl who left me. . . . I'd turn

away, sick and sorry, from some confounded ‘wise-browed Minerva’ they told me was my little gel angelified. I want to hear her call me ‘Old Daddy-Man’ again, and feel her hang round my neck and hug till I nearly suffocate. Confound ‘holy angels’—I want my baby, and if I thought seeing her as she was depended on my ‘being good’—I’d beat our curate at it to-morrow—and he was a devil at it. Only ate thrice a week I believe, and always coughed twice before he spoke once, lest the Powers of Darkness lead him into hasty utterance. He choked in my mother’s drawing-room through doing it with dry biscuit in his mouth. . . . I never enjoyed a funeral more. . . . Father dear, I’m going to get very drunk to-night—and put up a most parlous binge. . . .”

“And you’ll have a most parlous head to-morrow, my son, and be mortal sorry for yourself,” replied the priest.

“I’ve got to go on the bust or go *mad*, Father,” was the reply. “These anniversaries somehow stir memories. Bad things, memories—here.”

“I understand all about it, my son. I’ve been in a Lunatic Asylum—driven mad by grief and mental agony. . . . But drink’s a treacherous friend and one who doesn’t always await your pleasure. It has a way of becoming over-familiar. . . .”

“Not under the same roof with you, Father. . . . Look at poor old Tallant—why you made him . . .”

Again Dr. Foy tapped for silence, and silence fell upon the noisy room like a pall.

Father Gregory rose, and a cheer, that threatened to raise the roof, rose with him. As he lifted a hand in modest deprecation it died down and he said:

“My children, my annual dissipation,” and held up a glass of champagne, “I ask you to drink with me the health of our Founder—John Durham.”

At the name every man stood on the seat of his chair, placed one foot on the table, raised his glass above his head, and his voice above its natural pitch, in that most meaning of meaningless songs the Englishman’s pæan of praise:

For he’s a jolly good fellow
And so say all of us.

As sung by the Members of the Chotapettah Club the banal jingle was a hymn, and its singing a solemn rite and proud pleasurable duty.

When John Durham rose to return thanks and propose the health of Father Gregory, the former cheering, shouting, table-banging, and stamping seemed but as a murmuring of wind in summer corn, or a gentle maiden's sigh. Nor could anything but the limited endurance of mere human man put a period to the storm. At length it weakened, lulled, dwindled, and sank as throats grew hoarse, hands grew sore, glass and crockery broke, and muscles tired. It was impossible to acclaim even Father Gregory for ever.

Followed the speeches of the survivors, the original members, they of ten years' sojourn in the house of peace.

"I call on my dear old friend Barronby for a speech," said John Durham.

Amid the perfect silence that followed the welcoming applause, Major Barronby, very white of face and unsteady of limb, rose to his feet, glanced at a paper of notes, and began:

"Durham—Father Gregory," said he . . . "Gentlemen—I——" and ended.

After a couple of awful minutes, during which the man suffered agonies, and his audience much discomfort, in sympathy, he sat down again and shaded his heavy face with his shaking hand.

"I call upon my old friend Burke for a speech," said John Durham as the kindly clapping, intended to cover the shame and pain of the tongue-tied man, subsided.

Burke rose—monocled, cool, dapper, and debonair.

"Ah—er—I—Thanks awf'ly," said he, and sat him down.

Barronby found his hand beneath the tablecloth and wrung it.

"You shouldn't have done that for me, Reggie, you are a gentleman . . . you damned old fool," he murmured brokenly.

If there was one thing that the ex-trooper *could* do, it was to make an eloquent, clever, witty, and appropriate speech at any time, in any place, on any occasion.

"I call on my dear old friend Dalcane for a speech," said the Founder a third time—following out the prearranged programme.

The formerly Reverend Montague Dalcane looked up, shook his head, and, for a minute, sought beneath the table and his chair for something he

had not dropped.

“I call upon my friend Hoalke for a speech,” said Durham.

Mr. Henry Hoalke, with a leer and a hiccup, sprang to his feet, glass in hand, raised it unsteadily—and fell to the ground in an epileptic or apoplectic fit, dragging part of the tablecloth with him. Dr. Foy and Oscar Forthway carried him to his room, whence he returned later.

The Members of the Chotapettah Club stood upon their chairs linked crossed hands and sang, “For Auld Lang Syne” through, from beginning to end, fourteen times, and then, quitting the dining-room, separated to cards, billiards, the bar, moonlit-garden, or verandah, each to do according to his kind. . . .

Serjeant Bunn, taking his morning tub, without having been to bed, might have been heard to remark:

“You’re an ’ighly accomplished delikit-’anded walley-de-chamber, Bunny, my lad—or oughter—after puttin’ seventeen liquor-logged, slant-decked derrylicks to bed in one night. All *thorough* gents too.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF THE WAY OF A TRANSGRESSOR

Not a sound was to be heard in the Chotapettah Club. Men moved softly, spoke in whispers, laughed not at all.

Every face bore a look of preoccupation, anxiety, fear.

Servants whispered in corners, gathered in knots with clucks of consternation, gesticulations, and gestures of grief and horror, with genuine tears of real mental anguish.

Major Barronby sat sprawling at a table, with his bowed head on his arms, and frankly blubbered—his shoulders heaving and body shaking with great rending sobs.

Mr. Henry Hoalke paced his room like a caged jackal—and gnawed fiercely and hungrily at his nails. From time to time he flung his hands above his head, looked up, with working, twitching face, and shouted a four-word prayer.

The Honourable Reginald Burke leaned over a verandah balustrade and gloomily stared, with unseeing eyes, at the trim bright garden. With nerves and features under complete control, he gave no sign of the tumult of emotion within—save that his healthy face was blanched and he looked old and ill.

Beneath the trees in a corner of the grounds, careless as to who might see him, Montague Dalcane prayed to the great Good God of All Creeds and All Peoples, as he had never prayed before. He prayed like a Mussulman, with his whole body as well as heart and soul. He seemed to strive to seize physically upon the Hem of the Garment of the Lord that he might attract His attention and importunately beg an answer to his prayer.

In the big reading-room, old Mr. Pardie sat and cried quietly, like a woman.

In his lodge Serjeant Bunn attacked his punching-ball with tremendous ferocity and violence, blaspheming and swearing meanwhile, with incredible fluency and abandon. Serjeant Bunn could not weep and Serjeant Bunn could not pray, so, as he must give his bursting heart and overflowing feelings some outlet, he did these things.

And according to their love, their training, their knowledge, their circumstances, and their individual natures, did others, the Members of the Chotapettah Club.

In the sick-room, John Durham knelt by the bedside, gripping his manhood with his might, and saw light and hope and faith and love fade from his life, and the world turn to a grey ash-heap.

By the door, the most famous specialist in India took his leave of Dr. Foy—of poor Dr. Foy, still puzzled, bewildered, astonished at what he had discovered concerning Father Gregory and might not divulge—of poor Dr. Foy, in whom were two men, the keen, cool, methodical, capable physician and the weeping, broken, bewildered friend—for Father Gregory lay dying.

The hours of Father Gregory—gentle, beautiful, loving Father Gregory; comforting, inspiring, ennobling Father Gregory; the Friend in need, the *Friend* indeed—were numbered. The hours of Father Gregory were become minutes.

"Let me say good-bye to poor Barronby, to Burke, Dalcane, and Hoalke whom I have known longest here, dear John," he whispered, "and you give my love and blessing and farewell to each one of the rest yourself—afterwards. There won't be time for all, and I have something to say to you alone—my son."

John Durham raised a face more lifeless than that of the dying priest, and he stroked the transparent hand, whispered to Dr. Foy to send for the senior Members—if he thought it advisable. . . .

Barronby entered, flung himself down by the bed, placed the old man's hand upon his head and said with forced quiet:

"Father—I *have* thanked God for taking my little Cynthia, and I'll never touch liquor nor card nor filth again while I live—in memory of you, Father. Oh, don't go——" and, his sobs breaking out afresh, Dr. Foy led him groping from the room—when Father Gregory had whispered, "I thank you, my son, God bless and help you."

Burke, white-faced, dry-eyed, and apparently calm, bowed—as Father Gregory smiled his blessing and murmured his farewell—turned without a word, and walked straight from the room to Burrapore, which is thirty-one miles from Chotapettah.

Hoalke came to the door and there collapsed and was borne away by Dr. Foy.

Dalcane, serene and calm, whispered:

"Father—through you I see God, and am at peace. *For a little while*, good-bye," and fell to praying.

A few minutes later, Father Gregory said, "Leave me now with my son," and when Dr. Foy had begged him to receive his unasked promise never to give way to his vice again, they left him with John Durham.

Raising himself and embracing the heartbroken man:

"Kiss me, John," said Father Gregory, with his dying breath, "take me in your arms and kiss me on the lips—for *I am your mother, Joan Rayven, true wife of your noble father—John Durham*."

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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 *Father Gregory* by Percival Christopher Wren]