

Here he stopped suddenly, for want of imagination to complete the curse.

The first speaker was a young man of four-and-twenty, the age which is to my sex what eighteen is to the other, because at four-and-twenty youth and manhood meet. He of four-and-twenty is yet a youth, inasmuch as women are still angels, every dinner is a feast, every man of higher rank is a demigod, and every book is true. He is a man, inasmuch as he has the firm step of manhood, he has passed through his calf-love, he knows what claret means, and his heart is set upon the thing of which boys care nothing. He is a youth, because he can still play a game of football and rejoice amazingly in a boat-race; he is a man, because he knows that these things belong to the past, and that to concern oneself seriously with athletics when you can no longer be an athlete in the games is to put yourself on the level of a rowing coach or the athletic critic of a sporting paper.

Being only four-and-twenty, the speaker was in high spirits. He was also hungry. He was always both. What has life better to offer than a continual flow of animal spirits and a perpetual appetite? He was a tall, slight, and perhaps rather a weedy youth, a little too long of leg, a little too narrow in the beam, a little spare about the shoulders; but a youth of a ruddy and a cheerful countenance. To say that the lines of his face were never set to gravity would be too much, because I defy any man to laugh when he is sleeping, eating, or drinking. At all other times this young man was ready to laugh without stopping. Not a foolish cackle of idiotic vacuity such as may be heard in Earlswood Asylum, or at a tea-party to meet the curate; but a cheerful bubble of mirth and good-humour, proof that the spirit within took everything joyously, seeing in every misadventure its humorous side, and in every privation its absurdity.

The other who rode beside him was some years older at least. A man of thirty-five, or perhaps more; a man with a hatchet-face—nose and forehead in one straight line; long chin and long upper lip in another; face red with health as well as bronzed with the sun; a good honest face, supernaturally grave, grave beyond all understanding; lips that were always tightly closed; eyes which sometimes sparkled in response to