Passing of the Third Floor Back and Other Stories

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PASSING OF THE THIRD FLOOR BACK

The neighbourhood of Bloomsbury Square towards four o'clock of a November afternoon is not so crowded as to secure to the stranger, of appearance anything out of the common, immunity from observation. Tibb's boy, screaming at the top of his voice that *she* was his honey, stopped suddenly, stepped backwards on to the toes of a voluble young lady wheeling a perambulator, and remained deaf, apparently, to the somewhat personal remarks of the voluble young lady. Not until he had reached the next corner—and then more as a soliloquy than as information to the street—did Tibb's boy recover sufficient interest in his own affairs to remark that *he* was her bee. The voluble young lady herself, following some half-a-dozen yards behind, forgot her wrongs in contemplation of the stranger's back. There was this that was peculiar about the stranger's back: that instead of being flat it presented a decided curve. "It ain't a 'ump,

and it don't look like kervitcher of the spine," observed the voluble young lady to herself. "Blimy if I don't believe 'e's taking 'ome 'is washing up his back."

The constable at the corner, trying to seem busy doing nothing, noticed the stranger's approach with gathering interest. "That's an odd sort of a walk of yours, young man," thought the constable. "You take care you don't fall down and tumble over yourself."

"Thought he was a young man," murmured the constable, the stranger having passed him. "He had a young face right enough."

The daylight was fading. The stranger, finding it impossible to read the name of the street upon the corner house, turned back.

"Why, 'tis a young man," the constable told himself; "a mere boy."

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger; "but would you mind telling me my way to Bloomsbury Square."

"This is Bloomsbury Square," explained the constable; "leastways round the corner is. What number might you be wanting?"

The stranger took from the ticket pocket of his tightly buttoned overcoat a piece of paper, unfolded it and read it out: "Mrs. Pennycherry. Number Forty-eight."

"Round to the left," instructed him the constable; "fourth house. Been recommended there?"

"By—by a friend," replied the stranger. "Thank you very much."

"Ah," muttered the constable to himself; "guess you won't be calling him that by the

end of the week, young—"

"Funny," added the constable, gazing after the retreating figure of the stranger. "Seen plenty of the other sex as looked young behind and old in front. This cove looks young in front and old behind. Guess he'll look old all round if he stops long at mother Pennycherry's: stingy old cat."

Constables whose beat included Bloomsbury Square had their reasons for not liking Mrs. Pennycherry. Indeed it might have been difficult to discover any human being with reasons for liking that sharp-featured lady. Maybe the keeping of second-rate boarding houses in the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury does not tend to develop the virtues of generosity and amiability.

Meanwhile the stranger, proceeding upon his way, had rung the bell of Number Forty-eight. Mrs. Pennycherry, peeping from the area and catching a glimpse, above the railings, of a handsome if somewhat effeminate masculine face, hastened to readjust her widow's cap before the looking-glass while directing Mary Jane to show the stranger, should he prove a problematical boarder, into the dining-room, and to light the gas.

"And don't stop gossiping, and don't you take it upon yourself to answer questions. Say I'll be up in a minute," were Mrs. Pennycherry's further instructions, "and mind you hide your hands as much as you can."

"What are you grinning at?" demanded Mrs. Pennycherry, a couple of minutes later,

of the dingy Mary Jane.

"Wasn't grinning," explained the meek Mary Jane, "was only smiling to myself."

"What at?"

"Dunno," admitted Mary Jane. But still she went on smiling.

"What's he like then?" demanded Mrs. Pennycherry.

"'E ain't the usual sort," was Mary Jane's opinion.

"Thank God for that," ejaculated Mrs. Pennycherry piously.

"Says 'e's been recommended, by a friend."

"By whom?"

"By a friend. 'E didn't say no name."

Mrs. Pennycherry pondered. "He's not the funny sort, is he?"

Not that sort at all. Mary Jane was sure of it.

Mrs. Pennycherry ascended the stairs still pondering. As she entered the room the stranger rose and bowed. Nothing could have been simpler than the stranger's bow, yet there came with it to Mrs. Pennycherry a rush of old sensations long forgotten. For one brief moment Mrs. Pennycherry saw herself an amiable well-bred lady, widow of a solicitor: a visitor had called to see her. It was but a momentary fancy. The next instant Reality reasserted itself. Mrs. Pennycherry, a lodging-house keeper, existing precariously upon a daily round of petty meannesses, was prepared for contest with a possible new boarder, who fortunately looked an inexperienced young gentleman.

"Someone has recommended me to you," began Mrs. Pennycherry; "may I ask who?"

But the stranger waved the question aside as immaterial.

"You might not remember—him," he smiled. "He thought that I should do well to pass the few months I am given—that I have to be in London, here. You can take me in?"

Mrs. Pennycherry thought that she would be able to take the stranger in.

"A room to sleep in," explained the stranger, "—any room will do—with food and drink sufficient for a man, is all that I require."

"For breakfast," began Mrs. Pennycherry, "I always give—"

"What is right and proper, I am convinced," interrupted the stranger. "Pray do not trouble to go into detail, Mrs. Pennycherry. With whatever it is I shall be content."

Mrs. Pennycherry, puzzled, shot a quick glance at the stranger, but his face, though the gentle eyes were smiling, was frank and serious.

"At all events you will see the room," suggested Mrs. Pennycherry, "before we discuss terms."

"Certainly," agreed the stranger. "I am a little tired and shall be glad to rest there."

Mrs. Pennycherry led the way upward; on the landing of the third floor, paused a moment undecided, then opened the door of the back bedroom.

"It is very comfortable," commented the stranger.

"For this room," stated Mrs. Pennycherry, "together with full board, consisting of—"

"Of everything needful. It goes without saying," again interrupted the stranger with his quiet grave smile.

"I have generally asked," continued Mrs. Pennycherry, "four pounds a week. To you—" Mrs. Pennycherry's voice, unknown to her, took to itself the note of aggressive generosity—"seeing you have been recommended here, say three pounds ten."

"Dear lady," said the stranger, "that is kind of you. As you have divined, I am not a rich man. If it be not imposing upon you I accept your reduction with gratitude."

Again Mrs. Pennycherry, familiar with the satirical method, shot a suspicious glance upon the stranger, but not a line was there, upon that smooth fair face, to which a sneer could for a moment have clung. Clearly he was as simple as he looked.

"Gas, of course, extra."

"Of course," agreed the Stranger.

"Coals—"

"We shall not quarrel," for a third time the stranger interrupted. "You have been very considerate to me as it is. I feel, Mrs. Pennycherry, I can leave myself entirely in your hands."

The stranger appeared anxious to be alone. Mrs. Pennycherry, having put a match to the stranger's fire, turned to depart. And at this point it was that Mrs. Pennycherry, the holder hitherto of an unbroken record for sanity, behaved in a manner she herself, five min-

utes earlier in her career, would have deemed impossible—that no living soul who had ever known her would have believed, even had Mrs. Pennycherry gone down upon her knees and sworn it to them.

"Did I say three pound ten?" demanded Mrs. Pennycherry of the stranger, her hand upon the door. She spoke crossly. She was feeling cross, with the stranger, with herself—particularly with herself.

"You were kind enough to reduce it to that amount," replied the stranger; "but if upon reflection you find yourself unable—"

"I was making a mistake," said Mrs. Pennycherry, "it should have been two pound ten."

"I cannot—I will not accept such sacrifice," exclaimed the stranger; "the three pound ten I can well afford."

"Two pound ten are my terms," snapped Mrs. Pennycherry. "If you are bent on paying more, you can go elsewhere. You'll find plenty to oblige you."

Her vehemence must have impressed the stranger. "We will not contend further," he smiled. "I was merely afraid that in the goodness of your heart—"

"Oh, it isn't as good as all that," growled Mrs. Pennycherry.

"I am not so sure," returned the stranger. "I am somewhat suspicious of you. But wilful woman must, I suppose, have her way."

The stranger held out his hand, and to Mrs. Pennycherry, at that moment, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to take it as if it had been the hand of an old friend

and to end the interview with a pleasant laugh—though laughing was an exercise not often indulged in by Mrs. Pennycherry.

Mary Jane was standing by the window, her hands folded in front of her, when Mrs. Pennycherry re-entered the kitchen. By standing close to the window one caught a glimpse of the trees in Bloomsbury Square and through their bare branches of the sky beyond.

"There's nothing much to do for the next half hour, till Cook comes back. I'll see to the door if you'd like a run out?" suggested Mrs. Pennycherry.

"It would be nice," agreed the girl so soon as she had recovered power of speech; "it's just the time of day I like."

"Don't be longer than the half hour," added Mrs. Pennycherry.

Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square, assembled after dinner in the drawing-room, discussed the stranger with that freedom and frankness characteristic of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square, towards the absent.

"Not what I call a smart young man," was the opinion of Augustus Longcord, who was something in the City.

"Thpeaking for mythelf," commented his partner Isidore, "hav'n'th any uthe for the thmart young man. Too many of him, ath it ith."

"Must be pretty smart if he's one too many for you," laughed his partner.

There was this to be said for the repartee of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square: it was simple

of construction and easy of comprehension.

"Well it made me feel good just looking at him," declared Miss Kite, the highly coloured. "It was his clothes, I suppose—made me think of Noah and the ark—all that sort of thing."

"It would be clothes that would make you think—if anything," drawled the languid Miss Devine. She was a tall, handsome girl, engaged at the moment in futile efforts to recline with elegance and comfort combined upon a horsehair sofa. Miss Kite, by reason of having secured the only easy-chair, was unpopular that evening; so that Miss Devine's remark received from the rest of the company more approbation than perhaps it merited.

"Is that intended to be clever, dear, or only rude?" Miss Kite requested to be informed.

"Both," claimed Miss Devine.

"Myself? I must confess," shouted the tall young lady's father, commonly called the Colonel, "I found him a fool."

"I noticed you seemed to be getting on very well together," purred his wife, a plump, smiling little lady.

"Possibly we were," retorted the Colonel. "Fate has accustomed me to the society of fools."

"Isn't it a pity to start quarrelling immediately after dinner, you two," suggested their thoughtful daughter from the sofa, "you'll have nothing left to amuse you for the rest of the evening."

"He didn't strike me as a conversationalist," said the lady who was cousin to a baronet; "but he did pass the vegetables before he

helped himself. A little thing like that shows breeding."

"Or that he didn't know you and thought maybe you'd leave him half a spoonful," laughed Augustus the wit.

"What I can't make out about him—" shouted the Colonel.

The stranger entered the room.

The Colonel, securing the evening paper, retired into a corner. The highly coloured Kite, reaching down from the mantelpiece a paper fan, held it coyly before her face. Miss Devine sat upright on the horse-hair sofa, and rearranged her skirts.

"Know anything?" demanded Augustus of the stranger, breaking the somewhat remarkable silence.

The stranger evidently did not understand. It was necessary for Augustus, the witty, to advance further into that odd silence.

"What's going to pull off the Lincoln handicap? Tell me, and I'll go out straight and put my shirt upon it."

"I think you would act unwisely," smiled the stranger; "I am not an authority upon the subject."

"Not! Why they told me you were Captain Spy of the *Sporting Life*—in disguise."

It would have been difficult for a joke to fall more flat. Nobody laughed, though why Mr. Augustus Longcord could not understand, and maybe none of his audience could have told him, for at Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square Mr. Augustus Longcord passed as a humorist. The stranger himself appeared unaware that

he was being made fun of.

"You have been misinformed," assured him the stranger.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Augustus Longcord.

"It is nothing," replied the stranger in his sweet low voice, and passed on.

"Well what about this theatre," demanded Mr. Longcord of his friend and partner; "do you want to go or don't you?" Mr. Longcord was feeling irritable.

"Goth the ticketh—may ath well," thought Isidore.

"Damn stupid piece, I'm told."

"Motht of them thupid, more or leth. Pity to wathte the ticketh," argued Isidore, and the pair went out.

"Are you staying long in London?" asked Miss Kite, raising her practised eyes towards the stranger.

"Not long," answered the stranger. "At least I do not know. It depends."

An unusual quiet had invaded the drawing-room of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square, generally noisy with strident voices about this hour. The Colonel remained engrossed in his paper. Mrs. Devine sat with her plump white hands folded on her lap, whether asleep or not it was impossible to say. The lady who was cousin to a baronet had shifted her chair beneath the gasolier, her eyes bent on her everlasting crochet work. The languid Miss Devine had crossed to the piano, where she sat fingering softly the tuneless keys, her back to the cold barely-furnished room.

"Sit down!" commanded saucily Miss Kite, indicating with her fan the vacant seat beside her. "Tell me about yourself. You interest me." Miss Kite adopted a pretty authoritative air towards all youthful-looking members of the opposite sex. It harmonised with the peach complexion and the golden hair, and fitted her about as well.

"I am glad of that," answered the stranger, taking the chair suggested. "I so wish to interest you."

"You're a very bold boy." Miss Kite lowered her fan, for the purpose of glancing archly over the edge of it, and for the first time encountered the eyes of the stranger looking into hers. And then it was that Miss Kite experienced precisely the same curious sensation that an hour or so ago had troubled Mrs. Pennycherry when the stranger had first bowed to her. It seemed to Miss Kite that she was no longer the Miss Kite that, had she risen and looked into it, the fly-blown mirror over the marble mantelpiece would, she knew, have presented to her view; but quite another Miss Kite—a cheerful, bright-eyed lady verging on middle age, yet still good-looking in spite of her faded complexion and somewhat thin brown locks. Miss Kite felt a pang of jealousy shoot through her; this middle-aged Miss Kite seemed, on the whole, a more attractive lady. There was a wholesomeness, a broadmindedness about her that instinctively drew one towards her. Not hampered, as Miss Kite herself was, by the necessity of appearing to be somewhere between eighteen and

twenty-two, this other Miss Kite could talk sensibly, even brilliantly: one felt it. A thoroughly "nice" woman this other Miss Kite; the real Miss Kite, though envious, was bound to admit it. Miss Kite wished to goodness she had never seen the woman. The glimpse of her had rendered Miss Kite dissatisfied with herself.

"I am not a boy," explained the stranger; "and I had no intention of being bold."

"I know," replied Miss Kite. "It was a silly remark. Whatever induced me to make it, I can't think. Getting foolish in my old age, I suppose."

The stranger laughed. "Surely you are not old."

"I'm thirty-nine," snapped out Miss Kite. "You don't call it young?"

"I think it a beautiful age," insisted the stranger; "young enough not to have lost the joy of youth, old enough to have learnt sympathy."

"Oh, I daresay," returned Miss Kite, "any age you'd think beautiful. I'm going to bed." Miss Kite rose. The paper fan had somehow got itself broken. She threw the fragments into the fire.

"It is early yet," pleaded the stranger, "I was looking forward to a talk with you."

"Well, you'll be able to look forward to it," retorted Miss Kite. "Good-night."

The truth was, Miss Kite was impatient to have a look at herself in the glass, in her own room with the door shut. The vision of that other Miss Kite—the clean-looking lady

of the pale face and the brown hair had been so vivid, Miss Kite wondered whether temporary forgetfulness might not have fallen upon her while dressing for dinner that evening.

The stranger, left to his own devices, strolled towards the loo table, seeking something to read.

"You seem to have frightened away Miss Kite," remarked the lady who was cousin to a baronet.

"It seems so," admitted the stranger.

"My cousin, Sir William Bosster," observed the crocheting lady, "who married old Lord Egham's niece—you never met the Eghams?"

"Hitherto," replied the stranger, "I have not had that pleasure."

"A charming family. Cannot understand—my cousin Sir William, I mean, cannot understand my remaining here. 'My dear Emily'—he says the same thing every time he sees me: 'My dear Emily, how can you exist among the sort of people one meets with in a boarding-house.' But they amuse me."

A sense of humour, agreed the stranger, was always of advantage.

"Our family on my mother's side," continued Sir William's cousin in her placid monotone, "was connected with the Tatton-Joneses, who when King George the Fourth—" Sir William's cousin, needing another reel of cotton, glanced up, and met the stranger's gaze.

"I'm sure I don't know why I'm telling you all this," said Sir William's cousin in an irritable tone. "It can't possibly interest you."

"Everything connected with you interests

me," gravely the stranger assured her.

"It is very kind of you to say so," sighed Sir William's cousin, but without conviction; "I am afraid sometimes I bore people."

The polite stranger refrained from contradiction.

"You see," continued the poor lady, "I really am of good family."

"Dear lady," said the stranger, "your gentle face, your gentle voice, your gentle bearing, all proclaim it."

She looked without flinching into the stranger's eyes, and gradually a smile banished the reigning dulness of her features.

"How foolish of me." She spoke rather to herself than to the stranger. "Why, of course, people—people whose opinion is worth troubling about—judge of you by what you are, not by what you go about saying you are."

The stranger remained silent.

"I am the widow of a provincial doctor, with an income of just two hundred and thirty pounds per annum," she argued. "The sensible thing for me to do is to make the best of it, and to worry myself about these high and mighty relations of mine as little as they have ever worried themselves about me."

The stranger appeared unable to think of anything worth saying.

"I have other connections," remembered Sir William's cousin; "those of my poor husband, to whom instead of being the 'poor relation' I could be the fairy god-mama. They are my people—or would be," added Sir William's cousin tartly, "if I wasn't a vulgar snob."

She flushed the instant she had said the words and, rising, commenced preparations for a hurried departure.

"Now it seems I am driving you away," sighed the stranger.

"Having been called a 'vulgar snob,'" retorted the lady with some heat, "I think it about time I went."

"The words were your own," the stranger reminded her.

"Whatever I may have thought," remarked the indignant dame, "no lady—least of all in the presence of a total stranger—would have called herself—" The poor dame paused, bewildered. "There is something very curious the matter with me this evening, that I cannot understand," she explained, "I seem quite unable to avoid insulting myself."

Still surrounded by bewilderment, she wished the stranger good-night, hoping that when next they met she would be more herself. The stranger, hoping so also, opened the door and closed it again behind her.

"Tell me," laughed Miss Devine, who by sheer force of talent was contriving to wring harmony from the reluctant piano, "how did you manage to do it? I should like to know."

"How did I do what?" inquired the stranger.

"Contrive to get rid so quickly of those two old frumps?"

"How well you play!" observed the stranger. "I knew you had genius for music the moment I saw you."

"How could you tell?"

"It is written so clearly in your face."

The girl laughed, well pleased. "You seem to have lost no time in studying my face."

"It is a beautiful and interesting face," observed the stranger.

She swung round sharply on the stool and their eyes met.

"You can read faces?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, what else do you read in mine?"

"Frankness, courage—"

"Ah, yes, all the virtues. Perhaps. We will take them for granted." It was odd how serious the girl had suddenly become. "Tell me the reverse side."

"I see no reverse side," replied the stranger. "I see but a fair girl, bursting into noble womanhood."

"And nothing else? You read no trace of greed, of vanity, of sordidness, of—" An angry laugh escaped her lips. "And you are a reader of faces!"

"A reader of faces." The stranger smiled. "Do you know what is written upon yours at this very moment? A love of truth that is almost fierce, scorn of lies, scorn of hypocrisy, the desire for all things pure, contempt of all things that are contemptible—especially of such things as are contemptible in woman. Tell me, do I not read aright?"

I wonder, thought the girl, is that why those two others both hurried from the room? Does everyone feel ashamed of the littleness that is in them when looked at by those clear, believing eyes of yours?

The idea occurred to her: "Papa seemed to have a good deal to say to you during dinner. Tell me, what were you talking about?"

"The military looking gentleman upon my left? We talked about your mother principally."

"I am sorry," returned the girl, wishful now she had not asked the question. "I was hoping he might have chosen another topic for the first evening!"

"He did try one or two," admitted the stranger; "but I have been about the world so little, I was glad when he talked to me about himself. I feel we shall be friends. He spoke so nicely, too, about Mrs. Devine."

"Indeed," commented the girl.

"He told me he had been married for twenty years and had never regretted it but once!"

Her black eyes flashed upon him, but meeting his, the suspicion died from them. She turned aside to hide her smile.

"So he regretted it—once."

"Only once," explained the stranger, "in a passing irritable mood. It was so frank of him to admit it. He told me—I think he has taken a liking to me. Indeed he hinted as much. He said he did not often get an opportnnity of talking to a man like myself—he told me that he and your mother, when they travel together, are always mistaken for a honeymoon couple. Some of the experiences he related to me were really quite amusing." The stranger laughed at recollection of them—"that even here, in this place, they are generally referred

to as 'Darby and Joan.'"

"Yes," said the girl, "that is true. Mr. Longcord gave them that name, the second evening after our arrival. It was considered clever—but rather obvious I thought myself."

"Nothing—so it seems to me," said the stranger, "is more beautiful than the love that has weathered the storms of life. The sweet, tender blossom that flowers in the heart of the young—in hearts such as yours—that, too, is beautiful. The love of the young for the young, that is the beginning of life. But the love of the old for the old, that is the beginning of—of things longer."

"You seem to find all things beautiful," the girl grumbled.

"But are not all things beautiful?" demanded the stranger.

The Colonel had finished his paper. "You two are engaged in a very absorbing conversation," observed the Colonel, approaching them.

"We were discussing Darbies and Joans," explained his daughter. "How beautiful is the love that has weathered the storms of life!"

"Ah!" smiled the Colonel, "that is hardly fair. My friend has been repeating to cynical youth the confessions of an amorous husband's affection for his middle-aged and somewhat—" The Colonel in playful mood laid his hand upon the stranger's shoulder, an action that necessitated his looking straight into the stranger's eyes. The Colonel drew himself up stiffly and turned scarlet.

Somebody was calling the Colonel a cad.

Not only that, but was explaining quite clearly, so that the Colonel could see it for himself, why he was a cad.

"That you and your wife lead a cat and dog existence is a disgrace to both of you. At least you might have the decency to try and hide it from the world—not make a jest of your shame to every passing stranger. You are a cad, sir, a cad!"

Who was daring to say these things? Not the stranger, his lips had not moved. Besides, it was not his voice. Indeed it sounded much more like the voice of the Colonel himself. The Colonel looked from the stranger to his daughter, from his daughter back to the stranger. Clearly they had not heard the voice—a mere hallucination. The Colonel breathed again.

Yet the impression remaining was not to be shaken off. Undoubtedly it was bad taste to have joked to the stranger upon such a subject. No gentleman would have done so.

But then no gentleman would have permitted such a jest to be possible. No gentleman would be forever wrangling with his wife—certainly never in public. However irritating the woman, a gentleman would have exercised self-control.

Mrs. Devine had risen, was coming slowly across the room. Fear laid hold of the Colonel. She was going to address some aggravating remark to him—he could see it in her eye—which would irritate him into savage retort.

Even this prize idiot of a stranger would understand why boarding-house wits had

dubbed them "Darby and Joan," would grasp the fact that the gallant Colonel had thought it amusing, in conversation with a table acquaintance, to hold his own wife up to ridicule.

"My dear," cried the Colonel, hurrying to speak first, "does not this room strike you as cold? Let me fetch you a shawl."

It was useless: the Colonel felt it. It had been too long the custom of both of them to preface with politeness their deadliest insults to each other. She came on, thinking of a suitable reply: suitable from her point of view, that is. In another moment the truth would be out. A wild, fantastic possibility flashed through the Colonel's brain: If to him, why not to her?

"Letitia," cried the Colonel, and the tone of his voice surprised her into silence, "I want you to look closely at our friend. Does he not remind you of someone?"

Mrs. Devine, so urged, looked at the stranger long and hard. "Yes," she murmured, turning to her husband, "he does, who is it?"

"I cannot fix it," replied the Colonel; "I thought that maybe you would remember."

"It will come to me," mused Mrs. Devine. "It is someone—years ago, when I was a girl—in Devonshire. Thank you, if it isn't troubling you, Harry. I left it in the dining-room."

It was, as Mr. Augustus Longcord explained to his partner Isidore, the colossal foolishness of the stranger that was the cause of all the trouble. "Give me a man, who can

take care of himself—or thinks he can," declared Augustus Longcord, "and I am prepared to give a good account of myself. But when a helpless baby refuses even to look at what you call your figures, tells you that your mere word is sufficient for him, and hands you over his cheque-book to fill up for yourself—well, it isn't playing the game."

"Auguthuth," was the curt comment of his partner, "you're a fool."

"All right, my boy, you try," suggested Augustus.

"Jutht what I mean to do," asserted his partner.

"Well," demanded Augustus one evening later, meeting Isidore ascending the stairs after a long talk with the stranger in the dining-room with the door shut.

"Oh, don't arth me," retorted Isidore, "thilly ath, thath what he ith."

"What did he say?"

"What did he thay! talked about the Jewth: what a grand rathe they were—how people mithjudged them: all that thort of rot.

"Thaid thome of the motht honorable men he had ever met had been Jewth. Thought I wath one of 'em!"

"Well, did you get anything out of him?"

"Get anything out of him. Of courthe not. Couldn't very well thell the whole rathe, ath it were, for a couple of hundred poundth, after that. Didn't theem worth it."

There were many things Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square came gradually

to the conclusion were not worth the doing:—Snatching at the gravy; pouncing out of one's turn upon the vegetables and helping oneself to more than one's fair share; manœuvering for the easy-chair; sitting on the evening paper while pretending not to have seen it—all such-like tiresome bits of business. For the little one made out of it, really it was not worth the bother. Grumbling everlastingly at one's food; grumbling everlastingly at most things; abusing Pennycherry behind her back; abusing, for a change, one's fellow-boarders; squabbling with one's fellow-boarders about nothing in particular; sneering at one's fellow-boarders; talking scandal of one's fellow-boarders; making senseless jokes about one's fellow-boarders; talking big about oneself, nobody believing one—all such-like vulgarities. Other boarding-houses might indulge in them: Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square had its dignity to consider.

The truth is, Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square was coming to a very good opinion of itself: for the which not Bloomsbury Square so much as the stranger must be blamed. The stranger had arrived at Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square with the preconceived idea—where obtained from Heaven knows—that its seemingly commonplace, mean-minded, coarse-fibred occupants were in reality ladies and gentlemen of the first water; and time and observation had apparently only strengthened this absurd idea. The natural result was, Forty-eight Bloomsbury

Square was coming round to the stranger's opinion of itself.

Mrs. Pennycherry, the stranger would persist in regarding as a lady born and bred, compelled by circumstances over which she had no control to fill an arduous but honorable position of middle-class society—a sort of foster-mother, to whom were due the thanks and gratitude of her promiscuous family; and this view of herself Mrs. Pennycherry now clung to with obstinate conviction. There were disadvantages attaching, but these Mrs. Pennycherry appeared prepared to suffer cheerfully. A lady born and bred cannot charge other ladies and gentlemen for coals and candles they have never burnt; a foster-mother cannot palm off upon her children New Zealand mutton for Southdown. A mere lodging-house-keeper can play these tricks, and pocket the profits. But a lady feels she cannot: Mrs. Pennycherry felt she no longer could.

To the stranger Miss Kite was a witty and delightful conversationalist of most attractive personality. Miss Kite had one failing: it was lack of vanity. She was unaware of her own delicate and refined beauty. If Miss Kite could only see herself with his, the stranger's eyes, the modesty that rendered her distrustful of her natural charms would fall from her. The stranger was so sure of it Miss Kite determined to put it to the test. One evening, an hour before dinner, there entered the drawing-room, when the stranger only was there and before the gas was lighted, a pleasant, good-looking lady,

somewhat pale, with neatly-arranged brown hair, who demanded of the stranger if he knew her. All her body was trembling, and her voice seemed inclined to run away from her and become a sob. But when the stranger, looking straight into her eyes, told her that from the likeness he thought she must be Miss Kite's younger sister, but much prettier, it became a laugh instead: and that evening the golden-haired Miss Kite disappeared never to show her high-coloured face again; and what perhaps, more than all else, might have impressed some former habitué of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square with awe, it was that no one in the house made even a passing inquiry concerning her.

Sir William's cousin the stranger thought an acquisition to any boarding-house. A lady of high-class family! There was nothing outward or visible perhaps to tell you that she was of high-class family. She herself, naturally, would not mention the fact, yet somehow you felt it. Unconsciously she set a high-class tone, diffused an atmosphere of gentle manners. Not that the stranger had said this in so many words; Sir William's cousin gathered that he thought it, and felt herself in agreement with him.

For Mr. Longcord and his partner, as representatives of the best type of business men, the stranger had a great respect. With what unfortunate results to themselves has been noted. The curious thing is that the Firm appeared content with the price they had paid for the stranger's good opinion—had even, it

was rumoured, acquired a taste for honest men's respect—that in the long run was likely to cost them dear. But we all have our pet extravagance.

The Colonel and Mrs. Devine both suffered a good deal at first from the necessity imposed upon them of learning, somewhat late in life, new tricks. In the privacy of their own apartment they condoled with one another.

"Tomfool nonsense," grumbled the Colonel, "you and I starting billing and cooing at our age!"

"What I object to," said Mrs. Devine, "is the feeling that somehow I am being made to do it."

"The idea that a man and his wife cannot have their little joke together for fear of what some impertinent jackanapes may think of them! it's damn ridiculous," the Colonel exploded.

"Even when he isn't there," said Mrs. Devine, "I seem to see him looking at me with those vexing eyes of his. Really the man quite haunts me."

"I have met him somewhere," mused the Colonel, "I'll swear I've met him somewhere. I wish to goodness he would go."

A hundred things a day the Colonel wanted to say to Mrs. Devine, a hundred things a day Mrs. Devine would have liked to observe to the Colonel. But by the time the opportunity occurred—when nobody else was by to hear—all interest in saying them was gone.

"Women will be women," was the sentiment with which the Colonel consoled himself.

"A man must bear with them—must never forget that he is a gentleman."

"Oh, well, I suppose they're all alike," laughed Mrs. Devine to herself, having arrived at that stage of despair when one seeks refuge in cheerfulness. "What's the use of putting oneself out—it does no good, and only upsets one." There is a certain satisfaction in feeling you are bearing with heroic resignation the irritating follies of others. Colonel and Mrs. Devine came to enjoy the luxury of much self-approbation.

But the person seriously annoyed by the stranger's bigoted belief in the innate goodness of everyone he came across was the languid, handsome Miss Devine. The stranger would have it that Miss Devine was a noble-souled, high-minded young woman, something midway between a Flora Macdonald and a Joan of Arc. Miss Devine, on the contrary, knew herself to be a sleek, luxury-loving animal, quite willing to sell herself to the bidder who could offer her the finest clothes, the richest foods, the most sumptuous surroundings. Such a bidder was to hand in the person of a retired bookmaker, a somewhat greasy old gentleman, but exceedingly rich and undoubtedly fond of her.

Miss Devine, having made up her mind that the thing had got to be done, was anxious that it should be done quickly. And here it was that the stranger's ridiculous opinion of her not only irritated but inconvenienced her. Under the very eyes of a person—however foolish—convinced that you are possessed of

all the highest attributes of your sex, it is difficult to behave as though actuated by only the basest motives. A dozen times had Miss Devine determined to end the matter by formal acceptance of her elderly admirer's large and flabby hand, and a dozen times—the vision intervening of the stranger's grave, believing eyes—had Miss Devine refused decided answer. The stranger would one day depart. Indeed, he had told her himself, he was but a passing traveller. When he was gone it would be easier. So she thought at the time.

One afternoon the stranger entered the room where she was standing by the window, looking out upon the bare branches of the trees in Bloomsbury Square. She remembered afterwards, it was just such another foggy afternoon as the afternoon of the stranger's arrival three months before. No one else was in the room. The stranger closed the door, and came towards her with that curious, quick-leaping step of his. His long coat was tightly buttoned, and in his hands he carried his old felt hat and the massive knotted stick that was almost a staff.

"I have come to say good-bye," explained the stranger. "I am going."

"I shall not see you again?" asked the girl.

"I cannot say," replied the stranger. "But you will think of me?"

"Yes," she answered with a smile, "I can promise that."

"And I shall always remember you," promised the stranger, "and I wish you every joy—the joy of love, the joy of a happy mar-

riage."

The girl winced. "Love and marriage are not always the same thing," she said.

"Not always," agreed the stranger, "but in your case they will be one."

She looked at him.

"Do you think I have not noticed?" smiled the stranger, "a gallant, handsome lad, and clever. You love him and he loves you. I could not have gone away without knowing it was well with you."

Her gaze wandered towards the fading light.

"Ah, yes, I love him," she answered petulantly. "Your eyes can see clearly enough, when they want to. But one does not live on love, in our world. I will tell you the man I am going to marry if you care to know." She would not meet his eyes. She kept her gaze still fixed upon the dingy trees, the mist beyond, and spoke rapidly and vehemently: "The man who can give me all my soul's desire—money and the things that money can buy. You think me a woman, I'm only a pig. He is moist, and breathes like a porpoise; with cunning in place of a brain, and the rest of him mere stomach. But he is good enough for me."

She hoped this would shock the stranger and that now, perhaps, he would go. It irritated her to hear him only laugh.

"No," he said, "you will not marry him."

"Who will stop me?" she cried angrily.

"Your Better Self."

His voice had a strange ring of authority, compelling her to turn and look upon his

face. Yes, it was true, the fancy that from the very first had haunted her. She had met him, talked to him—in silent country roads, in crowded city streets, where was it? And always in talking with him her spirit had been lifted up: she had been—what he had always thought her.

"There are those," continued the stranger (and for the first time she saw that he was of a noble presence, that his gentle, child-like eyes could also command), "whose Better Self lies slain by their own hand and troubles them no more. But yours, my child, you have let grow too strong; it will ever be your master. You must obey. Flee from it and it will follow you; you cannot escape it. Insult it and it will chastise you with burning shame, with stinging self-reproach from day to day." The sternness faded from the beautiful face, the tenderness crept back. He laid his hand upon the young girl's shoulder. "You will marry your lover," he smiled. "With him you will walk the way of sunlight and of shadow."

And the girl, looking up into the strong, calm face, knew that it would be so, that the power of resisting her Better Self had passed away from her for ever.

"Now," said the stranger, "come to the door with me. Leave-takings are but wasted sadness. Let me pass out quietly. Close the door softly behind me."

She thought that perhaps he would turn his face again, but she saw no more of him than the odd roundness of his back under the tightly buttoned coat, before he faded into the

gathering fog.

Then softly she closed the door.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S JOKE

Myself, I do not believe this story. Six persons are persuaded of its truth; and the hope of these six is to convince themselves it was an hallucination. Their difficulty is there are six of them. Each one alone perceives clearly that it never could have been. Unfortunately, they are close friends, and cannot get away from one another; and when they meet and look into each other's eyes the thing takes shape again.

The one who told it to me, and who immediately wished he had not, was Armitage. He told it to me one night when he and I were the only occupants of the Club smoking-room. His telling me—as he explained afterwards—was an impulse of the moment. Sense of the thing had been pressing upon him all that day with unusual persistence; and the idea had occurred to him, on my entering the room, that the flippant scepticism with which an essentially commonplace mind like my own—he

used the words in no offensive sense—would be sure to regard the affair might help to direct his own attention to its more absurd aspect. I am inclined to think it did. He thanked me for dismissing his entire narrative as the delusion of a disordered brain, and begged me not to mention the matter to another living soul. I promised; and I may as well here observe that I do not call this mentioning the matter. Armitage is not the man's real name; it does not even begin with an A. You might read this story and dine next to him the same evening: you would know nothing.

Also, of course, I did not consider myself debarred from speaking about it, discreetly, to Mrs. Armitage, a charming woman. She burst into tears at the first mention of the thing. It took me all I knew to tranquillize her. She said that when she did not think about the thing she could be happy. She and Armitage never spoke of it to one another; and left to themselves her opinion was that eventually they might put remembrance behind them. She wished they were not quite so friendly with the Everetts. Mr. and Mrs. Everett had both dreamt precisely the same dream; that is, assuming it was a dream. Mr. Everett was not the sort of person that a clergyman ought, perhaps, to know; but as Armitage would always argue: for a teacher of Christianity to withdraw his friendship from a man because that man was somewhat of a sinner would be inconsistent. Rather should he remain his friend and seek to influence him. They dined with the Everetts regularly on Tuesdays, and

sitting opposite the Everetts, it seemed impossible to accept as a fact that all four of them at the same time and in the same manner had fallen victims to the same illusion. I think I succeeded in leaving her more hopeful. She acknowledged that the story, looked at from the point of common sense, did sound ridiculous; and threatened me that if I ever breathed a word of it to anyone, she never would speak to me again. She is a charming woman, as I have already mentioned.

By a curious coincidence I happened at the time to be one of Everett's directors on a Company he had just promoted for taking over and developing the Red Sea Coasting trade. I lunched with him the following Sunday. He is an interesting talker, and curiosity to discover how so shrewd a man would account for his connection with so insane—so impossible a fancy, prompted me to hint my knowledge of the story. The manner both of him and of his wife changed suddenly. They wanted to know who it was had told me. I refused the information, because it was evident they would have been angry with him. Everett's theory was that one of them had dreamt it—probably Camelford—and by hypnotic suggestion had conveyed to the rest of them the impression that they had dreamt it also. He added that but for one slight incident he should have ridiculed from the very beginning the argument that it could have been anything else than a dream. But what that incident was he would not tell me. His object, as he explained, was not to dwell upon the business,

but to try and forget it. Speaking as a friend, he advised me, likewise, not to cackle about the matter any more than I could help, lest trouble should arise with regard to my director's fees. His way of putting things is occasionally blunt.

It was at the Everetts', later on, that I met Mrs. Camelford, one of the handsomest women I have ever set eyes upon. It was foolish of me, but my memory for names is weak. I forgot that Mr. and Mrs. Camelford were the other two concerned, and mentioned the story as a curious tale I had read years ago in an old Miscellany. I had reckoned on it to lead me into a discussion with her on platonic friendship. She jumped up from her chair and gave me a look. I remembered then, and could have bitten out my tongue. It took me a long while to make my peace, but she came round in the end, consenting to attribute my blunder to mere stupidity. She was quite convinced herself, she told me, that the thing was pure imagination. It was only when in company with the others that any doubt as to this crossed her mind. Her own idea was that, if everybody would agree never to mention the matter again, it would end in their forgetting it. She supposed it was her husband who had been my informant: he was just that sort of ass. She did not say it unkindly. She said when she was first married, ten years ago, few people had a more irritating effect upon her than had Camelford; but that since she had seen more of other men she had come to respect him. I like to hear a woman speak well

of her husband. It is a departure which, in my opinion, should be more encouraged than it is. I assured her Camelford was not the culprit; and on the understanding that I might come to see her—not too often—on her Thursdays, I agreed with her that the best thing I could do would be to dismiss the subject from my mind and occupy myself instead with questions that concerned myself.

I had never talked much with Camelford before that time, though I had often seen him at the Club. He is a strange man, of whom many stories are told. He writes journalism for a living, and poetry, which he publishes at his own expense, apparently for recreation. It occurred to me that his theory would at all events be interesting; but at first he would not talk at all, pretending to ignore the whole affair, as idle nonsense. I had almost despaired of drawing him out, when one evening, of his own accord, he asked me if I thought Mrs. Armitage, with whom he knew I was on terms of friendship, still attached importance to the thing. On my expressing the opinion that Mrs. Armitage was the most troubled of the group, he was irritated; and urged me to leave the rest of them alone and devote whatever sense I might possess to persuading her in particular that the entire thing was and could be nothing but pure myth. He confessed frankly that to him it was still a mystery. He could easily regard it as chimera, but for one slight incident. He would not for a long while say what that was, but there is such a thing as perseverance, and in the end I dragged it out

of him. This is what he told me.

"We happened by chance to find ourselves alone in the conservatory, that night of the ball—we six. Most of the crowd had already left. The last 'extra' was being played: the music came to us faintly. Stooping to pick up Jessica's fan, which she had let fall to the ground, something shining on the tesselated pavement underneath a group of palms suddenly caught my eye. We had not said a word to one another; indeed, it was the first evening we had any of us met one another—that is, unless the thing was not a dream. I picked it up. The others gathered round me, and when we looked into one another's eyes we understood: it was a broken wine-cup, a curious goblet of Bavarian glass. It was the goblet out of which we had all dreamt that we had drunk."

I have put the story together as it seems to me it must have happened. The incidents, at all events, are facts. Things have since occurred to those concerned affording me hope that they will never read it. I should not have troubled to tell it at all, but that it has a moral.

Six persons sat round the great oak table in the wainscoted *Speise Saal* of that cosy hostelry, the Kneiper Hof at Konigsberg. It was late into the night. Under ordinary circumstances they would have been in bed, but having arrived by the last train from Dantzic, and having supped on German fare, it had seemed to them discreeter to remain awhile in talk. The house was strangely silent. The

rotund landlord, leaving their candles ranged upon the sideboard, had wished them "Gute Nacht" an hour before. The spirit of the ancient house enfolded them within its wings.

Here in this very chamber, if rumour is to be believed, Emmanuel Kant himself had sat discoursing many a time and oft. The walls, behind which for more than forty years the little peak-faced man had thought and worked, rose silvered by the moonlight just across the narrow way; the three high windows of the *Speise Saal* give out upon the old Cathedral tower beneath which now he rests. Philosophy, curious concerning human phenomena, eager for experience, unhampered by the limitation Convention would impose upon all speculation, was in the smoky air.

"Not into future events," remarked the Rev. Nathaniel Armitage, "it is better they should be hidden from us. But into the future of ourselves—our temperament, our character—I think we ought to be allowed to see. At twenty we are one individual; at forty, another person entirely, with other views, with other interests, a different outlook upon life, attracted by quite other attributes, repelled by the very qualities that once attracted us. It is extremely awkward, for all of us."

"I am glad to hear somebody else say that," observed Mrs. Everett, in her gentle, sympathetic voice. "I have thought it all myself so often. Sometimes I have blamed myself, yet how can one help it: the things that appeared of importance to us, they become indifferent;

new voices call to us; the idols we once worshipped, we see their feet of clay."

"If under the head of idols you include me," laughed the jovial Mr. Everett, "don't hesitate to say so." He was a large red-faced gentleman, with small twinkling eyes, and a mouth both strong and sensuous. "I didn't make my feet myself. I never asked anybody to take me for a stained-glass saint. It is not I who have changed."

"I know, dear, it is I," his thin wife answered with a meek smile. "I was beautiful, there was no doubt about it, when you married me."

"You were, my dear," agreed her husband: "As a girl few could hold a candle to you."

"It was the only thing about me that you valued, my beauty," continued his wife; "and it went so quickly. I feel sometimes as if I had swindled you."

"But there is a beauty of the mind, of the soul," remarked the Rev. Nathaniel Armitage, "that to some men is more attractive than mere physical perfection."

The soft eyes of the faded lady shone for a moment with the light of pleasure. "I am afraid Dick is not of that number," she sighed.

"Well, as I said just now about my feet," answered her husband genially, "I didn't make myself. I always have been a slave to beauty and always shall be. There would be no sense in pretending among chums that you haven't lost your looks, old girl." He laid his fine hand with kindly intent upon her bony shoulder. "But there is no call for you to fret yourself

as if you had done it on purpose. No one but a lover imagines a woman growing more beautiful as she grows older."

"Some women would seem to," answered his wife.

Involuntarily she glanced to where Mrs. Camelford sat with elbows resting on the table; and involuntarily also the small twinkling eyes of her husband followed in the same direction. There is a type that reaches its prime in middle age. Mrs. Camelford, *née* Jessica Dearwood, at twenty had been an uncanny-looking creature, the only thing about her appealing to general masculine taste having been her magnificent eyes, and even these had frightened more than they had allured. At forty, Mrs. Camelford might have posed for the entire Juno.

"Yes, he's a cunning old joker is Time," murmured Mr. Everett, almost inaudibly.

"What ought to have happened," said Mrs. Armitage, while with deft fingers rolling herself a cigarette, "was for you and Nellie to have married."

Mrs. Everett's pale face flushed scarlet.

"My dear," exclaimed the shocked Nathaniel Armitage, flushing likewise.

"Oh, why may one not sometimes speak the truth?" answered his wife petulantly. "You and I are utterly unsuited to one another—everybody sees it. At nineteen it seemed to me beautiful, holy, the idea of being a clergyman's wife, fighting by his side against evil. Besides, you have changed since then. You were human, my dear Nat, in those

days, and the best dancer I had ever met. It was your dancing was your chief attraction for me as likely as not, if I had only known myself. At nineteen how can one know oneself?"

"We loved each other," the Rev. Armitage reminded her.

"I know we did, passionately—then; but we don't now." She laughed a little bitterly. "Poor Nat! I am only another trial added to your long list. Your beliefs, your ideals are meaningless to me—mere narrow-minded dogmas, stifling thought. Nellie was the wife Nature had intended for you, so soon as she had lost her beauty and with it all her worldly ideas. Fate was maturing her for you, if only we had known. As for me, I ought to have been the wife of an artist, of a poet." Unconsciously a glance from her ever restless eyes flashed across the table to where Horatio Camelford sat, puffing clouds of smoke into the air from a huge black meerschaum pipe. "Bohemia is my country. Its poverty, its struggle would have been a joy to me. Breathing its free air, life would have been worth living."

Horatio Camelford leant back with eyes fixed on the oaken ceiling. "It is a mistake," said Horatio Camelford, "for the artist ever to marry."

The handsome Mrs. Camelford laughed good-naturedly. "The artist," remarked Mrs. Camelford, "from what I have seen of him would never know the inside of his shirt from the outside if his wife was not there to take it out of the drawer and put it over his head."

"His wearing it inside out would not make

much difference to the world," argued her husband. "The sacrifice of his art to the necessity of keeping his wife and family does."

"Well, you at all events do not appear to have sacrificed much, my boy," came the breezy voice of Dick Everett. "Why, all the world is ringing with your name."

"When I am forty-one, with all the best years of my life behind me," answered the Poet. "Speaking as a man, I have nothing to regret. No one could have had a better wife; my children are charming. I have lived the peaceful existence of the successful citizen. Had I been true to my trust I should have gone out into the wilderness, the only possible home of the teacher, the prophet. The artist is the bridegroom of Art. Marriage for him is an immorality. Had I my time again I should remain a bachelor."

"Time brings its revenges, you see," laughed Mrs. Camelford. "At twenty that fellow threatened to commit suicide if I would not marry him, and cordially disliking him I consented. Now twenty years later, when I am just getting used to him, he calmly turns round and says he would have been better without me."

"I heard something about it at the time," said Mrs. Armitage. "You were very much in love with somebody else, were you not?"

"Is not the conversation assuming a rather dangerous direction?" laughed Mrs. Camelford.

"I was thinking the same thing, "agreed Mrs. Everett. "One would imagine some

strange influence had seized upon us, forcing us to speak our thoughts aloud."

"I am afraid I was the original culprit," admitted the Reverend Nathaniel. "This room is becoming quite oppressive. Had we not better go to bed?"

The ancient lamp suspended from its smoke-grimed beam uttered a faint, gurgling sob, and spluttered out. The shadow of the old Cathedral tower crept in and stretched across the room, now illuminated only by occasional beams from the cloud-curtained moon. At the other end of the table sat a peak-faced little gentleman, clean-shaven, in full-bottomed wig.

"Forgive me," said the little gentleman. He spoke in English, with a strong accent. "But it seems to me here is a case where two parties might be of service to one another."

The six fellow-travellers round the table looked at one another, but none spoke. The idea that came to each of them, as they explained to one another later, was that without remembering it they had taken their candles and had gone to bed. This was surely a dream.

"It would greatly assist me," continued the little peak-faced gentleman, "in experiments I am conducting into the phenomena of human tendencies, if you would allow me to put your lives back twenty years."

Still no one of the six replied. It seemed to them that the little old gentleman must have been sitting there among them all the time, unnoticed by them.

"Judging from your talk this evening," con-

tinued the peak-faced little gentleman, "you should welcome my offer. You appear to me to be one and all of exceptional intelligence. You perceive the mistakes that you have made: you understand the causes. The future veiled, you could not help yourselves. What I propose to do is to put you back twenty years. You will be boys and girls again, but with this difference: that the knowledge of the future, so far as it relates to yourselves, will remain with you.

"Come," urged the old gentleman, "the thing is quite simple of accomplishment. As—as a certain philosopher has clearly proved: the universe is only the result of our own perceptions. By what may appear to you to be magic—by what in reality will be simply a chemical operation—I remove from your memory the events of the last twenty years, with the exception of what immediately concerns your own personalities. You will retain all knowledge of the changes, physical and mental, that will be in store for you; all else will pass from your perception."

The little old gentleman took a small phial from his waistcoat pocket, and, filling one of the massive wine-glasses from a decanter, measured into it some half-a-dozen drops. Then he placed the glass in the centre of the table.

"Youth is a good time to go back to," said the peak-faced little gentleman, with a smile. "Twenty years ago, it was the night of the Hunt Ball. You remember it?"

It was Everett who drank first. He drank it

with his little twinkling eyes fixed hungrily on the proud handsome face of Mrs. Camelford; and then handed the glass to his wife. It was she perhaps who drank from it most eagerly. Her life with Everett, from the day when she had risen from a bed of sickness stripped of all her beauty, had been one bitter wrong. She drank with the wild hope that the thing might possibly be not a dream; and thrilled to the touch of the man she loved, as reaching across the table he took the glass from her hand. Mrs. Armitage was the fourth to drink. She took the cup from her husband, drank with a quiet smile, and passed it on to Camelford. And Camelford drank, looking at nobody, and replaced the glass upon the table.

"Come," said the little old gentleman to Mrs. Camelford, "you are the only one left. The whole thing will be incomplete without you."

"I have no wish to drink," said Mrs. Camelford, and her eyes sought those of her husband, but he would not look at her.

"Come," again urged the Figure. And then Camelford looked at her and laughed drily.

"You had better drink," he said. "It's only a dream."

"If you wish it," she answered. And it was from his hands she took the glass.

It is from the narrative as Armitage told it to me that night in the Club smoking-room that I am taking most of my material. It seemed to him that all things began slowly to rise upward, leaving him stationary, but with

a great pain as though the inside of him were being torn away—the same sensation greatly exaggerated, so he likened it, as descending in a lift. But around him all the time was silence and darkness unrelieved. After a period that might have been minutes, that might have been years, a faint light crept towards him. It grew stronger, and into the air which now fanned his cheek there stole the sound of far-off music. The light and the music both increased, and one by one his senses came back to him. He was seated on a low cushioned bench beneath a group of palms. A young girl was sitting beside him, but her face was turned away from him.

"I did not catch your name," he was saying. "Would you mind telling it to me?"

She turned her face towards him. It was the most spiritually beautiful face he had ever seen. "I am in the same predicament," she laughed. "You had better write yours on my programme, and I will write mine on yours."

So they wrote upon each other's programme and exchanged again. The name she had written was Alice Blatchley.

He had never seen her before, that he could remember. Yet at the back of his mind there dwelt the haunting knowledge of her. Somewhere long ago they had met, talked together. Slowly, as one recalls a dream, it came back to him. In some other life, vague, shadowy, he had married this woman. For the first few years they had loved each other; then the gulf had opened between them, widened. Stern, strong voices had called to him to lay aside his

selfish dreams, his boyish ambitions, to take upon his shoulders the yoke of a great duty. When more than ever he had demanded sympathy and help, this woman had fallen away from him. His ideals but irritated her. Only at the cost of daily bitterness had he been able to resist her endeavours to draw him from his path. A face—that of a woman with soft eyes, full of helpfulness, shone through the mist of his dream—the face of a woman who would one day come to him out of the Future with outstretched hands that he would yearn to clasp.

"Shall we not dance?" said the voice beside him. "I really won't sit out a waltz."

They hurried into the ball-room. With his arm about her form, her wondrous eyes shyly, at rare moments, seeking his, then vanishing again behind their drooping lashes, the brain, the mind, the very soul of the young man passed out of his own keeping. She complimented him in her bewitching manner, a delightful blending of condescension and timidity.

"You dance extremely well," she told him. "You may ask me for another, later on."

The words flashed out from that dim haunting future. "Your dancing was your chief attraction for me, as likely as not, had I but known?"

All that evening and for many months to come the Present and the Future fought within him. And the experience of Nathaniel Armitage, divinity student, was the experience likewise of Alice Blatchley, who had

fallen in love with him at first sight, having found him the divinest dancer she had ever whirled with to the sensuous music of the waltz; of Horatio Camelford, journalist and minor poet, whose journalism earned him a bare income, but at whose minor poetry critics smiled; of Jessica Dearwood, with her glorious eyes, and muddy complexion, and her wild hopeless passion for the big, handsome, ruddy-bearded Dick Everett, who, knowing it, only laughed at her in his kindly, lordly way, telling her with frank brutalness that the woman who was not beautiful had missed her vocation in life; of that scheming, conquering young gentleman himself, who at twenty-five had already made his mark in the City, shrewd, clever, cool-headed as a fox, except where a pretty face and shapely hand or ankle were concerned; of Nellie Fanshawe, then in the pride of her ravishing beauty, who loved none but herself, whose clay-made gods were jewels, and fine dresses and rich feasts, the envy of other women and the courtship of all mankind.

That evening of the ball each clung to the hope that this memory of the future was but a dream. They had been introduced to one another; had heard each other's names for the first time with a start of recognition; had avoided one another's eyes; had hastened to plunge into meaningless talk; till that moment when young Camelford, stooping to pick up Jessica's fan, had found that broken fragment of the Rhenish wine-glass. Then it was that conviction refused to be shaken off, that

knowledge of the future had to be sadly accepted.

What they had not foreseen was that knowledge of the future in no way affected their emotions of the present. Nathaniel Armitage grew day by day more hopelessly in love with bewitching Alice Blatchley. The thought of her marrying anyone else—the long-haired, priggish Camelford in particular—sent the blood boiling through his veins; added to which sweet Alice, with her arms about his neck, would confess to him that life without him would be a misery hardly to be endured, that the thought of him as the husband of another woman—of Nellie Fanshawe in particular—was madness to her. It was right perhaps, knowing what they did, that they should say good-bye to one another. She would bring sorrow into his life. Better far that he should put her away from him, that she should die of a broken heart, as she felt sure she would. How could he, a fond lover, inflict this suffering upon her? He ought of course to marry Nellie Fanshawe, but he could not bear the girl. Would it not be the height of absurdity to marry a girl he strongly disliked because twenty years hence she might be more suitable to him than the woman he now loved and who loved him?

Nor could Nellie Fanshawe bring herself to discuss without laughter the suggestion of marrying on a hundred-and-fifty a year a curate that she positively hated. There would come a time when wealth would be indifferent to her, when her exalted spirit would ask but

for the satisfaction of self-sacrifice. But that time had not arrived. The emotions it would bring with it she could not in her present state even imagine. Her whole present being craved for the things of this world, the things that were within her grasp. To ask her to forego them now because later on she would not care for them! it was like telling a schoolboy to avoid the tuck-shop because, when a man, the thought of stick-jaw would be nauseous to him. If her capacity for enjoyment was to be short-lived, all the more reason for grasping joy quickly.

Alice Blatchley, when her lover was not by, gave herself many a headache trying to think the thing out logically. Was it not foolish of her to rush into this marriage with dear Nat? At forty she would wish she had married somebody else. But most women at forty—she judged from conversation round about her—wished they had married somebody else. If every girl at twenty listened to herself at forty there would be no more marriage. At forty she would be a different person altogether. That other elderly person did not interest her. To ask a young girl to spoil her life purely in the interests of this middle-aged party—it did not seem right. Besides, whom else was she to marry? Camelford would not have her; he did not want her then; he was not going to want her at forty. For practical purposes Camelford was out of the question. She might marry somebody else altogether—and fare worse. She might remain a spinster: she hated the mere name of spinster. The inky-

fingered woman journalist that, if all went well, she might become: it was not her idea. Was she acting selfishly? Ought she, in his own interests, to refuse to marry dear Nat? Nellie—the little cat—who would suit him at forty, would not have him. If he was going to marry anyone but Nellie he might as well marry her, Alice. A bachelor clergyman! it sounded almost improper. Nor was dear Nat the type. If she threw him over it would be into the arms of some designing minx. What was she to do?

Camelford at forty, under the influence of favourable criticism, would have persuaded himself he was a heaven-sent prophet, his whole life to be beautifully spent in the saving of mankind. At twenty he felt he wanted to live. Weird-looking Jessica, with her magnificent eyes veiling mysteries, was of more importance to him than the rest of the species combined. Knowledge of the future in his case only spurred desire. The muddy complexion would grow pink and white, the thin limbs round and shapely; the now scornful eyes would one day light with love at his coming. It was what he had once hoped: it was what he now knew. At forty the artist is stronger than the man; at twenty the man is stronger than the artist.

An uncanny creature, so most folks would have described Jessica Dearwood. Few would have imagined her developing into the good-natured, easy-going Mrs. Camelford of middle age. The animal, so strong within her at twenty, at thirty had burnt itself out. At eigh-

teen, madly, blindly in love with red-bearded, deep-voiced Dick Everett she would, had he whistled to her, have flung herself gratefully at his feet, and this in spite of the knowledge forewarning her of the miserable life he would certainly lead her, at all events until her slowly developing beauty should give her the whip hand of him—by which time she would have come to despise him. Fortunately, as she told herself, there was no fear of his doing so, the future notwithstanding. Nellie Fanshawe's beauty held him as with chains of steel, and Nellie had no intention of allowing her rich prize to escape her. Her own lover, it was true, irritated her more than any man she had ever met, but at least he would afford her refuge from the bread of charity. Jessica Dearwood, an orphan, had been brought up by a distant relative. She had not been the child to win affection. Of silent, brooding nature, every thoughtless incivility had been to her an insult, a wrong. Acceptance of young Camelford seemed her only escape from a life that had become to her a martyrdom. At forty-one he would wish he had remained a bachelor; but at thirty-eight that would not trouble her. She would know herself he was much better off as he was. Meanwhile, she would have come to like him, to respect him. He would be famous, she would be proud of him. Crying into her pillow—she could not help it—for love of handsome Dick, it was still a comfort to reflect that Nellie Fanshawe, as it were, was watching over her, protecting her from herself.

Dick, as he muttered to himself a dozen

times a day, ought to marry Jessica. At thirty-eight she would be his ideal. He looked at her as she was at eighteen, and shuddered. Nellie at thirty would be plain and uninteresting. But when did consideration of the future ever cry halt to passion: when did a lover ever pause thinking of the morrow? If her beauty was to quickly pass, was not that one reason the more urging him to possess it while it lasted?

Nellie Fanshawe at forty would be a saint. The prospect did not please her: she hated saints. She would love the tiresome, solemn Nathaniel: of what use was that to her now? He did not desire her; he was in love with Alice, and Alice was in love with him. What would be the sense—even if they all agreed—in the three of them making themselves miserable for all their youth that they might be contented in their old age? Let age fend for itself and leave youth to its own instincts. Let elderly saints suffer—it was their *métier*—and youth drink the cup of life. It was a pity Dick was the only "catch" available, but he was young and handsome. Other girls had to put up with sixty and the gout.

Another point, a very serious point, had been overlooked. All that had arrived to them in that dim future of the past had happened to them as the results of their making the marriages they had made. To what fate other roads would lead their knowledge could not tell them. Nellie Fanshawe had become at forty a lovely character. Might not the hard life she had led with her husband—a life

calling for continual sacrifice, for daily self-control—have helped towards this end? As the wife of a poor curate of high moral principles, would the same result have been secured? The fever that had robbed her of her beauty and turned her thoughts inward had been the result of sitting out on the balcony of the Paris Opera House with an Italian Count on the occasion of a fancy dress ball. As the wife of an East End clergyman the chances are she would have escaped that fever and its purifying effects. Was there not danger in the position: a supremely beautiful young woman, worldly-minded, hungry for pleasure, condemned to a life of poverty with a man she did not care for? The influence of Alice upon Nathaniel Armitage, during those first years when his character was forming, had been all for good. Could he be sure that, married to Nellie, he might not have deteriorated?

Were Alice Blatchley to marry an artist could she be sure that at forty she would still be in sympathy with artistic ideals? Even as a child had not her desire ever been in the opposite direction to that favoured by her nurse? Did not the reading of Conservative journals invariably incline her towards Radicalism, and the steady stream of Radical talk round her husband's table invariably set her seeking arguments in favour of the feudal system? Might it not have been her husband's growing Puritanism that had driven her to crave for Bohemianism? Suppose that towards middle age, the wife of a wild artist, she suddenly "took religion," as the saying is. Her

last state would be worse than the first.

Camelford was of delicate physique. As an absent-minded bachelor with no one to give him his meals, no one to see that his things were aired, could he have lived till forty? Could he be sure that home life had not given more to his art than it had taken from it?

Jessica Dearwood, of a nervous, passionate nature, married to a bad husband, might at forty have posed for one of the Furies. Not until her life had become restful had her good looks shown themselves. Hers was the type of beauty that for its development demands tranquillity.

Dick Everett had no delusions concerning himself. That, had he married Jessica, he could for ten years have remained the faithful husband of a singularly plain wife he knew to be impossible. But Jessica would have been no patient Griselda. The extreme probability was that having married her at twenty for the sake of her beauty at thirty, at twenty-nine at latest she would have divorced him.

Everett was a man of practical ideas. It was he who took the matter in hand. The refreshment contractor admitted that curious goblets of German glass occasionally crept into their stock. One of the waiters, on the understanding that in no case should he be called upon to pay for them, admitted having broken more than one wine-glass on that particular evening: thought it not unlikely he might have attempted to hide the fragments under a convenient palm. The whole thing evidently was a dream. So youth decided at

the time, and the three marriages took place within three months of one another.

It was some ten years later that Armitage told me the story that night in the Club smoking-room. Mrs. Everett had just recovered from a severe attack of rheumatic fever, contracted the spring before in Paris. Mrs. Camelford, whom previously I had not met, certainly seemed to me one of the handsomest women I have ever seen. Mrs. Armitage—I knew her when she was Alice Blatchley—I found more charming as a woman than she had been as a girl. What she could have seen in Armitage I never could understand. Camelford made his mark some ten years later: poor fellow, he did not live long to enjoy his fame. Dick Everett has still another six years to work off; but he is well behaved, and there is talk of a petition.

It is a curious story altogether, I admit. As I said at the beginning, I do not myself believe it.

THE SOUL OF NICHOLAS SNYDERS, OR THE MISER OF ZANDAM

Once upon a time in Zandam, which is by the Zuider Zee, there lived a wicked man named Nicholas Snyders. He was mean and hard and cruel, and loved but one thing in the world, and that was gold. And even that not for its own sake. He loved the power gold gave him—the power to tyrannize and to oppress, the power to cause suffering at his will. They said he had no soul, but there they were wrong. All men own—or, to speak more correctly, are owned by—a soul; and the soul of Nicholas Snyders was an evil soul. He lived in the old windmill which still is standing on the quay, with only little Christina to wait upon him and keep house for him. Christina was an orphan whose parents had died in debt. Nicholas, to Christina's everlasting gratitude, had

cleared their memory—it cost but a few hundred florins—in consideration that Christina should work for him without wages. Christina formed his entire household, and only one willing visitor ever darkened his door, the widow Toelast. Dame Toelast was rich and almost as great a miser as Nicholas himself. "Why should not we two marry?" Nicholas had once croaked to the widow Toelast. "Together we should be masters of all Zandam." Dame Toelast had answered with a cackling laugh; but Nicholas was never in haste.

One afternoon Nicholas Snyders sat alone at his desk in the centre of the great semi-circular room that took up half the ground floor of the windmill, and that served him for an office, and there came a knocking at the outer door.

"Come in!" cried Nicholas Snyders. He spoke in a tone quite kind for Nicholas Snyders. He felt so sure it was Jan knocking at the door—Jan Van der Voort, the young sailor, now master of his own ship, come to demand of him the hand of little Christina. In anticipation, Nicholas Snyders tasted the joy of dashing Jan's hopes to the ground; of hearing him plead, then rave; of watching the growing pallor that would overspread Jan's handsome face as Nicholas would, point by point, explain to him the consequences of defiance—how, firstly, Jan's old mother should be turned out of her home, his old father put into prison for debt; how, secondly, Jan himself should be pursued without remorse, his ship be bought over his head before he could complete the

purchase. The interview would afford to Nicholas Snyders sport after his own soul. Since Jan's return the day before, he had been looking forward to it. Therefore, feeling sure it was Jan, he cried "Come in!" quite cheerily.

But it was not Jan. It was somebody Nicholas Snyders had never set eyes on before. And neither, after that one visit, did Nicholas Snyders ever set eyes upon him again. The light was fading, and Nicholas Snyders was not the man to light candles before they were needed, so that he was never able to describe with any precision the stranger's appearance. Nicholas thought he seemed an old man, but alert in all his movements; while his eyes—the one thing about him Nicholas saw with any clearness—were curiously bright and piercing.

"Who are you?" asked Nicholas Snyders, taking no pains to disguise his disappointment.

"I am a pedlar," answered the stranger. His voice was clear and not unmusical, with just the suspicion of roguishness behind.

"Not wanting anything," answered Nicholas Snyders drily. "Shut the door and be careful of the step."

But instead the stranger took a chair and drew it nearer, and, himself in shadow, looked straight into Nicholas Snyders' face and laughed.

"Are you quite sure, Nicholas Snyders? Are you quite sure there is nothing you require?"

"Nothing," growled Nicholas Snyders—"except the sight of your back." The

stranger bent forward, and with his long, lean hand touched Nicholas Snyders playfully upon the knee. "Wouldn't you like a soul, Nicholas Snyders?" he asked.

"Think of it," continued the strange pedlar, before Nicholas could recover power of speech. "For forty years you have drunk the joy of being mean and cruel. Are you not tired of the taste, Nicholas Snyders? Wouldn't you like a change? Think of it, Nicholas Snyders—the joy of being loved, of hearing yourself blessed, instead of cursed! Wouldn't it be good fun, Nicholas Snyders—just by way of a change? If you don't like it, you can return and be yourself again."

What Nicholas Snyders, recalling all things afterwards, could never understand was why he sat there, listening in patience to the stranger's talk; for, at the time, it seemed to him the jesting of a wandering fool. But something about the stranger had impressed him.

"I have it with me," continued the odd pedlar; "and as for price—" The stranger made a gesture indicating dismissal of all sordid details. "I look for my reward in watching the result of the experiment. I am something of a philosopher. I take an interest in these matters. See." The stranger dived between his legs and produced from his pack a silver flask of cunning workmanship and laid it on the table.

"Its flavour is not unpleasant," explained the stranger. "A little bitter; but one does not drink it by the goblet: a wineglassful, such as

one would of old Tokay, while the mind of both is fixed on the same thought: 'May my soul pass into him, may his pass into me!' The operation is quite simple: the secret lies within the drug." The stranger patted the quaint flask as though it had been some little dog.

"You will say: 'Who will exchange souls with Nicholas Snyders?'" The stranger appeared to have come prepared with an answer to all questions. "My friend, you are rich; you need not fear. It is the possession men value the least of all they have. Choose your soul and drive your bargain. I leave that to you with one word of counsel only: you will find the young readier than the old—the young, to whom the world promises all things for gold. Choose you a fine, fair, fresh, young soul, Nicholas Snyders; and choose it quickly. Your hair is somewhat grey, my friend. Taste, before you die, the joy of living."

The strange pedlar laughed and, rising, closed his pack. Nicholas Snyders neither moved nor spoke, until with the soft clanging of the massive door his senses returned to him. Then, seizing the flask the stranger had left behind him, he sprang from his chair, meaning to fling it after him into the street. But the flashing of the firelight on its burnished surface stayed his hand.

"After all, the case is of value," Nicholas chuckled, and put the flask aside and, lighting the two tall candles, buried himself again in his green-bound ledger. Yet still from time to time Nicholas Snyders' eye would wander to where the silver flask remained half hidden

among dusty papers. And later there came again a knocking at the door, and this time it really was young Jan who entered.

Jan held out his great hand across the littered desk.

"We parted in anger, Nicholas Snyders. It was my fault. You were in the right. I ask you to forgive me. I was poor. It was selfish of me to wish the little maid to share with me my poverty. But now I am no longer poor."

"Sit down," responded Nicholas in kindly tone. "I have heard of it. So now you are master and the owner of your ship—your very own."

"My very own after one more voyage," laughed Jan. "I have Burgomaster Allart's promise."

"A promise is not a performance," hinted Nicholas. "Burgomaster Allart is not a rich man; a higher bid might tempt him. Another might step in between you and become the owner."

Jan only laughed. "Why, that would be the work of an enemy, which, God be praised, I do not think that I possess."

"Lucky lad!" commented Nicholas; "so few of us are without enemies. And your parents, Jan, will they live with you?"

"We wished it," answered Jan, "both Christina and I. But the mother is feeble. The old mill has grown into her life."

"I can understand," agreed Nicholas. "The old vine torn from the old wall withers. And your father, Jan; people will gossip. The mill is paying?"

Jan shook his head. "It never will again; and the debts haunt him. But all that, as I tell him, is a thing of the past. His creditors have agreed to look to me and wait."

"All of them?" queried Nicholas.

"All of them I could discover," laughed Jan.

Nicholas Snyders pushed back his chair and looked at Jan with a smile upon his wrinkled face. "And so you and Christina have arranged it all?"

"With your consent, sir," answered Jan.

"You will wait for that?" asked Nicholas.

"We should like to have it, sir." Jan smiled, but the tone of his voice fell agreeably on Nicholas Snyders' ear. Nicholas Snyders loved best beating the dog that, growled and showed its teeth.

"Better not wait for that," said Nicholas Snyders. "You might have to wait long."

Jan rose, an angry flush upon his face. "So nothing changes you, Nicholas Snyders. Have it your own way, then."

"You will marry her in spite of me?"

"In spite of you and of your friends the fiends, and of your master the Devil!" flung out Jan. For Jan had a soul that was generous and brave and tender and excessively short-tempered. Even the best of souls have their failings.

"I am sorry," said old Nicholas.

"I am glad to hear it," answered Jan.

"I am sorry for your mother," explained Nicholas. "The poor dame, I fear, will be homeless in her old age. The mortgage shall be foreclosed, Jan, on your wedding-day. I

am sorry for your father, Jan. His creditors, Jan—you have overlooked just one. I am sorry for him, Jan. Prison has always been his dread. I am sorry even for you, my young friend. You will have to begin life over again. Burgomaster Allart is in the hollow of my hand. I have but to say the word, your ship is mine. I wish you joy of your bride, my young friend. You must love her very dearly—you will be paying a high price for her."

It was Nicholas Snyders' grin that maddened Jan. He sought for something that, thrown straight at the wicked mouth, should silence it, and by chance his hand lighted on the pedlar's silver flask. In the same instance Nicholas Snyders' hand had closed upon it also. The grin had died away.

"Sit down," commanded Nicholas Snyders. "Let us talk further." And there was that in his voice that compelled the younger man's obedience.

"You wonder, Jan, why I seek always anger and hatred. I wonder at times myself. Why do generous thoughts never come to me, as to other men! Listen, Jan; I am in a whimsical mood. Such things cannot be, but it is a whim of mine to think it might have been. Sell me your soul, Jan, sell me your soul, that I, too, may taste this love and gladness that I hear about. For a little while, Jan, only for a little while, and I will give you all you desire."

The old man seized his pen and wrote.

"See, Jan, the ship is yours beyond mishap; the mill goes free; your father may hold up his head again. And all I ask, Jan, is that you

drink to me, willing the while that your soul may go from you and become the soul of old Nicholas Snyders—for a little while, Jan, only for a little while."

With feverish hands the old man had drawn the stopper from the pedlar's flagon, had poured the wine into twin glasses. Jan's inclination was to laugh, but the old man's eagerness was almost frenzy. Surely he was mad; but that would not make less binding the paper he had signed. A true man does not jest with his soul, but the face of Christina was shining down on Jan from out the gloom.

"You will mean it?" whispered Nicholas Snyders.

"May my soul pass from me and enter into Nicholas Snyders!" answered Jan, replacing his empty glass upon the table. And the two stood looking for a moment into one another's eyes.

And the high candles on the littered desk flickered and went out, as though a breath had blown them, first one and then the other.

"I must be getting home," came the voice of Jan from the darkness. "Why did you blow out the candles?"

"We can light them again from the fire," answered Nicholas. He did not add that he had meant to ask that same question of Jan. He thrust them among the glowing logs, first one and then the other; and the shadows crept back into their corners.

"You will not stop and see Christina?" asked Nicholas.

"Not to-night," answered Jan.

"The paper that I signed," Nicholas reminded him—"you have it?"

"I had forgotten it," Jan answered.

The old man took it from the desk and handed it to him. Jan thrust it into his pocket and went out. Nicholas bolted the door behind him and returned to his desk; sat long there, his elbow resting on the open ledger.

Nicholas pushed the ledger aside and laughed. "What foolery! As if such things could be! The fellow must have bewitched me."

Nicholas crossed to the fire and warmed his hands before the blaze. "Still, I am glad he is going to marry the little lass. A good lad, a good lad."

Nicholas must have fallen asleep before the fire. When he opened his eyes, it was to meet the grey dawn. He felt cold, stiff, hungry, and decidedly cross. Why had not Christina woke him up and given him his supper. Did she think he had intended to pass the night on a wooden chair? The girl was an idiot. He would go upstairs and tell her through the door just what he thought of her.

His way upstairs led through the kitchen. To his astonishment, there sat Christina, asleep before the burnt-out grate.

"Upon my word," muttered Nicholas to himself, "people in this house don't seem to know what beds are for!"

But it was not Christina, so Nicholas told himself. Christina had the look of a frightened rabbit: it had always irritated him. This girl, even in her sleep, wore an im-

pertinent expression—a delightfully impertinent expression. Besides, this girl was pretty—marvellously pretty. Indeed, so pretty a girl Nicholas had never seen in all his life before. Why had the girls, when Nicholas was young, been so entirely different! A sudden bitterness seized Nicholas: it was as though he had just learnt that long ago, without knowing it, he had been robbed.

The child must be cold. Nicholas fetched his fur-lined cloak and wrapped it about her.

There was something else he ought to do. The idea came to him while drawing the cloak around her shoulders, very gently, not to disturb her—something he wanted to do, if only he could think what it was. The girl's lips were parted. She appeared to be speaking to him, asking him to do this thing—or telling him not to do it. Nicholas could not be sure which. Half a dozen times he turned away, and half a dozen times stole back to where she sat sleeping with that delightfully impertinent expression on her face, her lips parted. But what she wanted, or what it was he wanted, Nicholas could not think.

Perhaps Christina would know. Perhaps Christina would know who she was and how she got there. Nicholas climbed the stairs, swearing at them for creaking.

Christina's door was open. No one was in the room; the bed had not been slept upon. Nicholas descended the creaking stairs.

The girl was still asleep. Could it be Christina herself? Nicholas examined the delicious features one by one. Never before, so

far as he could recollect, had he seen the girl; yet around her neck—Nicholas had not noticed it before—lay Christina's locket, rising and falling as she breathed. Nicholas knew it well; the one thing belonging to her mother Christina had insisted on keeping. The one thing about which she had ever defied him. She would never have parted with that locket. It must be Christina herself. But what had happened to her? Or to himself. Remembrance rushed in upon him. The odd pedlar! The scene with Jan! But surely all that had been a dream? Yet there upon the littered desk still stood the pedlar's silver flask, together with the twin stained glasses.

Nicholas tried to think, but his brain was in a whirl. A ray of sunshine streaming through the window fell across the dusty room. Nicholas had never seen the sun, that he could recollect. Involuntarily he stretched his hands towards it, felt a pang of grief when it vanished, leaving only the grey light. He drew the rusty bolts, flung open the great door. A strange world lay before him, a new world of lights and shadows, that wooed him with their beauty—a world of low, soft voices that called to him. There came to him again that bitter sense of having been robbed.

"I could have been so happy all these years," murmured old Nicholas to himself. "It is just the little town I could have loved—so quaint, so quiet, so homelike. I might have had friends, old cronies, children of my own maybe—"

A vision of the sleeping Christina flashed

before his eyes. She had come to him a child, feeling only gratitude towards him. Had he had eyes with which to see her, all things might have been different.

Was it too late? He is not so old—not so very old. New life is in his veins. She still loves Jan, but that was the Jan of yesterday. In the future, Jan's every word and deed will be prompted by the evil soul that was once the soul of Nicholas Snyders—that Nicholas Snyders remembers well. Can any woman love that, let the case be as handsome as you will?

Ought he, as an honest man, to keep the soul he had won from Jan by what might be called a trick? Yes, it had been a fair bargain, and Jan had taken his price. Besides, it was not as if Jan had fashioned his own soul; these things are chance. Why should one man be given gold, and another be given parched peas? He has as much right to Jan's soul as Jan ever had. He is wiser, he can do more good with it. It was Jan's soul that loved Christina; let Jan's soul win her if it can. And Jan's soul, listening to the argument, could not think of a word to offer in opposition.

Christina was still asleep when Nicholas re-entered the kitchen. He lighted the fire and cooked the breakfast and then aroused her gently. There was no doubt it was Christina. The moment her eyes rested on old Nicholas, there came back to her the frightened rabbit look that had always irritated him. It irritated him now, but the irritation was against himself.

"You were sleeping so soundly when I came

in last night—" Christina commenced.

"And you were afraid to wake me," Nicholas interrupted her. "You thought the old curmudgeon would be cross. Listen, Christina. You paid off yesterday the last debt your father owed. It was to an old sailor—I had not been able to find him before. Not a cent more do you owe, and there remains to you, out of your wages, a hundred florins. It is yours whenever you like to ask me for it."

Christina could not understand, neither then nor during the days that followed; nor did Nicholas enlighten her. For the soul of Jan had entered into a very wise old man, who knew that the best way to live down the past is to live boldly the present. All that Christina could be sure of was that the old Nicholas Snyders had mysteriously vanished, that in his place remained a new Nicholas, who looked at her with kindly eyes—frank and honest, compelling confidence. Though Nicholas never said so, it came to Christina that she herself, her sweet example, her ennobling influence it was that had wrought this wondrous change. And to Christina the explanation seemed not impossible—seemed even pleasing.

The sight of his littered desk was hateful to him. Starting early in the morning, Nicholas would disappear for the entire day, returning in the evening tired but cheerful, bringing with him flowers that Christina laughed at, telling him they were weeds. But what mattered names? To Nicholas they were beautiful. In Zandam the children ran from him, the dogs barked after him. So Nicholas, escaping

through byways, would wander far into the country. Children in the villages around came to know a kind old fellow who loved to linger, his hands resting on his staff, watching their play, listening to their laughter; whose ample pockets were storehouses of good things. Their elders, passing by, would whisper to one another how like he was in features to wicked old Nick, the miser of Zandam, and would wonder where he came from. Nor was it only the faces of the children that taught his lips to smile. It troubled him at first to find the world so full of marvellously pretty girls—of pretty women also, all more or less lovable. It bewildered him. Until he found that, notwithstanding, Christina remained always in his thoughts the prettiest, the most lovable of them all. Then every pretty face rejoiced him: it reminded him of Christina.

On his return the second day, Christina had met him with sadness in her eyes. Farmer Beerstraater, an old friend of her father's, had called to see Nicholas; not finding Nicholas, had talked a little with Christina. A hard-hearted creditor was turning him out of his farm. Christina pretended not to know that the creditor was Nicholas himself, but marvelled that such wicked men could be. Nicholas said nothing, but the next day Farmer Beerstraater had called again, all smiles, blessings, and great wonder.

"But what can have come to him?" repeated Farmer Beerstraater over and over.

Christina had smiled and answered that perhaps the good God had touched his heart;

but thought to herself that perhaps it had been the good influence of another. The tale flew. Christina found herself besieged on every hand, and, finding her intercessions invariably successful, grew day by day more pleased with herself, and by consequence more pleased with Nicholas Snyders. For Nicholas was a cunning old gentleman. Jan's soul in him took delight in undoing the evil the soul of Nicholas had wrought. But the brain of Nicholas Snyders that remained to him whispered: "Let the little maid think it is all her doing."

The news reached the ears of Dame Toelast. The same evening saw her seated in the inglenook opposite Nicholas Snyders, who smoked and seemed bored.

"You are making a fool of yourself, Nicholas Snyders," the Dame told him. "Everybody is laughing at you."

"I had rather they laughed than cursed me," growled Nicholas.

"Have you forgotten all that has passed between us?" demanded the Dame.

"Wish I could," sighed Nicholas.

"At your age—" commenced the Dame.

"I am feeling younger than I ever felt in all my life," Nicholas interrupted her.

"You don't look it," commented the Dame.

"What do looks matter?" snapped Nicholas. "It is the soul of a man that is the real man."

"They count for something, as the world goes," explained the Dame. "Why, if I liked to follow your example and make a fool of myself, there are young men, fine young men, hand-

some young men—"

"Don't let me stand in your way," interposed Nicholas quickly. "As you say, I am old and I have a devil of a temper. There must be many better men than I am, men more worthy of you."

"I don't say there are not," returned the Dame: "but nobody more suitable. Girls for boys, and old women for old men. I haven't lost my wits, Nicholas Snyders, if you have. When you are yourself again—"

Nicholas Snyders sprang to his feet. "I am myself," he cried, "and intend to remain myself! Who dares say I am not myself?"

"I do," retorted the Dame with exasperating coolness. "Nicholas Snyders is not himself when at the bidding of a pretty-faced doll he flings his money out of the window with both hands. He is a creature bewitched, and I am sorry for him. She'll fool you for the sake of her friends till you haven't a cent left, and then she'll laugh at you. When you are yourself, Nicholas Snyders, you will be crazy with yourself—remember that." And Dame Toelast marched out and slammed the door behind her.

"Girls for boys, and old women for old men." The phrase kept ringing in his ears. Hitherto his new-found happiness had filled his life, leaving no room for thought. But the old Dame's words had sown the seed of reflection.

Was Christina fooling him? The thought was impossible. Never once had she pleaded for herself, never once for Jan. The evil

thought was the creature of Dame Toelast's evil mind. Christina loved him. Her face brightened at his coming. The fear of him had gone out of her; a pretty tyranny had replaced it. But was it the love that he sought? Jan's soul in old Nick's body was young and ardent. It desired Christina not as a daughter, but as a wife. Could it win her in spite of old Nick's body? The soul of Jan was an impatient soul. Better to know than to doubt.

"Do not light the candles; let us talk a little by the light of the fire only," said Nicholas. And Christina, smiling, drew her chair towards the blaze. But Nicholas sat in the shadow.

"You grow more beautiful every day, Christina," said Nicholas— "sweeter and more womanly. He will be a happy man who calls you wife."

The smile passed from Christina's face. "I shall never marry," she answered.

"Never is a long word, little one."

"A true woman does not marry the man she does not love."

"But may she not marry the man she does?" smiled Nicholas.

"Sometimes she may not," Christina explained.

"And when is that?"

Christina's face was turned away. "When he has ceased to love her."

The soul in old Nick's body leapt with joy. "He is not worthy of you, Christina. His new fortune has changed him. Is it not so? He

thinks only of money. It is as though the soul of a miser had entered into him. He would marry even Dame Toelast for the sake of her gold-bags and her broad lands and her many mills, if only she would have him. Cannot you forget him?"

"I shall never forget him. I shall never love another man. I try to hide it; and often I am content to find there is so much in the world that I can do. But my heart is breaking." She rose and, kneeling beside him, clasped her hands around him. "I am glad you have let me tell you," she said. "But for you I could not have borne it. You are so good to me."

For answer he stroked with his withered hand the golden hair that fell disordered about his withered knees. She raised her eyes to him; they were filled with tears, but smiling.

"I cannot understand," she said. "I think sometimes that you and he must have changed souls. He is hard and mean and cruel, as you used to be." She laughed, and the arms around him tightened for a moment. "And now you are kind and tender and great, as once he was. It is as if the good God had taken away my lover from me to give to me a father."

"Listen to me, Christina," he said. "It is the soul that is the man, not the body. Could you not love me for my new soul?"

"But I do love you," answered Christina, smiling through her tears.

"Could you as a husband?" The firelight fell upon her face. Nicholas, holding it between

his withered hands, looked into it long and hard; and reading what he read there, laid it back against his breast and soothed it with his withered hand.

"I was jesting, little one," he said. "Girls for boys, and old women for old men. And so, in spite of all, you still love Jan?"

"I love him," answered Christina. "I cannot help it."

"And if he would, you would marry him, let his soul be what it may?"

"I love him," answered Christina. "I cannot help it."

Old Nicholas sat alone before the dying fire. Is it the soul or the body that is the real man? The answer was not so simple as he had thought it.

"Christina loved Jan"—so Nicholas mumbled to the dying fire—"when he had the soul of Jan. She loves him still, though he has the soul of Nicholas Snyders. When I asked her if she could love me, it was terror I read in her eyes, though Jan's soul is now in me; she divined it. It must be the body that is the real Jan, the real Nicholas. If the soul of Christina entered into the body of Dame Toelast, should I turn from Christina, from her golden hair, her fathomless eyes, her asking lips, to desire the shrivelled carcass of Dame Toelast? No; I should still shudder at the thought of her. Yet when I had the soul of Nicholas Snyders, I did not loathe her, while Christina was naught to me. It must be with the soul that we love, else Jan would still love Christina and I should be Miser Nick. Yet here am

I loving Christina, using Nicholas Snyders' brain and gold to thwart Nicholas Snyders' every scheme, doing everything that I know will make him mad when he comes back into his own body; while Jan cares no longer for Christina, would marry Dame Toelast for her broad lands, her many mills. Clearly it is the soul that is the real man. Then ought I not to be glad, thinking I am going back into my own body, knowing that I shall wed Christina? But I am not glad; I am very miserable. I shall not go with Jan's soul, I feel it; my own soul will come back to me. I shall be again the hard, cruel, mean old man I was before, only now I shall be poor and helpless. The folks will laugh at me, and I shall curse them, powerless to do them evil. Even Dame Toelast will not want me when she learns all. And yet I must do this thing. So long as Jan's soul is in me, I love Christina better than myself. I must do this for her sake. I love her—I cannot help it."

Old Nicholas rose, took from the place, where a month before he had hidden it, the silver flask of cunning workmanship.

"Just two more glassfuls left," mused Nicholas, as he gently shook the flask against his ear. He laid it on the desk before him, then opened once again the old green ledger, for there still remained work to be done.

He woke Christina early. "Take these letters, Christina," he commanded. "When you have delivered them all, but not before, go to Jan; tell him I am waiting here to see him on a matter of business." He kissed her and

seemed loth to let her go.

"I shall only be a little while," smiled Christina.

"All partings take but a little while," he answered.

Old Nicholas had foreseen the trouble he would have. Jan was content, had no desire to be again a sentimental young fool, eager to saddle himself with a penniless wife. Jan had other dreams.

"Drink, man, drink!" cried Nicholas impatiently, "before I am tempted to change my mind. Christina, provided you marry her, is the richest bride in Zandam. There is the deed; read it; and read quickly."

Then Jan consented, and the two men drank. And there passed a breath between them as before; and Jan with his hands covered his eyes a moment.

It was a pity, perhaps, that he did so, for in that moment Nicholas snatched at the deed that lay beside Jan on the desk. The next instant it was blazing in the fire.

"Not so poor as you thought!" came the croaking voice of Nicholas. "Not so poor as you thought! I can build again, I can build again!" And the creature, laughing hideously, danced with its withered arms spread out before the blaze, lest Jan should seek to rescue Christina's burning dowry before it was destroyed.

Jan did not tell Christina. In spite of all Jan could say, she would go back. Nicholas Snyders drove her from the door with curses. She could not understand. The only thing

clear was that Jan had come back to her.

"'Twas a strange madness that seized upon me," Jan explained. "Let the good sea breezes bring us health."

So from the deck of Jan's ship they watched old Zandam till it vanished into air.

Christina cried a little at the thought of never seeing it again; but Jan comforted her and later new faces hid the old.

And old Nicholas married Dame Toelast, but, happily, lived to do evil only for a few years longer.

Long after, Jan told Christina the whole story, but it sounded very improbable, and Christina—though, of course, she did not say so—did not quite believe it, but thought Jan was trying to explain away that strange month of his life during which he had wooed Dame Toelast. Yet it certainly was strange that Nicholas, for the same short month, had been so different from his usual self.

"Perhaps," thought Christina, "if I had not told him I loved Jan, he would not have gone back to his old ways. Poor old gentleman! No doubt it was despair."

MRS. KORNER SINS HER MERCIES

"I do mean it," declared Mrs. Korner, "I like a man to be a man."

"But you would not like Christopher—I mean Mr. Korner—to be that sort of man," suggested her bosom friend.

"I don't mean that I should like it if he did it often. But I should like to feel that he was able to be that sort of man.—Have you told your master that breakfast is ready?" demanded Mrs. Korner of the domestic staff, entering at the moment with three boiled eggs and a teapot.

"Yus, I've told 'im," replied the staff indignantly.

The domestic staff at Acacia Villa, Ravenscourt Park, lived in a state of indignation. It could be heard of mornings and evenings saying its prayers indignantly.

"What did he say?"

"Said 'e'll be down the moment 'e's dressed."

"Nobody wants him to come before," commented Mrs. Korner. "Answered me that he was putting on his collar when I called up to him five minutes ago."

"Answer yer the same thing now, if yer called up to 'im agen, I 'spect," was the opinion of the staff. "Was on 'is 'ands and knees when I looked in, scooping round under the bed for 'is collar stud."

Mrs. Korner paused with the teapot in her hand. "Was he talking?"

"Talkin'? Nobody there to talk to; I adn't got no time to stop and chatter."

"I mean to himself," explained Mrs. Korner. "He—he wasn't swearing?" There was a note of eagerness, almost of hope, in Mrs. Korner's voice.

"Swearin'! 'E! Why, 'e don't know any."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Korner. "That will do, Harriet; you may go."

Mrs. Korner put down the teapot with a bang. "The very girl," said Mrs. Korner bitterly, "the very girl despises him."

"Perhaps," suggested Miss Greene, "he had been swearing and had finished."

But Mrs. Korner was not to be comforted. "Finished! Any other man would have been swearing all the time."

"Perhaps," suggested the kindly bosom friend, ever the one to plead the cause of the transgressor, "perhaps he was swearing, and she did not hear him. You see, if he had his head well underneath the bed—"

The door opened.

"Sorry I am late," said Mr. Korner, burst-

ing cheerfully into the room. It was a point with Mr. Korner always to be cheerful in the morning. "Greet the day with a smile and it will leave you with a blessing," was the motto Mrs. Korner, this day a married woman of six months and three weeks standing had heard her husband murmur before getting out of bed on precisely two hundred and two occasions. The Motto entered largely into the scheme of Mr. Korner's life. Written in fine copperplate upon cards all of the same size, a choice selection counselled him each morning from the rim of his shaving-glass.

"Did you find it?" asked Mrs. Korner.

"It is most extraordinary," replied Mr. Korner, as he seated himself at the breakfast-table. "I saw it go under the bed with my own eyes. Perhaps—"

"Don't ask me to look for it," interrupted Mrs. Korner. "Crawling about on their hands and knees, knocking their heads against iron bedsteads, would be enough to make some people swear." The emphasis was on the "some."

"It is not bad training for the character," hinted Mr. Korner, "occasionally to force oneself to perform patiently tasks calculated—"

"If you get tied up in one of those long sentences of yours, you will never get out in time to eat your breakfast," was the fear of Mrs. Korner.

"I should be sorry for anything to happen to it," remarked Mr. Korner, "its intrinsic value may perhaps—"

"I will look for it after breakfast," volun-

teered the amiable Miss Greene. "I am good at finding things."

"I can well believe it," the gallant Mr. Korner assured her, as with the handle of his spoon he peeled his egg. "From such bright eyes as yours, few—"

"You've only got ten minutes," his wife reminded him. "Do get on with your breakfast."

"I should like," said Mr. Korner, "to finish a speech occasionally."

"You never would," asserted Mrs. Korner.

"I should like to try," sighed Mr. Korner, "one of these days—"

"How did you sleep, dear? I forgot to ask you," questioned Mrs. Korner of the bosom friend.

"I am always restless in a strange bed the first night," explained Miss Greene. "I daresay, too, I was a little excited."

"I could have wished," said Mr. Korner, "it had been a better example of the delightful art of the dramatist. When one goes but seldom to the theatre—"

"One wants to enjoy oneself" interrupted Mrs. Korner.

"I really do not think," said the bosom friend, "that I have ever laughed so much in all my life."

"It was amusing. I laughed myself," admitted Mr. Korner. "At the same time I cannot help thinking that to treat drunkenness as a theme—"

"He wasn't drunk," argued Mrs. Korner, "he was just jovial."

"My dear!" Mr. Korner corrected her, "he simply couldn't stand."

"He was much more amusing than some people who can," retorted Mrs. Korner.

"It is possible, my dear Aimee," her husband pointed out to her, "for a man to be amusing without being drunk; also for a man to be drunk without—"

"Oh, a man is all the better," declared Mrs. Korner, "for letting himself go occasionally."

"My dear—"

"You, Christopher, would be all the better for letting yourself go—occasionally."

"I wish," said Mr. Korner, as he passed his empty cup, "you would not say things you do not mean. Anyone hearing you—"

"If there's one thing makes me more angry than another," said Mrs. Korner, "it is being told I say things that I do not mean."

"Why say them then?" suggested Mr. Korner.

"I don't. I do—I mean I do mean them," explained Mrs. Korner.

"You can hardly mean, my dear," persisted her husband, "that you really think I should be all the better for getting drunk—even occasionally."

"I didn't say drunk; I said 'going it.'"

"But I do 'go it' in moderation," pleaded Mr. Korner, "'Moderation in all things,' that is my motto."

"I know it," returned Mrs. Korner.

"A little of everything and nothing—" this time Mr. Korner interrupted himself. "I fear," said Mr. Korner, rising, "we must postpone the

further discussion of this interesting topic. If you would not mind stepping out with me into the passage, dear, there are one or two little matters connected with the house—"

Host and hostess squeezed past the visitor and closed the door behind them. The visitor continued eating.

"I do mean it," repeated Mrs. Korner, for the third time, reseating herself a minute later at the table. "I would give anything—anything," reiterated the lady recklessly, "to see Christopher more like the ordinary sort of man."

"But he has always been the sort—the sort of man he is," her bosom friend reminded her.

"Oh, during the engagement, of course, one expects a man to be perfect. I didn't think he was going to keep it up."

"He seems to me," said Miss Greene, "a dear, good fellow. You are one of those people who never know when they are well off."

"I know he is a good fellow," agreed Mrs. Korner, "and I am very fond of him. It is just because I am fond of him that I hate feeling ashamed of him. I want him to be a manly man, to do the things that other men do."

"Do all the ordinary sort of men swear and get occasionally drunk?"

"Of course they do," asserted Mrs. Korner, in a tone of authority. "One does not want a man to be a milksop."

"Have you ever seen a drunken man?" inquired the bosom friend, who was nibbling sugar.

"Heaps," replied Mrs. Korner, who was

sucking marmalade off her fingers.

By which Mrs. Korner meant that some half a dozen times in her life she had visited the play, choosing by preference the lighter form of British drama. The first time she witnessed the real thing, which happened just precisely a month later, long after the conversation here recorded had been forgotten by the parties most concerned, no one could have been more utterly astonished than was Mrs. Korner.

How it came about Mr. Korner was never able to fully satisfy himself. Mr. Korner was not the type that serves the purpose of the temperance lecturer. His "first glass" he had drunk more years ago than he could recollect, and since had tasted the varied contents of many others. But never before had Mr. Korner exceeded, nor been tempted to exceed, the limits of his favourite virtue, moderation.

"We had one bottle of claret between us," Mr. Korner would often recall to his mind, "of which he drank the greater part. And then he brought out the little green flask. He said it was made from pears—that in Peru they kept it specially for Children's parties. Of course, that may have been his joke; but in any case I cannot see how just one glass—I wonder could I have taken more than one glass while he was talking." It was a point that worried Mr. Korner.

The "he" who had talked, possibly, to such bad effect was a distant cousin of Mr. Korner's, one Bill Damon, chief mate of the steamship *La Fortuna*. Until their chance meeting that

afternoon in Leadenhall Street, they had not seen each other since they were boys together. The *Fortuna* was leaving St. Katherine's Docks early the next morning bound for South America, and it might be years before they met again. As Mr. Damon pointed out, Fate, by thus throwing them into each other's arms, clearly intended they should have a cosy dinner together that very evening in the captain's cabin of the *Fortuna*.

Mr. Korner, returning to the office, despatched to Ravenscourt Park an express letter, announcing the strange news that he might not be home that evening much before ten, and at half-past six, for the first time since his marriage, directed his steps away from home and Mrs. Korner.

The two friends talked of many things. And later on they spoke of sweethearts and of wives. Mate Damon's experiences had apparently been wide and varied. They talked—or, rather, the mate talked, and Mr. Korner listened—of the olive-tinted beauties of the Spanish Main, of the dark-eyed passionate creoles, of the blond Junos of the Californian valleys. The mate had theories concerning the care and management of women: theories that, if the mate's word could be relied upon, had stood the test of studied application. A new world opened out to Mr. Korner; a world where lovely women worshipped with doglike devotion men who, though loving them in return, knew how to be their masters. Mr. Korner, warmed gradually from cold disapproval to bubbling appreciation, sat en-

tranced. Time alone set a limit to the recital of the mate's adventures. At eleven o'clock the cook reminded them that the captain and the pilot might be aboard at any moment. Mr. Korner, surprised at the lateness of the hour, took a long and tender farewell of his cousin, and found St. Katherine's Docks one of the most bewildering places out of which he had ever tried to escape. Under a lamp-post in the Minories, it suddenly occurred to Mr. Korner that he was an unappreciated man. Mrs. Korner never said and did the sort of things by means of which the beauties of the Southern Main endeavoured feebly to express their consuming passion for gentlemen superior in no way—as far as he could see—to Mr. Korner himself. Thinking over the sort of things Mrs. Korner did say and did do, tears sprung into Mr. Korner's eyes. Noticing that a policeman was eyeing him with curiosity, he dashed them aside and hurried on. Pacing the platform of the Mansion House Station, where it is always draughty, the thought of his wrongs returned to him with renewed force. Why was there no trace of doglike devotion about Mrs. Korner? The fault—so he bitterly told himself—the fault was his. "A woman loves her master; it is her instinct," mused Mr. Korner to himself. "Damme," thought Mr. Korner, "I don't believe that half her time she knows I am her master."

"Go away," said Mr. Korner to a youth of pasty appearance who, with open mouth, had stopped immediately in front of him.

"I'm fond o' listening," explained the pasty

youth.

"Who's talking?" demanded Mr. Korner.

"You are," replied the pasty youth.

It is a long journey from the city to Ravenscourt Park, but the task of planning out the future life of Mrs. Korner and himself kept Mr. Korner wide awake and interested. When he got out of the train the thing chiefly troubling him was the three-quarters of a mile of muddy road stretching between him and his determination to make things clear to Mrs. Korner then and there.

The sight of Acacia Villa, suggesting that everybody was in bed and asleep, served to further irritate him. A dog-like wife would have been sitting up to see if there was anything he wanted. Mr. Korner, acting on the advice of his own brass plate, not only knocked but also rang. As the door did not immediately fly open, he continued to knock and ring. The window of the best bedroom on the first floor opened.

"Is that you?" said the voice of Mrs. Korner. There was, as it happened, a distinct suggestion of passion in Mrs. Korner's voice, but not of the passion Mr. Korner was wishful to inspire. It made him a little more angry than he was before.

"Don't you talk to me with your head out of the window as if this were a gallanty show. You come down and open the door," commanded Mr. Korner.

"Haven't you got your latchkey?" demanded Mrs. Korner.

For answer Mr. Korner attacked the door

again. The window closed. The next moment but six or seven, the door was opened with such suddenness that Mr. Korner, still gripping the knocker, was borne inward in a flying attitude. Mrs. Korner had descended the stairs ready with a few remarks. She had not anticipated that Mr. Korner, usually slow of speech, could be even readier.

"Where's my supper?" indignantly demanded Mr. Korner, still supported by the knocker.

Mrs. Korner, too astonished for words, simply stared.

"Where's my supper?" repeated Mr. Korner, by this time worked up into genuine astonishment that it was not ready for him. "What's everybody mean, going off to bed, when the masterororous hasn't had his supper?"

"Is anything the matter, dear?" was heard the voice of Miss Greene, speaking from the neighbourhood of the first landing.

"Come in, Christopher," pleaded Mrs. Korner, "please come in, and let me shut the door."

Mrs. Korner was the type of young lady fond of domineering with a not un-graceful hauteur over those accustomed to yield readily to her; it is a type that is easily frightened.

"I wan' grilled kinneys-on-toast," explained Mr. Korner, exchanging the knocker for the hat-stand, and wishing the next moment that he had not. "Don' let's 'avareytalk about it. Unnerstan'? I dowan' any talk about it."

"What on earth am I to do?" whispered the terrified Mrs. Korner to her bosom friend,

"there isn't a kidney in the house."

"I should poach him a couple of eggs," suggested the helpful bosom friend; "put plenty of Cayenne pepper on them. Very likely he won't remember."

Mr. Korner allowed himself to be persuaded into the dining-room, which was also the breakfast parlour and the library. The two ladies, joined by the hastily clad staff, whose chronic indignation seemed to have vanished in face of the first excuse for it that Acacia Villa had afforded her, made haste to light the kitchen fire.

"I should never have believed it," whispered the white-faced Mrs. Korner, "never."

"Makes yer know there's a man about the 'ouse, don't it?" chirped the delighted staff. Mrs. Korner, for answer, boxed the girl's ears; it relieved her feelings to a slight extent.

The staff retained its equanimity, but the operations of Mrs. Korner and her bosom friend were retarded rather than assisted by the voice of Mr. Korner, heard every quarter of a minute, roaring out fresh directions.

"I dare not go in alone," said Mrs. Korner, when all things were in order on the tray. So the bosom friend followed her, and the staff brought up the rear.

"What's this?" frowned Mr. Korner. "I told you chops."

"I'm so sorry, dear," faltered Mrs. Korner, "but there weren't any in the house."

"In a perfectly organizedouse, such as for the future I meanterave," continued Mr. Korner, helping himself to beer, "there should al-

ways be chopanteak. Unnerstanme? chopanteak!"

"I'll try and remember, dear," said Mrs. Korner.

"Pearsterme," said Mr. Korner, between mouthfuls, "you're norrer sort of housekeeper I want."

"I'll try to be, dear," pleaded Mrs. Korner.

"Where's your books?" Mr. Korner suddenly demanded.

"My books?" repeated Mrs. Korner, in astonishment.

Mr. Korner struck the corner of the table with his fist, which made most things in the room, including Mrs. Korner, jump.

"Don't you defy me, my girl," said Mr. Korner. "You know whatermean, your housekeepin' books."

They happened to be in the drawer of the chiffonier. Mrs. Korner produced them, and passed them to her husband with a trembling hand. Mr. Korner, opening one by hazard, bent over it with knitted brows.

"Pearsterme, my girl, you can't add," said Mr. Korner.

"I—I was always considered rather good at arithmetic, as a girl," stammered Mrs. Korner.

"What you mayabeen as a girl, and what—twenner-seven and nine?" fiercely questioned Mr. Korner.

"Thirty-eight—seven," commenced to blunder the terrified Mrs. Korner.

"Know your nine tables or don't you?" thundered Mr. Korner.

"I used to," sobbed Mrs. Korner.

"Say it," commanded Mr. Korner.

"Nine times one are nine," sobbed the poor little woman, "nine times two—"

"Goron," said Mr. Korner sternly.

She went on steadily, in a low monotone, broken by stifled sobs. The dreary rhythm of the repetition may possibly have assisted. As she mentioned fearfully that nine times eleven were ninety-nine, Miss Greene pointed stealthily toward the table. Mrs. Korner, glancing up fearfully, saw that the eyes of her lord and master were closed; heard the rising snore that issued from his head, resting between the empty beer-jug and the cruet stand.

"He will be all right," counselled Miss Greene. "You go to bed and lock yourself in. Harriet and I will see to his breakfast in the morning. It will be just as well for you to be out of the way."

And Mrs. Korner, only too thankful for some one to tell her what to do, obeyed in all things.

Toward seven o'clock the sunlight streaming into the room caused Mr. Korner first to blink, then yawn, then open half an eye.

"Greet the day with a smile," murmured Mr. Korner, sleepily, "and it will—"

Mr. Korner sat up suddenly and looked about him. This was not bed. The fragments of a jug and glass lay scattered round his feet. To the tablecloth an overturned cruet-stand mingled with egg gave colour. A tingling sensation about his head called for investigation. Mr. Korner was forced to the conclusion that somebody had been trying to make a salad of

him—somebody with an exceptionally heavy hand for mustard. A sound directed Mr. Korner's attention to the door.

The face of Miss Greene, portentously grave, was peeping through the jar.

Mr. Korner rose. Miss Greene entered stealthily, and, closing the door, stood with her back against it.

"I suppose you know what—what you've done?" suggested Miss Greene,

She spoke in a sepulchral tone; it chilled poor Mr. Korner to the bone.

"It is beginning to come back to me, but not—not very clearly," admitted Mr. Korner.

"You came home drunk—very drunk," Miss Greene informed him, "at two o'clock in the morning. The noise you made must have awakened half the street."

A groan escaped from his parched lips.

"You insisted upon Aimee cooking you a hot supper."

"I insisted!" Mr. Korner glanced down upon the table. "And—and she did it!"

"You were very violent," explained Miss Greene; "we were terrified at you, all three of us." Regarding the pathetic object in front of her, Miss Greene found it difficult to recollect that a few hours before she really had been frightened of it. Sense of duty alone restrained her present inclination to laugh.

"While you sat there, eating your supper," continued Miss Greene remorselessly, "you made her bring you her books."

Mr. Korner had passed the stage when anything could astonish him.

"You lectured her about her housekeeping." There was a twinkle in the eye of Mrs. Korner's bosom friend. But lightning could have flashed before Mr. Korner's eyes without his noticing it just then.

"You told her that she could not add, and you made her say her tables."

"I made her—" Mr. Korner spoke in the emotionless tones of one merely desiring information. "I made Aimee say her tables?"

"Her nine times," nodded Miss Greene.

Mr. Korner sat down upon his chair and stared with stony eyes into the future.

"What's to be done?" said Mr. Korner, "she'll never forgive me; I know her. You are not chaffing me?" he cried with a momentary gleam of hope. "I really did it?"

"You sat in that very chair where you are sitting now and ate poached eggs, while she stood opposite to you and said her nine times table. At the end of it, seeing you had gone to sleep yourself, I persuaded her to go to bed. It was three o'clock, and we thought you would not mind." Miss Greene drew up a chair, and, with her elbows on the table, looked across at Mr. Korner. Decidedly there was a twinkle in the eyes of Mrs. Korner's bosom friend.

"You'll never do it again," suggested Miss Greene.

"Do you think it possible," cried Mr. Korner, "that she may forgive me?"

"No, I don't," replied Miss Greene. At which Mr. Korner's face fell back to zero. "I think the best way out will be for you to forgive her."

The idea did not even amuse him. Miss Greene glanced round to satisfy herself that the door was still closed, and listened a moment to assure herself of the silence.

"Don't you remember," Miss Greene took the extra precaution to whisper it, "the talk we had at breakfast-time the first morning of my visit, when Aimee said you would be all the better for 'going it' occasionally?"

Yes, slowly it came back to Mr. Korner. But she only said "going it," Mr. Korner recollected to his dismay.

"Well, you've been 'going it,'" persisted Miss Greene. "Besides, she did not mean 'going it.' She meant the real thing, only she did not like to say the word. We talked about it after you had gone. She said she would give anything to see you more like the ordinary man. And that is her idea of the ordinary man."

Mr. Korner's sluggishness of comprehension irritated Miss Greene. She leaned across the table and shook him. "Don't you understand? You have done it on purpose to teach her a lesson. It is she who has got to ask you to forgive her."

"You think—?"

"I think, if you manage it properly, it will be the best day's work you have ever done. Get out of the house before she wakes. I shall say nothing to her. Indeed, I shall not have the time; I must catch the ten o'clock from Paddington. When you come home this evening, you talk first; that's what you've got to do." And Mr. Korner, in his excitement, kissed the bosom friend before he knew what

he had done.

Mrs. Korner sat waiting for her husband that evening in the drawing-room. She was dressed as for a journey, and about the corners of her mouth were lines familiar to Christopher, the sight of which sent his heart into his boots. Fortunately, he recovered himself in time to greet her with a smile. It was not the smile he had been rehearsing half the day, but that it was a smile of any sort astonished the words away from Mrs. Korner's lips, and gave him the inestimable advantage of first speech.

"Well," said Mr. Korner cheerily, "and how did you like it?"

For the moment Mrs. Korner feared her husband's new complaint had already reached the chronic stage, but his still smiling face reassured her—to that extent at all events.

"When would you like me to 'go it' again? Oh, come," continued Mr. Korner in response to his wife's bewilderment, "you surely have not forgotten the talk we had at breakfast-time—the first morning of Mildred's visit. You hinted how much more attractive I should be for occasionally 'letting myself go!'"

Mr. Korner, watching intently, perceived that upon Mrs. Korner recollection was slowly forcing itself.

"I was unable to oblige you before," explained Mr. Korner, "having to keep my head clear for business, and not knowing what the effect upon one might be. Yesterday I did my best, and I hope you are pleased with me. Though, if you could see your way to being content—just for the present and until I get

more used to it—with a similar performance not oftener than once a fortnight, say, I should be grateful," added Mr. Korner.

"You mean—" said Mrs. Korner, rising.

"I mean, my dear," said Mr. Korner, "that almost from the day of our marriage you have made it clear that you regard me as a milksop. You have got your notion of men from silly books and sillier plays, and your trouble is that I am not like them. Well, I've shown you that, if you insist upon it, I can be like them."

"But you weren't," argued Mrs. Korner, "not a bit like them."

"I did my best," repeated Mr. Korner; "we are not all made alike. That was *my* drunk."

"I didn't say 'drunk.'"

"But you meant it," interrupted Mr. Korner. "We were talking about drunken men. The man in the play was drunk. You thought him amusing."

"He was amusing," persisted Mrs. Korner, now in tears. "I meant that sort of drunk."

"His wife," Mr. Korner reminded her, "didn't find him amusing. In the third act she was threatening to return home to her mother, which, if I may judge from finding you here with all your clothes on, is also the idea that has occurred to you."

"But you—you were so awful," whimpered Mrs. Korner.

"What did I do?" questioned Mr. Korner.

"You came hammering at the door—"

"Yes, yes, I remember that. I wanted my supper, and you poached me a couple of eggs.

What happened after that?"

The recollection of that crowning indignity lent to her voice the true note of tragedy.

"You made me say my tables—my nine times!"

Mr. Korner looked at Mrs. Korner, and Mrs. Korner looked at Mr. Korner, and for a while there was silence.

"Were you—were you really a little bit on," faltered Mrs. Korner, "or only pretending?"

"Really," confessed Mr. Korner. "For the first time in my life. If you are content, for the last time also."

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Korner, "I have been very silly. Please forgive me."

THE COST OF KINDNESS

"Kindness," argued little Mrs. Pennycoop, "costs nothing."

"And, speaking generally, my dear, is valued precisely at cost price," retorted Mr. Pennycoop, who, as an auctioneer of twenty years' experience, had enjoyed much opportunity of testing the attitude of the public towards sentiment.

"I don't care what you say, George," persisted his wife; "he may be a disagreeable, cantankerous old brute—I don't say he isn't. All the same, the man is going away, and we may never see him again."

"If I thought there was any fear of our doing so," observed Mr. Pennycoop, "I'd turn my back on the Church of England to-morrow and become a Methodist."

"Don't talk like that, George," his wife admonished him, reprovingly; "the Lord might be listening to you."

"If the Lord had to listen to old Cracklethorpe He'd sympathize with me," was the opinion of Mr. Pennycoop.

"The Lord sends us our trials, and they are meant for our good," explained his wife. "They are meant to teach us patience."

"You are not churchwarden," retorted her husband; "you can get away from him. You hear him when he is in the pulpit, where, to a certain extent, he is bound to keep his temper."

"You forget the rummage sale, George," Mrs. Pennycoop reminded him; "to say nothing of the church decorations."

"The rummage sale," Mr. Pennycoop pointed out to her, "occurs only once a year, and at that time your own temper, I have noticed—"

"I always try to remember I am a Christian," interrupted little Mrs. Pennycoop. "I do not pretend to be a saint, but whatever I say I am always sorry for it afterwards—you know I am, George."

"It's what I am saying," explained her husband. "A vicar who has contrived in three years to make every member of his congregation hate the very sight of a church—well, there's something wrong about it somewhere."

Mrs. Pennycoop, gentlest of little women, laid her plump and still pretty hands upon her husband's shoulders. "Don't think, dear, I haven't sympathized with you. You have borne it nobly. I have marvelled sometimes that you have been able to control yourself as you have done, most times; the things that he has said to you."

Mr. Pennycoop had slid unconsciously into an attitude suggestive of petrified virtue,

lately discovered.

"One's own poor self," observed Mr. Pennycoop, in accents of proud humility—"insults that are merely personal one can put up with. Though even there," added the senior churchwarden, with momentary descent towards the plane of human nature, "nobody cares to have it hinted publicly across the vestry table that one has chosen to collect from the left side for the express purpose of artfully passing over one's own family."

"The children have always had their threepenny-bits ready waiting in their hands," explained Mrs. Pennycoop, indignantly.

"It's the sort of thing he says merely for the sake of making a disturbance," continued the senior churchwarden. "It's the things he does I draw the line at."

"The things he has done, you mean, dear," laughed the little woman, with the accent on the "has." "It is all over now, and we are going to be rid of him. I expect, dear, if we only knew, we should find it was his liver. You know, George, I remarked to you the first day that he came how pasty he looked and what a singularly unpleasant mouth he had. People can't help these things, you know, dear. One should look upon them in the light of afflictions and be sorry for them."

"I could forgive him doing what he does if he didn't seem to enjoy it," said the senior churchwarden. "But, as you say, dear, he is going, and all I hope and pray is that we never see his like again."

"And you'll come with me to call upon

him, George," urged kind little Mrs. Pennycoop. "After all, he has been our vicar for three years, and he must be feeling it, poor man—whatever he may pretend—going away like this, knowing that everybody is glad to see the back of him."

"Well, I sha'n't say anything I don't really feel," stipulated Mr. Pennycoop.

"That will be all right, dear," laughed his wife, "so long as you don't say what you do feel. And we'll both of us keep our temper," further suggested the little woman, "whatever happens. Remember, it will be for the last time."

Little Mrs. Pennycoop's intention was kind and Christianlike. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe would be quitting Wychwood-on-the-Heath the following Monday, never to set foot—so the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe himself and every single member of his congregation hoped sincerely—in the neighbourhood again. Hitherto no pains had been taken on either side to disguise the mutual joy with which the parting was looked forward to. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, M.A., might possibly have been of service to his Church in, say, some East-end parish of unsavoury reputation, some mission station far advanced amid the hordes of heathendom. There his inborn instinct of antagonism to everybody and everything surrounding him, his unconquerable disregard for other people's views and feelings, his inspired conviction that everybody but himself was bound to be always wrong about everything, com-

bined with determination to act and speak fearlessly in such belief, might have found their uses. In picturesque little Wychwood-on-the-Heath, among the Kentish hills, retreat beloved of the retired tradesman, the spinster of moderate means, the reformed Bohemian developing latent instincts towards respectability, these qualities made only for scandal and disunion.

For the past two years the Rev. Cracklethorpe's parishioners, assisted by such other of the inhabitants of Wychwood-on-the-Heath as had happened to come into personal contact with the reverend gentleman, had sought to impress upon him, by hints and innuendoes difficult to misunderstand, their cordial and daily-increasing dislike of him, both as a parson and a man. Matters had come to a head by the determination officially announced to him that, failing other alternatives, a deputation of his leading parishioners would wait upon his bishop. This it was that had brought it home to the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe that, as the spiritual guide and comforter of Wychwood-on-the Heath, he had proved a failure. The Rev. Augustus had sought and secured the care of other souls. The following Sunday morning he had arranged to preach his farewell sermon, and the occasion promised to be a success from every point of view. Churchgoers who had not visited St. Jude's for months had promised themselves the luxury of feeling they were listening to the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe for the last time. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe had pre-

pared a sermon that for plain speaking and directness was likely to leave an impression. The parishioners of St. Jude's, Wychwood-on-the-Heath, had their failings, as we all have. The Rev. Augustus flattered himself that he had not missed out a single one, and was looking forward with pleasurable anticipation to the sensation that his remarks, from his "firstly" to his "sixthly and lastly," were likely to create.

What marred the entire business was the impulsiveness of little Mrs. Pennycoop. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, informed in his study on the Wednesday afternoon that Mr. and Mrs. Pennycoop had called, entered the drawing-room a quarter of an hour later, cold and severe; and, without offering to shake hands, requested to be informed as shortly as possible for what purpose he had been disturbed. Mrs. Pennycoop had had her speech ready to her tongue. It was just what it should have been, and no more.

It referred casually, without insisting on the point, to the duty incumbent upon all of us to remember on occasion we were Christians; that our privilege it was to forgive and forget; that, generally speaking, there are faults on both sides; that partings should never take place in anger; in short, that little Mrs. Pennycoop and George, her husband, as he was waiting to say for himself, were sorry for everything and anything they may have said or done in the past to hurt the feelings of the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, and would like to shake hands with him and wish him every

happiness for the future. The chilling attitude of the Rev. Augustus scattered that carefully-rehearsed speech to the winds. It left Mrs. Pennycoop nothing but to retire in choking silence, or to fling herself upon the inspiration of the moment and make up something new. She choose the latter alternative.

At first the words came halting. Her husband, man-like, had deserted her in her hour of utmost need and was fumbling with the door-knob. The steely stare with which the Rev. Cracklethorpe regarded her, instead of chilling her, acted upon her as a spur. It put her on her mettle. He should listen to her. She would make him understand her kindly feeling towards him if she had to take him by the shoulders and shake it into him. At the end of five minutes the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, without knowing it, was looking pleased. At the end of another five Mrs. Pennycoop stopped, not for want of words, but for want of breath. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe replied in a voice that, to his own surprise, was trembling with emotion. Mrs. Pennycoop had made his task harder for him. He had thought to leave Wychwood-on-the-Heath without a regret. The knowledge he now possessed, that at all events one member of his congregation understood him, as Mrs. Pennycoop had proved to him she understood him, sympathized with him—the knowledge that at least one heart, and that heart Mrs. Pennycoop's, had warmed to him, would transform what he had looked forward to as a blessed relief into a lasting grief.

Mr. Pennycoop, carried away by his wife's eloquence, added a few halting words of his own. It appeared from Mr. Pennycoop's remarks that he had always regarded the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe as the vicar of his dreams, but misunderstandings in some unaccountable way will arise. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, it appeared, had always secretly respected Mr. Pennycoop. If at any time his spoken words might have conveyed the contrary impression, that must have arisen from the poverty of our language, which does not lend itself to subtle meanings.

Then following the suggestion of tea, Miss Cracklethorpe, sister to the Rev. Augustus—a lady whose likeness to her brother in all respects was startling, the only difference between them being that while he was clean-shaven she wore a slight moustache—was called down to grace the board. The visit was ended by Mrs. Pennycoop's remembrance that it was Wilhelmina's night for a hot bath.

"I said more than I intended to," admitted Mrs. Pennycoop to George, her husband, on the way home; "but he irritated me."

Rumour of the Pennycoops' visit flew through the parish. Other ladies felt it their duty to show to Mrs. Pennycoop that she was not the only Christian in Wychwood-on-the-Heath. Mrs. Pennycoop, it was feared, might be getting a swelled head over this matter. The Rev. Augustus, with pardonable pride, repeated some of the things that Mrs. Pennycoop had said to him. Mrs. Pennycoop was not to imagine herself the only person in

Wychwood-on-the-Heath capable of generosity that cost nothing. Other ladies could say graceful nothings—could say them even better. Husbands dressed in their best clothes and carefully rehearsed were brought in to grace the almost endless procession of disconsolate parishioners hammering at the door of St. Jude's parsonage. Between Thursday morning and Saturday night the Rev. Augustus, much to his own astonishment, had been forced to the conclusion that five-sixths of his parishioners had loved him from the first without hitherto having had opportunity of expressing their real feelings.

The eventful Sunday arrived. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe had been kept so busy listening to regrets at his departure, assurances of an esteem hitherto disguised from him, explanations of seeming discourtesies that had been intended as tokens of affectionate regard, that no time had been left to him to think of other matters. Not till he entered the vestry at five minutes to eleven did recollection of his farewell sermon come to him. It haunted him throughout the service. To deliver it after the revelations of the last three days would be impossible. It was the sermon that Moses might have preached to Pharaoh the Sunday prior to the exodus. To crush with it this congregation of broken-hearted adorers sorrowing for his departure would be inhuman. The Rev. Augustus tried to think of passages that might be selected, altered. There were none. From beginning to end it contained not a single sentence capable of be-

ing made to sound pleasant by any ingenuity whatsoever.

The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe climbed slowly up the pulpit steps without an idea in his head of what he was going to say. The sunlight fell upon the upturned faces of a crowd that filled every corner of the church. So happy, so buoyant a congregation the eyes of the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe had never till that day looked down upon. The feeling came to him that he did not want to leave them. That they did not wish him to go, could he doubt? Only by regarding them as a collection of the most shameless hypocrites ever gathered together under one roof. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe dismissed the passing suspicion as a suggestion of the Evil One, folded the neatly-written manuscript that lay before him on the desk, and put it aside. He had no need of a farewell sermon. The arrangements made could easily be altered. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe spoke from his pulpit for the first time an impromptu.

The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe wished to acknowledge himself in the wrong. Foolishly founding his judgment upon the evidence of a few men, whose names there would be no need to mention, members of the congregation who, he hoped, would one day be sorry for the misunderstandings they had caused, brethren whom it was his duty to forgive, he had assumed the parishioners of St. Jude's, Wychwood-on-the-Heath, to have taken a personal dislike to him. He wished to publicly apologize for the injustice he had unwittingly

done to their heads and to their hearts. He now had it from their own lips that a libel had been put upon them. So far from their wishing his departure, it was self-evident that his going would inflict upon them a great sorrow. With the knowledge he now possessed of the respect—one might almost say the veneration—with which the majority of that congregation regarded him—knowledge, he admitted, acquired somewhat late—it was clear to him he could still be of help to them in their spiritual need. To leave a flock so devoted would stamp him as an unworthy shepherd. The ceaseless stream of regrets at his departure that had been poured into his ear during the last four days he had decided at the last moment to pay heed to. He would remain with them—on one condition.

There quivered across the sea of humanity below him a movement that might have suggested to a more observant watcher the convulsive clutchings of some drowning man at some chance straw. But the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe was thinking of himself.

The parish was large and he was no longer a young man. Let them provide him with a conscientious and energetic curate. He had such a one in his mind's eye, a near relation of his own, who, for a small stipend that was hardly worth mentioning, would, he knew it for a fact, accept the post. The pulpit was not the place in which to discuss these matters, but in the vestry afterwards he would be pleased to meet such members of the congregation as might choose to stay.

The question agitating the majority of the congregation during the singing of the hymn was the time it would take them to get outside the church. There still remained a faint hope that the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, not obtaining his curate, might consider it due to his own dignity to shake from his feet the dust of a parish generous in sentiment, but obstinately close-fisted when it came to putting its hands into its pockets.

But for the parishioners of St. Jude's that Sunday was a day of misfortune. Before there could be any thought of moving, the Rev. Augustus raised his surpliced arm and begged leave to acquaint them with the contents of a short note that had just been handed up to him. It would send them all home, he felt sure, with joy and thankfulness in their hearts. An example of Christian benevolence was among them that did honour to the Church.

Here a retired wholesale clothier from the East-end of London—a short, tubby gentleman who had recently taken the Manor House—was observed to turn scarlet.

A gentleman hitherto unknown to them had signalled his advent among them by an act of munificence that should prove a shining example to all rich men. Mr. Horatio Copper—the reverend gentleman found some difficulty, apparently, in deciphering the name.

"Cooper-Smith, sir, with an hyphen," came in a thin whisper, the voice of the still scarlet-faced clothier.

Mr. Horatio Cooper-Smith, taking—the Rev. Augustus felt confident—a not unworthy means of grappling to himself thus early the hearts of his fellow-townsmen, had expressed his desire to pay for the expense of a curate entirely out of his own pocket. Under these circumstances, there would be no further talk of a farewell between the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe and his parishioners. It would be the hope of the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe to live and die the pastor of St. Jude's.

A more solemn-looking, sober congregation than the congregation that emerged that Sunday morning from St. Jude's in Wychwood-on-the-Heath had never, perhaps, passed out of a church door.

"He'll have more time upon his hands," said Mr. Biles, retired wholesale ironmonger and junior churchwarden, to Mrs. Biles, turning the corner of Acacia Avenue—"he'll have more time to make himself a curse and a stumbling-block."

"And if this 'near relation' of his is anything like him—"

"Which you may depend upon it is the case, or he'd never have thought of him," was the opinion of Mr. Biles.

"I shall give that Mrs. Pennycoop," said Mrs. Biles, "a piece of my mind when I meet her."

But of what use was that?

THE LOVE OF ULRICH NEBENDAHL

Perhaps of all, it troubled most the Herr Pfarrer. Was he not the father of the village? And as such did it not fall to him to see his children marry well and suitably? marry in any case. It was the duty of every worthy citizen to keep alive throughout the ages the sacred hearth fire, to rear up sturdy lads and honest lassies that would serve God, and the Fatherland. A true son of Saxon soil was the Herr Pastor Winckelmann—kindly, simple, sentimental.

"Why, at your age, Ulrich—at your age," repeated the Herr Pastor, setting down his beer and wiping with the back of his hand his large uneven lips, "I was the father of a family—two boys and a girl. You never saw her, Ulrich; so sweet, so good. We called her Maria." The Herr Pfarrer sighed and hid his broad red face behind the raised cover of his pewter pot.

"They must be good fun in a house, the little ones," commented Ulrich, gazing upward with his dreamy eyes at the wreath of smoke

ascending from his long-stemmed pipe. "The little ones, always my heart goes out to them."

"Take to yourself a wife," urged the Herr Pfarrer. "It is your duty. The good God has given to you ample means. It is not right that you should lead this lonely life. Bachelors make old maids; things of no use."

"That is so," Ulrich agreed. "I have often said the same unto myself. It would be pleasant to feel one was not working merely for oneself."

"Elsa, now," went on the Herr Pfarrer, "she is a good child, pious and economical. The price of such is above rubies."

Ulrich's face lightened with a pleasant smile. "Aye, Elsa is a good girl," he answered. "Her little hands—have you ever noticed them, Herr Pastor—so soft and dimpled."

The Pfarrer pushed aside his empty pot and leaned his elbows on the table.

"I think—I do not think—she would say no. Her mother, I have reason to believe— Let me sound them—discreetly." The old pastor's red face glowed redder, yet with pleasurable anticipation; he was a born matchmaker.

But Ulrich the wheelwright shuffled in his chair uneasily.

"A little longer," he pleaded. "Let me think it over. A man should not marry without first being sure he loves. Things might happen. It would not be fair to the maiden."

The Herr Pfarrer stretched his hand across the table and laid it upon Ulrich's arm.

"It is Hedwig; twice you walked home with

her last week."

"It is a lonesome way for a timid maiden; and there is the stream to cross," explained the wheelwright.

For a moment the Herr Pastor's face had clouded, but now it cleared again.

"Well, well, why not? Elsa would have been better in some respects, but Hedwig—ah, yes, she, too, is a good girl; a little wild perhaps—it will wear off. Have you spoken with her?"

"Not yet."

"But you will?"

Again there fell that troubled look into those dreamy eyes. This time it was Ulrich who, laying aside his pipe, rested his great arms upon the wooden table.

"Now, how does a man know when he is in love?" asked Ulrich of the Pastor who, having been married twice, should surely be experienced upon the point. "How should he be sure that it is this woman and no other to whom his heart has gone out?"

A commonplace-looking man was the Herr Pastor, short and fat and bald. But there had been other days, and these had left to him a voice that still was young; and the evening twilight screening the seared face, Ulrich heard but the pastor's voice, which was the voice of a boy.

"She will be dearer to you than yourself. Thinking of her, all else will be as nothing. For her you would lay down your life."

They sat in silence for a while; for the fat little Herr Pfarrer was dreaming of the past; and long, lanky Ulrich Nebendahl, the wheel-

wright, of the future.

That evening, as chance would have it, Ulrich returning to his homestead—a rambling mill beside the river, where he dwelt alone with ancient Anna—met Elsa of the dimpled hands upon the bridge that spans the murmuring Muhlde, and talked a while with her, and said good-night.

How sweet it had been to watch her ox-like eyes shyly seeking his, to press her dimpled hand and feel his own great strength. Surely he loved her better than he did himself. There could be no doubt of it. He pictured her in trouble, in danger from the savage soldiery that came and went like evil shadows through these pleasant Saxon valleys, leaving death and misery behind them: burnt homesteads; wild-eyed women, hiding their faces from the light. Would he not for her sake give his life?

So it was made clear to him that little Elsa was his love.

Until next morning, when, raising his eyes from the whirling saw, there stood before him Margot, laughing. Margot, mischief-loving, wayward, that would ever be to him the baby he had played with, nursed, and comforted. Margot weary! Had he not a thousand times carried her sleeping in his arms. Margot in danger! At the mere thought his face flushed an angry scarlet.

All that afternoon Ulrich communed with himself, tried to understand himself, and could not. For Elsa and Margot and Hedwig were not the only ones by a long way. What girl in the village did he not love, if it came

to that: Liesel, who worked so hard and lived so poorly, bullied by her cross-grained granddam. Susanna, plain and a little crotchety, who had never had a sweetheart to coax the thin lips into smiles. The little ones—for so they seemed to long, lanky Ulrich, with their pleasant ways—Ulrich smiled as he thought of them—how should a man love one more than another?

The Herr Pfarrer shook his head and sighed.

"That is not love. *Gott in Himmel*! think what it would lead to? The good God never would have arranged things so. You love one; she is the only woman in the world for you."

"But you, yourself, Herr Pastor, you have twice been married," suggested the puzzled wheelwright.

"But one at a time, Ulrich—one at a time. That is a very different thing."

Why should it not come to him, alone among men? Surely it was a beautiful thing, this love; a thing worthy of a man, without which a man was but a useless devourer of food, cumbering the earth.

So Ulrich pondered, pausing from his work one drowsy summer's afternoon, listening to the low song of the waters. How well he knew the winding Muhlde's merry voice. He had worked beside it, played beside it all his life. Often he would sit and talk to it as to an old friend, reading answers in its changing tones.

Trudchen, seeing him idle, pushed her cold nose into his hand. Trudchen just now was

feeling clever and important. Was she not the mother of the five most wonderful puppies in all Saxony? They swarmed about his legs, pressing him with their little foolish heads. Ulrich stooped and picked up one in each big hand. But this causing jealousy and heart-burning, laughing, he lay down upon a log. Then the whole five stormed over him, biting his hair, trampling with their clumsy paws upon his face; till suddenly they raced off in a body to attack a floating feather. Ulrich sat up and watched them, the little rogues, the little foolish, helpless things, that called for so much care. A mother thrush twittered above his head. Ulrich rose and creeping on tiptoe, peeped into the nest. But the mother bird, casting one glance towards him, went on with her work. Whoever was afraid of Ulrich the wheelwright! The tiny murmuring insects buzzed to and fro about his feet. An old man, passing to his evening rest, gave him "good-day." A zephyr whispered something to the leaves, at which they laughed, then passed upon his way. Here and there a shadow crept out from its hiding-place.

"If only I could marry the whole village!" laughed Ulrich to himself.

But that, of course, is nonsense!

The spring that followed let loose the dogs of war again upon the blood-stained land, for now all Germany, taught late by common suffering forgetfulness of local rivalries, was rushing together in a mighty wave that would sweep French feet for ever from their hold on German soil. Ulrich, for whom the love of

woman seemed not, would at least be the lover of his country. He, too, would march among those brave stern hearts that, stealing like a thousand rivulets from every German valley, were flowing north and west to join the Prussian eagles.

But even love of country seemed denied to Ulrich of the dreamy eyes. His wheelwright's business had called him to a town far off. He had been walking all the day. Towards evening, passing the outskirts of a wood, a feeble cry for help, sounding from the shadows, fell upon his ear. Ulrich paused, and again from the sombre wood crept that weary cry of pain. Ulrich ran and came at last to where, among the wild flowers and the grass, lay prone five human figures. Two of them were of the German Landwehr, the other three Frenchmen in the hated uniform of Napoleon's famous scouts. It had been some unimportant "affair of outposts," one of those common incidents of warfare that are never recorded—never remembered save here and there by some sad face unnoticed in the crowd. Four of the men were dead; one, a Frenchman was still alive, though bleeding copiously from a deep wound in the chest that with a handful of dank grass he was trying to staunch.

Ulrich raised him in his arms. The man spoke no German, and Ulrich knew but his mother tongue; but when the man, turning towards the neighbouring village with a look of terror in his half-glazed eyes, pleaded with his hands, Ulrich understood, and lifting him gently carried him further into the wood.

He found a small deserted shelter that had been made by charcoal-burners, and there on a bed of grass and leaves Ulrich laid him; and there for a week all but a day Ulrich tended him and nursed him back to life, coming and going stealthily like a thief in the darkness. Then Ulrich, who had thought his one desire in life to be to kill all Frenchmen, put food and drink into the Frenchman's knapsack and guided him half through the night and took his hand; and so they parted.

Ulrich did not return to Alt Waldnitz, that lies hidden in the forest beside the murmuring Muhlde. They would think he had gone to the war; he would let them think so. He was too great a coward to go back to them and tell them that he no longer wanted to fight; that the sound of the drum brought to him only the thought of trampled grass where dead men lay with curses in their eyes.

So, with head bowed down in shame, to and fro about the moaning land, Ulrich of the dreamy eyes came and went, guiding his solitary footsteps by the sounds of sorrow, driving away the things of evil where they crawled among the wounded, making his way swiftly to the side of pain, heedless of the uniform.

Thus one day he found himself by chance near again to forest-girdled Waldnitz. He would push his way across the hills, wander through its quiet ways in the moonlight while the good folks all lay sleeping. His footsteps quickened as he drew nearer. Where the trees broke he would be able to look down upon it, see every roof he knew so well—the

church, the mill, the winding Muhlde—the green, worn grey with dancing feet, where, when the hateful war was over, would be heard again the Saxon folk-songs.

Another was there, where the forest halts on the brow of the hill—a figure kneeling on the ground with his face towards the village. Ulrich stole closer. It was the Herr Pfarrer, praying volubly but inaudibly. He scrambled to his feet as Ulrich touched him, and his first astonishment over, poured forth his tale of woe.

There had been trouble since Ulrich's departure. A French corps of observation had been camped upon the hill, and twice within the month had a French soldier been found murdered in the woods. Heavy had been the penalties exacted from the village, and terrible had been the Colonel's threats of vengeance. Now, for a third time, a soldier stabbed in the back had been borne into camp by his raging comrades, and this very afternoon the Colonel had sworn that if the murderer were not handed over to him within an hour from dawn, when the camp was to break up, he would before marching burn the village to the ground. The Herr Pfarrer was on his way back from the camp where he had been to plead for mercy, but it had been in vain.

"Such are foul deeds!" said Ulrich.

"The people are mad with hatred of the French," answered the Herr Pastor. "It may be one, it may be a dozen who have taken vengeance into their own hands. May God forgive them."

"They will not come forward—not to save the village?"

"Can you expect it of them! There is no hope for us; the village will burn as a hundred others have burned."

Aye, that was true; Ulrich had seen their blackened ruins; the old sitting with white faces among the wreckage of their homes, the little children wailing round their knees, the tiny broods burned in their nests. He had picked their corpses from beneath the charred trunks of the dead elms.

The Herr Pfarrer had gone forward on his melancholy mission to prepare the people for their doom.

Ulrich stood alone, looking down upon Alt Waldnitz bathed in moonlight. And there came to him the words of the old pastor: "She will be dearer to you than yourself. For her you would lay down your life." And Ulrich knew that his love was the village of Alt Waldnitz, where dwelt his people, the old and wrinkled, the laughing "little ones," where dwelt the helpless dumb things with their deep pathetic eyes, where the bees hummed drowsily, and the thousand tiny creatures of the day.

They hanged him high upon a withered elm, with his face towards Alt Waldnitz, that all the village, old and young, might see; and then to the beat of drum and scream of fife they marched away; and forest-hidden Waldnitz gathered up once more its many threads of quiet life and wove them into homely pattern.

They talked and argued many a time, and some there were who praised and some who blamed. But the Herr Pfarrer could not understand.

Until years later a dying man unburdened his soul so that the truth became known.

Then they raised Ulrich's coffin reverently, and the young men carried it into the village and laid it in the churchyard that it might always be among them. They reared above him what in their eyes was a grand monument, and carved upon it:

"GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS."