

She ran off to fetch them; and thenceforward 'shop' banished every subject from the field. They were still at it when the gong sounded for lunch, and half the interminable day was gone.

Lunch would be rather an effort. Helen's eager interest in the panorama of life made it a matter of course that she should lead the talk at table, and she was in no mood for it to-day.

To her relief, she found herself spared the trouble. Keith, who had an uncanny knack of divining her needs, came in armed with a book that had arrived by the second post and made havoc of his morning's work. His feigned inability to part with it was obviously an excuse to make it the main topic of the meal.

"Calls itself an *Essay on the Confusion of the Arts*," he said, placing a spare knife between the leaves. "I ordered it for Mark on Stoddart's recommendation. But I'm inclined to think it really belongs to you. The writer upholds so many of your pet convictions. Listen here." The knife was removed. "'Of course the present movement may continue indefinitely; we may have ideas of education still more undisciplined; a still more pathological outpouring of fiction. . . . In short, the dehumanising of life and literature may go on for ever. But we should not count upon it. Reactions have been known to occur, and they have occasionally been sudden. The world may even now be threatened with a subliminal uprush of common sense, however disconcerting the prospect may be to Mr. Bernard Shaw and his followers. But prophecy is vain. Everything depends on leadership; and one can never tell whether the right persons will take the trouble to be born.'"

"One only knows they are notoriously lazy in that respect!" Lady Forsyth struck in with a chuckle of appreciation. "I like your new friend. Any more gems of that quality?"