

too," replied the boy in mingled reproach and disgust. "Why, that's what all Auntie's friends say when they hear the news. Don't you think twenty is old enough to be a soldier, Peter?"

The query was not directly answered. The old man was looking very serious with the effort of seeking unaccustomed words. Knowing the nature of Harry's upbringing by his maiden aunt, Peter felt some responsibility toward him, perhaps realizing that his own reminiscences and quaint philosophy had done much to mould the boy's ideas of the world. He resumed in his flat tone: "Think well, lad. Remember that war is not a game of play. Don't believe that it just means carrying a sword and having all the lasses smile at you."

"Hang it, Peter, I'm not that kind of a fool," broke in Harry, bitterness in his tone. "Why should I think about the women? Heavens, they don't understand anything about real life. I don't know whether it is natural foolishness, or whether they just refuse to listen to reason. . . . If you try to tell them anything serious, they behave like children, or else bring up some ridiculous argument that—that has no sense at all." After this impetuous outburst he paused sheepishly, suddenly aware that old Peter could see what was beneath these generalizations about the sex. A little more hastily than usual, Peter inquired, "When will you be leaving us?"

"Oh, I won't be able to go for a week or more. I was over at Market Barton yesterday to enlist, and everything was in a most awful muddle. The authorities are so taken by surprise that goodness knows when things will be straightened out. I'll have to kick my heels about here and have everybody stare at me, and whisper and ask silly questions—ugh! Why, oh why have I got to live in a town full of old women?"

Peter ventured on a mild expostulation, "I think you've always had a pretty jolly time, haven't you, Master Harry?"

"Oh, yes," impatiently, "when I was a child and did not think about Life. But they only made much of me as long as it amused them. Now that I start to think for myself, they have no use for me. They all look stiff and superior; I know they are trying to make me feel ashamed. But I don't care, I'll show them." Again he paused, annoyed at the recurrence of the plural pronoun which had proved so ineffectual to conceal the real state of his feelings. "If I have to stand a week of it, I fear I'll give way," he concluded, pathetically.

"Why not try a book," said Peter, in his most colourless manner. The young man burst out laughing. "What an idea, Peter! Would you trust me with one, since I don't subscribe to your library?" He grew suddenly serious and continued, "all the same, you know, it's not a bad notion. Maybe it will keep my mind occupied. And besides, I'd rather like to see what sort of stuff it is that she—that everybody here is so fond of. Choose something for me."

Peter rummaged among his books and produced one. Harry looked at it curiously. "'Pride and Prejudice'—it sounds like a sermon. Are you sure it's worth reading?"

Peter knew his man. "If you can't read a book through, Master Harry, when you set your mind to it" he said, "I dunno how you'll fight a war through, that's a good deal harder."

That was enough for Harry. "I'll read every blessed word of it, and inside of a week at that," he vowed

I'll bring it back this day week," and he marched out of the shop, half his worries forgotten in the interest of this unwonted enterprise. Old Peter shook his head after him and muttered, "He's another that's too young to be thinkin' sour thoughts about the world. I wonder what bee is stinging the youngsters all at once"

All this happened on a Wednesday, and on the following Tuesday Peter made one of his infrequent visits to the county town. Before starting he had put a note on his door, "Will be back on Wednesday at half past two." Punctual in his return, he came jogging down the street in his little donkey cart, and there he was spied by Harry Bayfield, who with a shout of welcome ran to meet him and clambered into the seat beside him. "I've just got an official letter," he said. "They say I can start training next week, and be ready for service about the first of July." The idea was so serious to him that, boy-like, he no longer wanted to talk about it, so he hurried on. "I say, Peter, that was a queer book. I read it, and, you know, I was interested in a sort of way. It's given me a new light, if you know what I mean, into the ways of women. It was a woman wrote it you see, and it seems to clear up a lot of things that puzzled me. Not that it shows them much wiser than I found them to be, but it makes them really human. It took away all my annoyance, somehow." And he looked as pompous as a judge. Then he found that they were passing his own home, and he dismounted. "I'll be along in a few minutes, and bring back the book," was his parting announcement. This time, as Peter watched him go, he did not shake his head, but nodded once, and smiled over his donkey's ears into infinity.

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