

ale, old ale, one for me, for once his lord and my own master, and one for him to drink my health in, and the health of William Congreve, who doubtless drank here many years ago, when green fields spread between here and Westminster, and this was a little inn, a naughty little inn, where gay young men brought gay young women to talk private business in the country. I saw them sitting in twos outside the tavern with a bottle of wine before them on a trestle-board, and a pair of glasses, or perhaps one between them, graven with the portrait of a tall ship, or a motto of love and good fellowship.

And then, when the ale was done, we went on, and I forgot old Chelsea, the riverside village in the fields, to think upon how I was to spend the night in this new Chelsea, haunted, it was true, by the ghosts of winebibbers and painters and poets, but, to me who was to live in it, suddenly become as frightening and as solitary as an undiscovered land.

In a street of grey houses we stopped at a corner where an alley turned aside; we stopped at the corner house, which was a greengrocer's shop. Slipping down from the tailboard of the van, I looked up at the desolate, curtainless windows of the top floor that showed where I was to sleep.

The landlord was an observant, uncomfortable wretch, who ran the shop on the ground