

"Somehow," he said smiling, "the masculine intellect finds it rather difficult to go to such extreme lengths of reasonableness."

"Indeed? I'm sure I wouldn't let myself be persuaded that some mysterious power resided in two absurd ugly images,—as if you were one of the people in Anstey's novels!"

"Well, they may be ugly enough, but they seemed to be very influential; and I don't think it altogether fair, now, begging your pardon, that only the beautiful should be powerful. What's this Pope says,

'Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,  
And beauty draws us with a single hair.'

—capillary attraction, Wiley used to call it, in his clever way."

After going out of his way to repeat this remark of Wiley's, he felt humiliated that all its brilliancy had so utterly vanished as it fell from his lips, and yet was conscious at the same time of ridiculous depths of gratefulness to Elsie, for her kindly tolerance of all things less perfect than herself.

"That fable of his," the gracious divinity said, "about the images was rather clever."

"Oh, it wasn't his, remember," answered Evans, recalling his thoughts from wandering. "I told you of how he read me your uncle's letter."

"Well, I wrote to uncle this summer, too—and I asked him about the *Algonquin* accident. The two voyagers were my uncle and Mr. Jack Wiley, after all."

"And your uncle gave Jack the idols?"

"He knew nothing of them whatever, Fred. Have you them yet?"

"Not now. Wiley asked me for them before he left for Chicago."

"And I do hope," she said quickly, "that uncle will not tell him how I was asking about the accident. But I am so sorry—you can't think Fred,—that any one could do what he did to make you miserable like that!"

A dim light was beginning to break on Evans, though it left many things indistinct and uncertain, as yet. He said, as if with a sudden inspiration, "Your bright sunshine, Elsie, has dispelled the gloom which—"

"There, that's nice, and so original, too," she interrupted, looking pleased, however, with his rhetoric. "And now we'll talk about something else. I'm tired of your idolatry,—"

She checked herself, and then laughed a little at Evans, who was actually beginning to blush, as he answered her. And after that their talk, no doubt, was of the pleasant, melancholy autumn weather; for as they walked on side by side, the maples and oaks and beeches around these two foolish young persons were fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf,—so many Malvolios, "sad and civil" now, standing soberly about the fields in their frayed finery, like old-time gentlemen of broken fortune.

## X

When the contents of the scroll met his view—  
*Ingoldby Legends.*

And now, while our friend Evans, late in the night, is poring intently over a letter from Wiley, we will take the liberty—we have done so before—of glancing over his shoulder, and reading it ourselves; for it is full in the light of the shaded lamp; and indeed, as Virginius said, (though on a more momentous occasion it is true), "there is no way save this."

I doubt not (*Wiley wrote*) that you are censuring me in your wisdom for my exodus Chicago-wards on the eve of the Supplementals. Well, I am now fairly started here with Pearson, and do not in the least regret having come out of the "Macaulay's Essays stage" of my development, in which I have been foolishly wasting away my days. All through last year, however, I was storing my mind with such valuable knowledge as I could lay hands on; and indeed I was beginning to be afraid that if I prolonged my stay in Residence, my mental furniture would soon become altogether too solid, cumbrous, and unwieldy for one of my light tonnage.

But this is not why I am writing to you now. Pearson has been telling me that in a letter to him Miss Fraine has made some enquiries about an accident you've heard of, which befell two certain voyagers as their small boat was being hoisted up the *Algonquin's* side. Now, Pearson and myself solemnly covenanted at that time, to let that little mishap, as not reflecting great glory on us, pass out of history,—each of us being a Cornelius Tacitus, as it were. But Miss Fraine's question was put so artfully, that he thought I had

been publishing the facts of the case in Toronto, and unwillingly,—being a Chicago lawyer,—he told the whole truth. Yes, Fred, I was the other occupant of that small boat. The hand that wields this pen wildly grasped the rope thrown towards your humble servant, gamboling gracefully in the liquid element.

The letter which I read to you last August was, I blush to say it, a fabrication, and as for the *soi disant* idols, I got them, as paper-weights I believe, in Toronto; and

"Time, who like the merchant lives on 'Change,"

saw each of them later "the Lar of a Canadian chief," to quote Hood again. One of them,—indeed neither of them would stay away from you long,—you found a very *apto cum Lare*, as our friend Horace has it.

You will find it instructive and entertaining to take mental glances over the doings of the idols since I gave you them. Can you divine, for instance, by what means they came back to you the first time? Of course I at once took advantage, as you will remember now, of each of the different turns things were taking; and things did seem so to shape themselves that I was rendered the greatest assistance in the way of being enabled to ascribe plausibly to the idols such copious discharges of thaumaturgic force. Indeed, when I think of how much seemed to come about of itself,—for that matter, the whole train of circumstances, though under my hands, may be said to have shaped and moulded itself,—I am ashamed that I did not do it all up more artistically, and in a less haphazard way.

With regard to the second return of the idols, I was for a long time completely at a loss how to manage it, and I made many attempts which failed,—perhaps you can recall some of them. At length I arranged the matter with Dekker, and by a fortunate linking of events, it came to pass as it did. I was careful enough, you may rest assured, in what I said to Dekker; he had no idea of the actual state of affairs; and is not likely ever to suspect it, not being gifted with what they call in the reviews "profound psychological insight." But then he didn't have the making of his own skull, you know.

I need say no more, I think, and I'll leave you now to your meditations. But you must not judge me too severely and unsparingly; reflect on and weigh well the temptation. And remember that after all, as Mr. Sludge says,—

"Strictly, it's what good people style untruth;  
But yet, so far, not quite the full-grown thing;  
It's fancying, fable-making, nonsense work—  
What never meant to be so very bad—  
The knack of story-telling, brightening up  
Each dull old bit of fact that drops its shine,  
One does see somewhat when one shuts one's eyes,  
If only spots and streaks; tables do tip  
In the oddest way of themselves; and pens, good Lord,  
Who knows if you drive them or they drive you?"

I will allow myself to say, in conclusion, that I foresaw all this. I never hoped for a moment, Fred, that Miss Fraine would throw herself with your *abandon* into an unquestioning acceptance of my little fiction, or that she would at all repose in yours very truly, such a touching quantity of trust and confiding belief.

J. W.

Can you guess why I took the idols with me when leaving? I will tell you. I haven't the slightest doubt that by this time Elsie and you are no longer "out," but are once again brought into sweet accord,—*amantium irae*, and that sort of thing. Considering, then, how disastrous it is that the idols should be kept apart, and how they will come together, I have sent them by express back to Toronto; one addressed to you, the other (in Pearson's handwriting) to Miss Elsie Fraine. I know that she disliked them for their ugliness; but hasn't Goethe said that "miracle-working pictures are rarely works of art"? You will find, unbeliever though you are, that they still have some of their old power; for you believed in them once, and a clock doesn't stop the moment you throw away the key. Well, Miss Fraine will receive what Pearson and myself, after due deliberation, have pronounced to be the best-looking one; and it is for you to win her over to an appreciation of how fitting and delightfully appropriate an arrangement it is that she should have one of the two idols, and you the other.

While Evans was filling his pipe, with his eyes still fixed on what Wiley had written, he was not without a dim consciousness of having spoken aloud. He did not change his attitude while slowly folding the letter into a long strip, with which he lighted his pipe thoughtfully; and as he sat smoking, he stared straight before him.

W. J. HEALY.

(The End.)