

"But—but why do you say that?"

"Because I've been through it," said Cyril grimly, "and it's hell! And it doesn't get better as you go on, but only worse. And now we're on this business, Ted, I tell you frankly that, if I could go back and wipe out this rotten year, and take my old berth at Hammond's, with all its greasy sordidness—skirts and blouses, Ted, sellin' 'em to the retail!—I'd do it—yes, and be glad—if it would wipe out the other thing! So now you know how bad I feel."

"She died, didn't she?" said Ted, and his voice, never a harsh one, seemed to sink to a melting softness.

"She did—and I see her now. By God, I'll always see her! And Clare laughed at me, Ted. She hasn't got any heart. She doesn't care a cent for me. She has as good as told me so. I'm only the oof bird. I've come up against that a considerable time ago. That's why I have been so jolly slack about the election business. What do I care? Not a red cent. What am I going to get out of it? Not a blooming thing! I'm her doormat, Ted. But it isn't going to last!"

More and more amazed, Ted Charters was lifted for the moment out of his own keen pain by the revelation of unimagined fires raging under the superficial surface which Cyril Rodney presented to the world.

Clare and he had made many mistakes in the course of their chequered career, but never had they made a greater one than when they underrated the capacity of the Rodneys.

"I don't blame you, either," he said, as he began to make his cigarette. "But why don't you stand up to her and speak out like a man, as you're doing now? It's what she'd respect, Cyril. She's my sister, and I know."

Under his breath Cyril mumbled something which Charters did not catch.

"Are you going to-day, then? And will you tell