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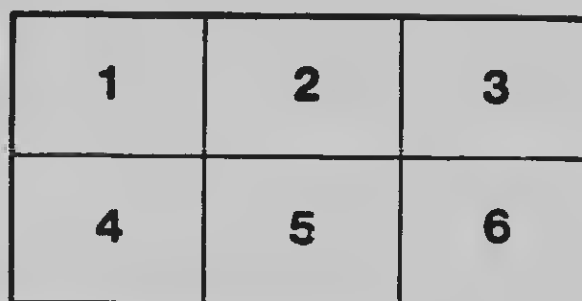
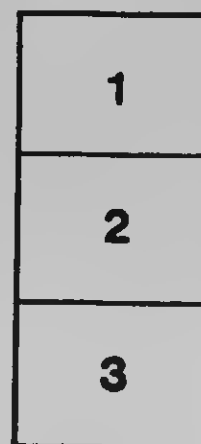
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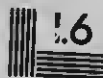
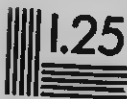
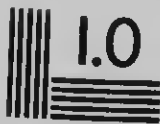
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BY

E. TEMPLE THURSTON

AUTHOR OF

"THE CITY OF BEAUTIFUL NONSENSE," "THE GARDEN
OF RESURRECTION," ETC.



THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY LIMITED
TORONTO

1912

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BRUNSWICK STREET, STAMFORD STREET, S.E.,
AND BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

TO
MARK BARR

28441 7.12.41

MY DEAR MARK,

I promised you once that if ever "The Little Sisters of Mercy" appeared between covers, the book should bear your name. Here is the fulfilment of my promise.

I am reprinting in this collection "An Idyll of Science," which never appeared in any magazine. Editors often said to me, "Have you ever written a short story which you like, that no paper has considered what they call—suitable?" Many times have I told them that I have. "Well, send it along here," they have said. "We'll publish it with an announcement to that effect." I have sent it along. The regrets of those editors have been my only consolation for the fact that it never appeared anywhere.

Here it is, then, with twelve others and the assurance that I am

Yours always,

E. TEMPLE THURSTON.

Chalfont St. Peter, 1912.

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These stories have appeared at various times over the past five years. I am grateful to the editors of the following papers for their permission to reprint: "The London Magazine," "The Throne," "The Bystander," "The Woman at Home," "Pearson's Weekly."

The story called "An Idyll of Science" is taken from my novel "The City of Beautiful Nonsense," where it appeared as the work of a young writer, the hero of the novel.

THE AUTHOR.

I
A PAIR OF BRACES

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PART I

WHAT YOU CAN MAKE OF SOCIALISM IF YOU TRY

I HAVE never tried, but I know those who have. I know those who are still trying. The worst about it is that it sounds well. Every intelligence can grasp it. In fact, the lower the intelligence, the firmer the grasp. The best about it is that no two people take hold of it in quite the same way. I have heard more people agree about the Immaculate Conception than ever I have on the subject of Socialism. Now, if you are not a Socialist yourself this sort of thing gives you confidence.

Herbert Lobb had his ideas about Socialism. So far as they could be called ideas, they were his own. I dare say there are many similar, but I certainly have never heard any quite the same as his.

They were well known in the district of Limehouse, which, as you know, is called Lime'us down there. In the neighbourhood of Plimsoll Court, where he lived, the people were tired of them.

Whenever a voice was heard in any sustained effort at the corner of the Court, some woman's head would come out of the window and, as she retired again, you would hear her say to some one within—

“'Erbert—at it again! Gawd knows where 'e finds the money to get 'is drink from!”

You can see by that remark how sadly his opinions had fallen. When a man's ideas are attributed to drink, you may be sure that he has repeated them many times. That, at least, is true of Lime'us.

But Herbert, in his way, was sober enough. There were days, but they came regularly, which is a distinct advantage in a husband. The wife can prepare for their coming. There are many little things she can do, as

one who makes ready for a siege. It is when these things happen unawares that they are so difficult to cope with.

No; Mrs. Lobb would have told you that 'Erbert was an excellent husband. She had taken the good with the bad without much complaint, as seventy-five women out of a hundred will do. She would never have said he was a drinking man, because his periods of intoxication came at such regular intervals that it all went into his general character as a decent husband.

It was strange too that, in those intervals, so far from voicing his opinions, he kept silent about them. Socialism was not the result of drink with him, as it is with some men. He merely became morose, sat in the kitchen and said nothing for hours at a stretch. All this was uncomfortable, but it was better than being beaten.

Mrs. Lobb preferred him, of course, when he was sober and talked, because he was not one of those men who needed the conflict

of other opinions to make him break into oratory. He just went off like a spring that has slipped its catch, amusing himself and the children for whole whiles together.

She told Johnny that his father was a very clever man. Any good wife will do this for her son. He finds out sooner or later, but it is as well for a child to honour its parents as long as possible.

"'E'd 'a' done wonders, only 'e never 'ad 'is chanst," she told Johnny; and Johnny, who was nine, had bigger eyes for his father when next he came back from the docks.

"Muvver says you'd 'a' done wonders, only you never 'ad no chanst," said Johnny to him the same evening.

He had been primed up to this. His mother had gently suggested that he should tell his father what she had said.

"Ah," said Herbert—and he took a very deep breath—"if I'd only 'ad my chanst. 'Strewth!"

You could easily have seen how it pleased

him. It raised vistas in his mind of the glorious things he would have done if he had had that chance, things which were intensely real because no one logically could have denied their probability.

“When I ’ad my bumps done, years ago, down at Margate, by a professor there on the sands, ’e says to me, ‘You’ve got brains,’ ’e says. ‘Lor!’ says ’e, ‘you’ve got brains! What are yer?’ says ’e. I tell ’im I worked at the docks. ‘’Strewth!’ ’e says, ‘yer oughter been a politician.’ And ’e laid ’is ’ands on the bumps on me ’ead as though ’e was going to squeeze the brains out of ’em. ‘Been hedicated?’ he says. ‘No,’ says I. ‘Any of the family been hedicated?’ ’e says again. ‘I’ve got a brother a dentist,’ I says —that’s your Uncle Bob at Turnham Green. ‘Thought there was a clever one in the family,’ says ’e. ‘But lor’ love-a-duck!’ says ’e, feeling me bumps again, ‘’e ain’t ’n the ’unt with yer for brains.’ Do you remember, Emily?”

Herbert always verified his statements even when he was addressing his own children. It gave weight to his opinions. When Emily Lobb said yes or no—and that was all she was expected to say—the children looked back at their father with deeper wonder in their faithful eyes.

From these reminiscences he would depart by obvious progression into those heights of Socialistic imagination which were always in the nature of a fairy tale to Johnny; and to Mary, then just seven years old, were a pleasing confusion of sounds with now and then a meaning dropping upon her ears like a bolt out of the blue.

“And why didn’t I get me chanst, I should like to know?” Herbert would ask. Nothing would have surprised him more than if he had received an answer to that question.

“Why was Bob heducated, and me left to pick up what learnin’ I could?”

“Because you ran away from home and

went to sea rather than go to school," replied a small voice within him. But he had put that question so many times that the small voice grew tired of answering. You can imagine how it became a pleasure to ask that question at last. Finally it came to be that this question was the one which always set loose the spring from its catch. From this pinnacle he soared forth into the realms of his fancy; and all the little reading, all the little knowledge he had gathered in his lifetime was jumbled into a great, sounding, voluminous discourse of the greatest balderdash you ever heard.

The names of Spencer, Huxley and Darwin came rolling from his tongue, employed to give authorship to statements of his own which he could not quite swallow himself.

"What did 'Uxley think of the Bible, I'd like to know?" he would ask Johnny.

And Johnny would stare back at him in a wondering silence.

“E said there warn’t a word of truth in it, from the Deluge to the Flood.”

You see, there was no one to heckle him. He had the whole platform to himself, and his audience listened open-mouthed.

Now all this was very well in its way, and did little harm to any one. He got infinitely more pleasure out of sobriety and the power to talk than out of intoxication and moroseness, therefore he was sober more often than not. And so long as he had no great personal grievance of his own, it was little more than talking.

But the great catastrophe came at last. Herbert lost his job. Conditions of trade, fluctuations in the market of labour, and the fact that he one day got drunk at his work, all combined to thrust him into the great army of unemployed. There came the day when he returned to Plimsoll Court a very silent man, with eyes cast down, saying he had lost his job.

For a whole week he sought for more work,

but there was none to be had. Then he threw in his lot with two other men. They secured a barrel-organ and, with the word "Unemployed" printed by Herbert in large black letters on a card, they wandered through the West End, earning an excellent wage. One of the men was a bricklayer, thrown out of his employment also because he drank. To him the largest share of the profits were given because, on the organ, in the little box where, if the grinder is an Italian, the wee bambino is always laid, there were placed the pick, the shovel and the hod, the pathetic insignia of his trade.

Now, it was these excursions to the West, a lucrative form of idleness, which were the worst thing in the world for Herbert. He had forgotten almost that there the people were wealthy; that there there were great mansions with flowers glittering on the window-sills; that there there were gardens and parks, carriages and motor-cars, and people more idle than himself. It was not to be expected

he could realise that they were better constituted to idleness than he. It was not to be expected he could see justice in the fact that their justification was the harder to achieve than it was with him who had been given so little. All that he saw superficially was that their justification was not earned, a fact so obvious amongst the rich that one forgets the virtues which, being human beings, they must possess. Then, last, and worst of all, he strolled one afternoon into Hyde Park. He saw the idle women lolling in their carriages. What is more, he heard a stump-orator preaching Socialism.

That was the firebrand to set his inflammable nature alight. When he came back that evening, he was more filled with words than ever he had been before. He thumped his fists down upon the table, and the cups rattled in their saucers to the fury of his eloquence.

"Why 'aven't I been given no chanst?" he demanded—"why warn't I hedicated?"

Look at them empty-'eaded lubbers in 'Ide Park—if I'd 'ad 'arf their heducation, I shouldn't want to be rollin' a blarsted barrel-horgan through the streets, touchin' me 'at to 'em when they give me a copper. A copper! Blim'me—and their pocket~ stuck togevver with gold!”

He looked round at Emily. He looked at Johnny. Then, last of all, his eyes rested on Mary. They said nothing. It seemed very unjust to them.

“And all this bloated haristocracy!” he went on—“what are they, livin' on the fat of the land, in their palaces, with servants with white wigs and gold buttons on their coats? What are they, I'd like to know? Darwin's proved they're all one and the same as hus—just descended from monkeys, that's all they is; just descended from monkeys, monkeys! 'Strewth, don't they look it, too! Callin' 'em 'my lord' and 'my lady,' and them only monkeys! I don't mind the Queen. Saw 'er drive through the Park the

other day, and she bowing and as agreeable like as yer please. I don't mind 'er—she can't 'elp it—it ain't no fault of 'ern. 'Sides, there's no bunkum about 'er. She's what I call a mingler—that's what she is; she's a mingler—she mingles with 'uman flesh and blood, she do. No huppishness about 'er. But these other blokes what sit lollin' in the Park, grudgin' the penny to pay their chairs, and their pockets stuck togevver with gold, I'd like to know what right they 'ave to chuck a penny to me as if I was dirt? What right 'ave they?"

He appealed to the whole family at once, and the silence which met his demand seemed to satisfy him. He went on as eloquently as ever.

"If I was only given my chanst," he continued—"if one of them rich beggars who's got more money than 'e can put in one bank all at once, if 'e'd give me fifty pounds—which 'e could, without feelin' so much as a fly crawlin' over 'is bald 'ead—then we could start a shop, Emily, a little greengrocer's

shop, and I could go to Covent Garden every mornin' with a barrer and get the stuff, and you could 'ave a blue apron on yer and sit in the shop, an' we'd make a pile o' money that way."

Emily stopped in the midst of her work and gazed into the radiant future. A little greengrocer's shop and she wearing a blue apron, making a penny on every pound of potatoes she sold! Every one bought potatoes! And perhaps a few cut flowers for sale in an old jam-jar!

Johnny saw that look in his mother's eyes. It is a look no one can mistake. For when the eyes take into them the sight of flowers, they become so gentle that you might think the whole world was a garden. He saw, too, the expression in his father's face as he watched her. And then and there Johnny made up his mind to a great resolve.

"Is there really people 'oo 'ave fifty pounds in their pockets?" he asked.

His father looked at him pityingly for his ignorance.

"Fifty pounds!" he said witheringly—"why, every blarsted thing they 'ave in their pockets, some of 'em, is made o' gold. I've seen 'em pickin' their teeth with gold tooth-picks—that I 'ave—and cigarettes in gold cigarette-cases. There are some as eats off gold plates. Gawd, when yer think of that, don't it make yer blood boil? It's chuckin' money away, I calls it—playin' ducks and drakes with it, and poor devils like meself and 'er"—he pointed tragically to Emily—"oo, fer just the price of one o' them plates, could be set up for life as 'appy as any one. Fifty pounds! Gawd! it ain't much, is it? It ain't much to make no difference out of one man's pocket, and make a fortune in another's?"

This, then, is what Herbert Lobb made out of Socialism—a fairy tale—a castle in Spain. To that sympathetic little audience of his, it all sounded so real and possible a thing. Surely some man would give them one of his gold plates? A plate was not a

thing you missed—not very much. Herbert occasionally broke one when he was morose, and nothing was said about it afterwards.

And so, with all these wonders ringing in his ears, with all these pictures of palaces and flower-gardens lighting in his eyes Johnny formed his resolve. He would journey to this fairy land himself. He would find this prince to whom the loss of a gold plate would be no loss at all; to whom the gift of fifty pounds would be less than the crawling of a fly upon his head. If it were true—and he believed every word his father said—then it must be possible. You only needed to ask—that was all.

He took hold of his mother's hand, and he held it tight as he made his little oath within himself. The very next day, then, he played truant from school, and set forth from Lime'us upon his wanderings—the only son going out into the world to find the golden dish for the king—his father.

PART II

THE JOURNEY OF THE ONLY SON

THERE is a lot of idle talk about believing in fairy-tales. You hear nothing about believing in autobiographies or in the amazing stories that science is telling every day. Then why assume it possible that there can be any doubt about a fairy-tale? They are happening every day. The conditions under which they happen are a little different—that is all.

But every hour some prince—in his own right—sets forth to find his princess; every day some son of some aged father begins his travels into the great forest of the world to find the jewel of fortune. Nearly every fairy-tale was this, the setting forth upon a journey; and they travelled but little faster

with their seven-league boots than we do now with our express trains.

It was only the more fortunate ones, however, who met the old woman on the roadside who could tell them where the seven-league boots were to be found. Many of them had to walk until, footsore and weary, they arrived at their journey's end.

This way it was with Johnny. Through numberless streets of warehouses, always inquiring the way of every pedestrian he met, he marched bravely on until he came to a mighty bridge which leant across a great grey river. It leant so far that it just touched the other bank. Johnny crossed it, marvelling at the thunder of sound as the countless vehicles rolled over its tireless arms.

And then he began to find himself in a different world. The streets of warehouses ended and, in their place, rose great buildings, with noble pillars and beautiful windows. He saw no flowers upon the window-sills as yet. There were no wide gardens,



or trees growing up through the pavements. Yet it was all very grand and very wonderful.

As he stood outside the Royal Exchange, and gazed down the vast delta of streets, he thought he had never seen anything, not even in pictures, so grand as this.

Of course, all his father had said was true. All the men who hurried by him were fabulously rich. They had gold watch-chains—nearly every one of them. He stared up in their faces as they passed, but they were in such a hurry, taking so little notice of him, that his courage failed when he tried to ask one of them where he could get fifty pounds.

Moreover, there were yet many things he must see for himself before he returned. Herbert had told him of a place called Covent Garden. It was there he was going to take the barrer in the morning to get fruit and cabbages when they had their little shop. Johnny knew he must see that before he went back again. Flowers grew there like they did in a place called Heaven. They grew

in thousands, with such colour as he had never seen before. Fruit was there too—fruit that you could take out of baskets, and eat without any one holding up a hand to stop you.

So he asked the way to Covent Garden, and a vague hand pointed in a vague direction. Every one was in too much of a hurry to stop and explain it, street by street. But he arrived there eventually. He saw the flowers under the great round roof of glass.

With his little mouth wide open, he stood and gazed at the brilliant masses of colour. People pushed him and jostled him, for they were all in a hurry there, too. But one push in the back more or less did not deprive him of wonder. He found, too, the baskets of fruit—the discarded oranges, the over-ripe white grapes thrown away in their packing of cork chips. They were good eating, I can tell you! He believed the grapes were gooseberries, till they melted in his mouth.

Then his little face turned upwards, like some bird when it drinks, and he thought he had never eaten anything like it in his life. It was far better than a meal of bread-and-lard.

It was just near here that he saw the first garden. A glimpse under an archway showed him the little patch of green in the square before St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden, and he slipped in. Oh, it was wonderful! The sunlight was pouring down upon the grass, the trees were waving their leaves about, and two beautiful little girls in clean pink and blue aprons were playing with a skipping-rope.

"Like to 'ave a turn?" said one, seeing an opportunity for the easing of labour.

Johnny would have given a great deal to consent, but he shook his head and walked away. The temptation was so great that he dared not stay there a moment longer. There might be thousands who had their pockets filled with gold, but he knew that he

must be diligent in his search before he found the one who would give it him.

The great difficulty that beset him was that every one seemed in such a hurry. Even when he asked the way, they did not stop for one moment, but, as they walked, called out something to him over their shoulders which, for the most part, he never heard at all.

Now, if it was going to be like this, when he only asked the way, would they ever have time to stop and count out fifty pounds from their pockets? It seemed unlikely. He determined to try with the very next man he met who wore a gold watch-chain.

Long before he reached Piccadilly, he saw the very person approaching him. He was walking a little more leisurely than most of those whom he had seen. His top-hat glistened in the sunlight and a cane with a gold band upon it swung loosely on his arm.

As he came nearer, Johnny saw him take a gold cigarette-case from his pocket, and he stopped to light a cigarette. A gold cigar-

ette-case! This was the very man! Could there be any doubt about it? His whole appearance—the tie-pin that glittered in his tie! Johnny knew that he must be one of those lords of whom his father had spoken.

With his throat parching and his little heart hammering underneath his waistcoat, Johnny stopped before him as he threw away his match. The man looked down.

“Well?” said he.

“Please, sir,” said Johnny, and then words failed him. He tried to move his lips. At last, with a big swallowing in his throat, he became silent.

“What is it?” asked the man.

“Please, sir—father wants—fifty pounds.”

“Does he?” said the man. “Does he? Well, will you tell father”—and he said it so seriously that Johnny listened intently to every word—“will you tell father that there are plenty like him. London’s full of ’em.”

Saying which, he strolled on. Johnny watched him till he turned the corner of the

street. Then he put his face to the West. He set his eyes very steady and very straight. His eyes glittered like big diamonds.

That episode was soon forgotten, for Nature is gentle with children. There were a thousand other things to distract his mind, for it was the gate of fairyland when he reached Piccadilly Circus and though his legs were beginning to ache a little and his insides rumbled and made all sorts of demands for something to satisfy them, yet here there were wonderful ladies and carriages and motor-cars. Compared with the sight of all these, the weariness of his journeying was as nothing.

There, in the midst of that great space, he beheld the fountain with real water pouring for ever out of the fishes' mouths. Here again, too, there were flowers, great baskets of them! He had never known there could be so many flowers in one place. And under their beautiful parasols, in their bright silk and muslin dresses, the ladies lolled in their

carriages, like butterflies under the shade of the flowers.

As he stood on the pavement by the fountain and watched them all passing by—just like what he had heard the Lord Mayor's Show to be—he heard one lady in a carriage say to her companion—

“Look at that little boy!”

And the blood came and went in his face.

And when her companion replied: “He looks half starved,” then the blood came again and did not go for quite a long time, till they were out of sight.

At last, when his eyes had grown accustomed to the glare of the light and the passing show of colour, he asked the way once more, and set off for Hyde Park. It was there he knew he would find the richest people of all. There it was his father had seen the man with the gold toothpick; and in his mind it had come to seem that the man who had a gold toothpick would be bound to have gold plates in his house.

And if he had gold plates, then he it was to whom the gift of fifty pounds would be but the crawling of a fly upon his head.

Hyde Park, then, was where he would find such a man as that. These men with gold watch-chains were not so rich after all. Possibly the chains were not really gold. When he had seen a little boy not much older than himself wearing one, he began to think less highly of them. Surely a little boy could not be rich?

So, past the great houses where the flowers dipped over the window-sills, he struggled on to Hyde Park. It was a great effort, those last few hundred yards or so, but there was a wonderful goal to be reached.

It was just before lunch-time when he passed through the broad, white gates and saw, stretched before him, the fields and fields of green. It was so big, so limitless, that his little eyes could not take it all in. It seemed, when he looked on towards the West, as if the world went on for ever being

green; as if the trees and the grass would never stop growing till you came to the end of the earth.

He was too occupied with all he saw to be afraid of the horses as he crossed the end of the Row. One of them, ridden by a beautiful lady, all in black, pulled up short, with a champing of the bit, almost on his very toes.

"Get out of the way!" she exclaimed.

And then Johnny was frightened. He ran to where he saw the people sitting upon rows and rows of chairs. Here there were flowers again—vast bushes of them with blossoms dropping their petals, making a thick carpet of colour on the ground. He took the first vacant chair he saw and sat right on the very edge of it. On one side of him was a lady who had numberless things in gold hanging from a gold chain round her neck. Johnny never noticed, he was too interested in a horse that was prancing in the Row, but as he sat down, she put up a gold lorgnette to her eyes and

pulled her skirt away from any contact with his chair.

On the other side of him was an elderly gentleman, who looked on, saw everything and smiled. Presently Johnny found time to look at them, and he knew that both were rich. Either of them might give him the fifty pounds. With a feeling of relief, he settled himself a little further back in his chair.

Five minutes went by, and then a man in uniform, like a 'bus conductor, came out of nowhere, and stood in front of him. Johnny watched him with interest as he tore a ticket from a roll, punched it, and then held it out.

Johnny took it, and whispered: "Thank you."

"Penny," said the chair-man.

Johnny felt the blood rushing to his cheeks. He began to hand the ticket back, but the man took no notice.

"Penny," said the man.

Johnny slipped to the edge of his chair.

"Are these sort of people allowed in here?" asked the lady.

"Anybody's allowed in 'ere, madam, as pays for their seats."

The lady turned her head away. The elderly gentleman smiled.

"Have you got a penny?" asked the elderly gentleman.

Johnny shook his head. And then a wonderful thing happened. The elderly gentleman put his hand in his pocket and he drew out a whole handful of gold and silver. It was with terrible difficulty—hunting in and out amongst the glittering coins—that he found a penny at all. Then he gave it to the chair-man. Both Johnny and the chair-man looked at it in awe.

"Thank you, sir," said the collector; to Johnny he added: "Keep your ticket," and he walked away. The lady pulled her skirts together tightly about her body. A moment later she rose and left them.

"Didn't you know these chairs cost a penny?" asked the elderly gentleman.

Johnny looked up at him with big eyes—for here indeed was the man whose pockets were stuck together with gold. He shook his head.

"Where have you 'come from?" asked the elderly gentleman.

"Lime'us, sir."

"Limehouse?"

"Yes, sir."

"By train?"

"No, sir; walked, sir."

"What time did you start?"

"'Alf-past eight, sir."

"Aren't you tired?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hungry?"

"Yes, sir."

"When 'did you have something to eat?"

"Eight o'clock, sir."

"What was it?"

"Piece o' bread-an'-lard, sir."

"My God!"

"Yes, sir."

"And what did you want to come up to Hyde Park for?"

"Find a rich bloke, sir."

The elderly gentleman's lip twitched.

"What for?"

"Father wants fifty pounds, sir."

"Does he?"

Johnny felt a thickness in his throat. This was just what the other man had said.

"Does he?" repeated the elderly gentleman.—"And where 'do you think you're going to get fifty pounds in Hyde Park?"

"Anybody, sir. People are terrible rich, sir, in Hyde Park."

"How do you know?"

"'Cos I've seen the gold things they wear, sir. An' they got plenty more in their pockets."

"Like I have, you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, why not say you mean me straight away? Why not say you thought you could get something out of me, directly you saw me bring the money out of my pocket to pay for your chair?"

Johnny could not follow this. It was not spoken plain as when his father talked about things. But it was said in such an even, quiet voice that he was sure it must be all right. And so, just blindly, as these poor children do, he replied—

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so," said the elderly gentleman. "You'll always find it best to be honest in this world. And now let me give you a piece of advice. You can't get fifty pounds in this world without giving something in return for it. You tell your father that when you go home. And here—here's sixpence. Now you run to the nearest A B C shop, and get yourself something to eat, and then toddle home."

Then the elderly gentleman looked at his gold watch; he took a cigarette from a gold cigarette-case, he lit a match on his gold matchbox and, smiling at Johnny, he walked away.

PART III

THE JEWEL OF FORTUNE

IT is when hope has seemingly closed its doors to you that there comes a faint chink of light in the great darkness of the beyond. It is when the only son, footsore and weary, sinks down exhausted on the path through the forest which is overgrown with briars and thorns, that there comes the fairy of Good Chance to direct him on his way.

It was when the elderly gentleman left him, and he found himself completely alone, that all the feelings of exhaustion and hunger—surely terrible giants to meet when one is single-handed—lifted themselves in his little body and brought the tears welling into Johnny's eyes.

All the great people had gone back to their beautiful houses to eat their midday

meal and there, in that vast stretch of green grass and waving trees, Johnny was alone, seated on the very edge of his chair, with the tears tumbling down his cheeks.

He had never known the world was so empty before. With a vain effort he tried to cheer himself by opening his dirty little hand and looking at the sixpence which lay wet and sticky in his palm. For a moment or two the sight of it lifted his spirits, but then, when he thought of the fifty pounds, what was it? Why, he had known his father to lose a sixpence and only be cross about it for not more than a week.

But it was not only that he had not yet got the jewel of fortune, it was that he knew now he would never get it. Had not the rich gentleman said: "You can't get fifty pounds in this world without giving something in return for it?"

And what had he got that he could give or that any one would accept? Nothing! Not a single thing! With a heavy heart,

then, he flipped off his penny chair and, still grasping the sixpence in his hand, he turned sadly to the East once more.

It all seemed different now as he walked along the streets. He did not even trouble to look at the ladies passing by in their carriages, but, just dragging his little feet along, with now and then a gulping noise in his throat, he made his way back to Lime'us.

It was down in the City, in one of those thoroughfares where they have learnt all the cunning tricks of trade, that a notice in a window caught Johnny's eye. By now he was so tired that he hugged the shutters as he walked, sometimes resting himself on the sills of the windows ere he started on again. And in this, a tailor's window, he saw a card with words that leapt up to his eye—

FIFTY POUNDS FOR SIXPENCE! STEP INSIDE!

He stared and stared; then spelt it all right through, saying each word aloud in a

whisper to himself as he made it out. Fifty pounds for sixpence! Fifty pounds for sixpence! With an awful fear that it might not still be there, he slowly opened his fingers. When he saw the sixpence, still wet with the perspiration of his hand, his heart jumped up and began beating under his waistcoat with greater force than before.

Another moment and he had marched inside the shop.

"I want fifty pounds," he said; and he planted his sixpence with a click upon the counter. The elderly gentleman was quite right: you could not get fifty pounds in this world without giving something in return for it.

The man across the counter grinned.

"Give us down one o' them boxes, Jim," he said to a boy who was standing at the other end of the shop. The box was brought. It was opened. He took out a pair of braces and laid them before Johnny on the counter.

"That's about your size, I think," he said.

Johnny looked at them. Then he looked up into the man's face in bewilderment.

"But I want fifty pounds," he said—"same as what you say in the winder."

"Well, you've got it there," said the man as he smiled again. "You've got it there, or the chanst of it."

He took out a slip of paper from the box and caught at a pen from above his ear.

"What's yer name?" he asked.

"Lobb."

"What Christian name?"

"John. They call me Johnny. John, I suppose."

"Address?"

"What?"

"Address?"

"What's that mean?"

"Where d'yer live?"

"Plimsoll Court, Lime'us."

"Number?"

"Three."

He wrote it all down and handed the slip of paper together with the pair of braces across the counter.

"But I want fifty pounds," said Johnny with a trembling lip.

"Don't make an ass of yerself," said the man. "Yer can't get fifty pounds for sixpence nowhere as I knows of. That's an insurance coupong. If ye're found dead with that in yer pocket and the braces on yer back, yer'll get fifty pounds—leastways you won't, not being no good to yer—but yer father or yer mother'll get it—see?"

Johnny nodded his head in silence, but his little heart was standing still.

"Oo'll pay the money?" he asked presently.

"Why, the insurance company."

"When?"

"Soon afterwards. When yer dead. But it's no good after a year from to-day. Oh, you show it to yer fainer—he'll explain it.

It don't cover accident, yer know—only death."

Another customer came into the shop and Johnny, with the pair of braces in his hand, walked slowly out.

So this was what the elderly gentleman had meant when he said you could not get fifty pounds in this world without giving something in return for it. But was his life really worth fifty pounds? He could hardly believe it. He read the words on the coupon through and through again, and it seemed that that was what they did mean. If he were dead, then they could have that little greengrocer's shop. It was impossible for them to get it without. They had nothing that was worth fifty pounds to give in return—nothing except him.

He stopped as he passed a packing-yard. He kept swallowing something all the time as he peered in. Then, when there was no one about, he slipped behind the cover of a big dray and began hastily unbuttoning his

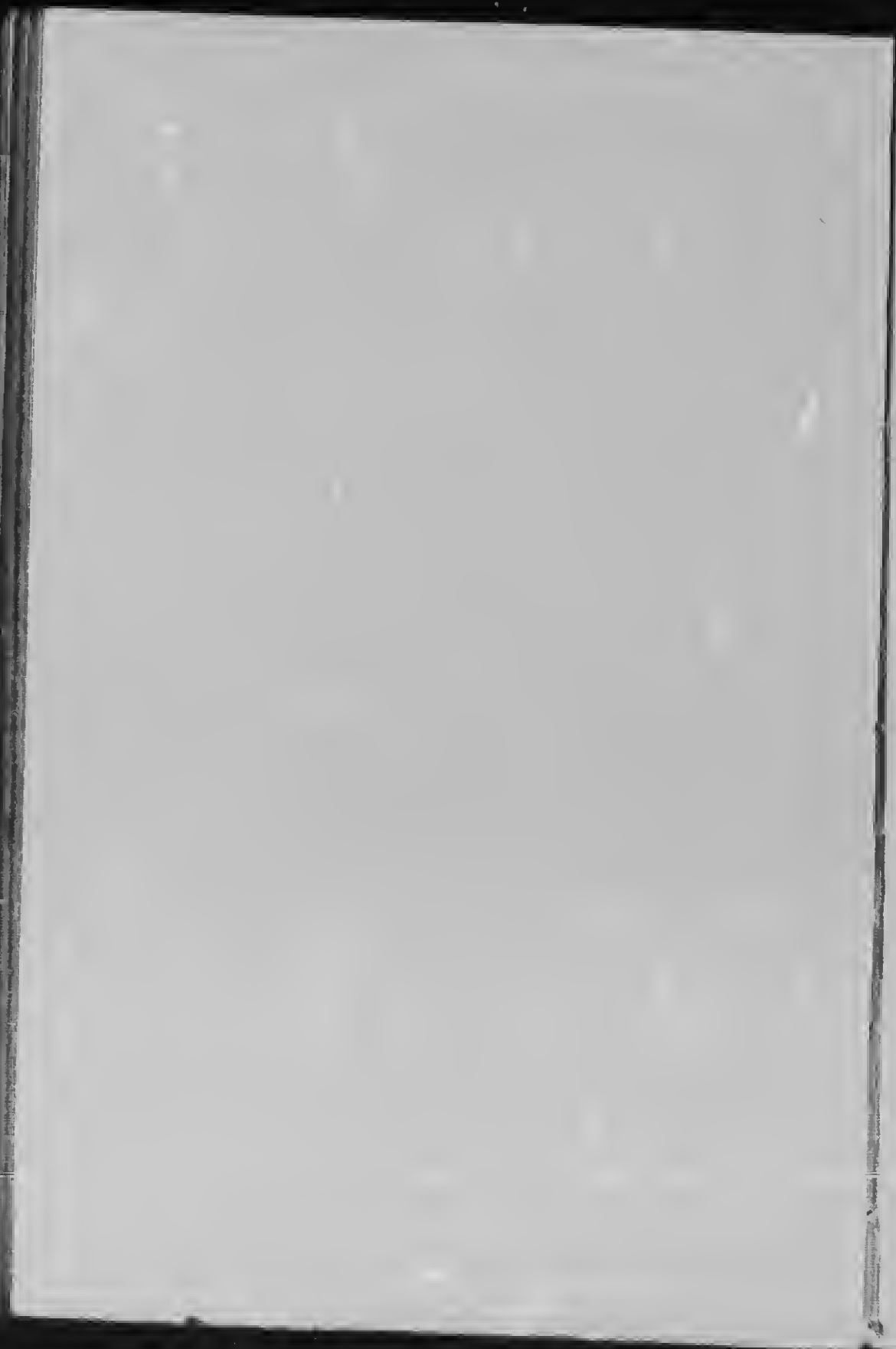
coat. It only required a moment or two, and the piece of broad thread with unstitched holes for the buttons which had supported his little knickerbockers before, was lying on the ground. In place of them he could feel the broad band of the splendid new braces tightening on his shoulders.

When he had put on his coat again, he carefully folded up his piece of paper and slipped it into his pocket. It was essential that they should find the piece of paper as well as the braces on his back—otherwise, how would they know who he was?

Then, with a white face, for he was very, very tired, he came out into the street once more and, once more turning his face to the East, he set forth again to where the great, grey river was rushing and lapping under the bridges.

II

SOME ONE ELSE'S ROMANCE



It is not always your own romance that is interesting. Your own romance is sometimes a very grey affair, with ugly threads that protrude in ragged ends, and then—it is as well to look to some one else.

Some one else will always have something in their lives that will make your own worth living. If you can but learn the art of looking for it, you will find colour everywhere. That is romance-colour. It is romance when you see blue and purple in the distant hills; it is romance when you see deep violet beneath in the shade beneath the trees.

All this is romance, because, if you climb up to the distant hills they are green; and if you stroll beneath the shadows of the trees, all is green there too. But there are colours in life as well—if not just now in your own, then in some one else's. It is not all so grey as it looks when you peer into it.

Personally, I am very fond of some one else. If it were not for some one else, I don't think I could quite go on. For whenever things are very grey with me, when my day is misty, when there is only a crude foreground and the blue distant is lost in grey—then I go to some one else.

But I am no master at the art. There are very few of us who are. Sometimes I find it very hard to obliterate myself entirely. It is recognised to be a difficult thing to do.

There was a pretty little romance once; but I lost it. I lost it because in the midst of it all, I tumbled across myself.

Some one else was in an A B C shop. A wee mouse of a thing she was, with a white face and pretty lips that you knew must feel quite cold when you touched them. The lips of a woman are the petals of a rose. That is a commonplace simile, but it is true.

Every woman's lips are like that; but some

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are the petals in the early morning before the sun has warmed them—some are the petals in the heavy, languorous heat of the day, and some—some are the withered petals when the summer is gone. I don't like to think of those.

Anyhow hers were the early morning ones—so early that the dew still chilled them. She waited on me in a whisper, I don't know how else to describe it. Her feet whispered; her skirt whispered. She whispered, "What are you going to have?" Yes, she waited on me in a whisper.

Sometimes I used to talk to her, asking her if she felt well that day and when she was going to take her holidays—silly questions expressing nothing more than my desire to draw her into conversation and discover her romance.

"I want you to give me a photograph of yourself," I said boldly one day.

The cup and saucer that she was carrying nearly tumbled from her hand. I had never

made such a brazen remark before. She was quite unprepared for it.

"I did have one taken once," she said in sudden confidence, leaning down over the table, so that her voice might reach me. "It was in evening 'dress. But I haven't got any copies now. I sent the last one away to Auntie when Uncle died."

"Did it help her to bear her loss?" I asked—a facetious, ridiculous question. The fact is, I was thinking of myself. I wanted her to find me funny.

In that respect I failed. Her china eyes gazed at me, and she whispered, "Auntie died a fortnight later."

You see, she was much funnier than I was. I could not have thought of anything so humorous as that, if I had tried for a year.

"Well, will you get one taken," I suggested seriously—"if I—if I pay for it?"

She caught in a little breath of amused delight between her lips. Then she squeezed her hands together.

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"Oh, wouldn't that be lovely!" she exclaimed, so loud that she did not have to bend down over the table, and I heard her quite plainly.

"Then you can give one to me," I continued—"and you can give one to him." I paused meaningly.

Her eyebrows went up in an arch like a rainbow.

"How did you know?" she whispered.

"I can see a picture of him in your eyes," said I—"and I want to know all about him."

"I can't talk now," she replied, with a frightened glance over her shoulder. She looked like a mouse peering up fearfully from a piece of cake. Yes—and such a piece of cake! She was just longing to tell me everything.

"When will you tell me then?" I persisted.

"I don't know."

"What are you doing next Sunday?"

"We're going out to Epping together."

"Ah—and the Sunday after that?"

"He works every other Sunday."

"Then you're free the Sunday after next?"

"Yes."

"We go to Kew Gardens then. All the woods are open to the public now, and when you've got your eyes full of bluebells, then you can tell me all about him. Don't forget—Charing Cross Underground at three o'clock, the Sunday after next. Tell him you're coming; don't keep a secret from him. I'll send him my photograph if he wants to know what I'm like. And when you clear away my plate you will find something that will make glad the heart of your photographer. Sunday after next—three o'clock—Charing Cross."

Well—there was colour! Ah, yes—but there was too much of it. I lost it all—and just because I tumbled up against myself.

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There are few Sundays that I have looked forward to more than that one. There are few Sundays that I look back to with more regret and shame.

I was there at five minutes to three. I could see blue-bells already. I could hear that little mouse's voice whispering through them all about him, when they were going to be married, where they were going to live.

And then—down Villiers Street she came. Oh, but she was a mouse no longer. She was a cockatoo! The small, white face and the dusty-coloured hair were all crowned with a violent magenta-coloured hat, adorned with violent magenta-coloured feathers. It was immense. The colour alone filled the whole street. It dragged remarks from little boys. It received all that it asked for; and it asked in such stentorian tones, that the little boys had to shriek at the top of their voice in order to be heard. I thought of it in the middle of the bluebells, and I wanted to run away.

And she—she bore it with the pride of a Cleopatra carrying off Antony in her arms in the eyes of the whole world. It was her best hat. Are there many things a woman is more proud of?

It was then that I tumbled against myself. I forgot all about romance. How could I be seen with a hat like that! So wrapped was I in my own feelings that I did not realise how much of the whole spirit of romance that hat meant to her.

I hid behind the bookstall and watched her come in. There she waited with an expectant, triumphant look upon her little face.

When people stared at her, she almost smiled back in pleasure, as though she would like to tell them all about it.

At last I emerged from my retreat. I came up timidly to her side. I had determined what to do. I raised my hat.

"Well," said I—"how are you? You're looking splendid. Will you just run and get

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the tickets while I buy a paper?" and I slipped a sovereign into her hand.

I often wonder what she did with those tickets. I often wonder whether she went alone to look at the bluebells. I can just imagine the bluebells staring at her.

III

THE LITTLE SISTERS OF MERCY

IF ever you go to Cappoquin in the county of Waterford, you cannot fail to see the Convent of Mercy. Like a hospital or a home of convalescence, it stands gauntly on the brow of a barren hill overlooking the little town. The new, yellow bricks of which it is partly built, the sparsely grown shrubs which line the hideous gravel drive bisecting the uncultivated ground before the house, combine to make its outward appearance as cheerless and forbidding as can well be imagined. The comforts of the interior may make up for this. I cannot say. I have never been inside. I could not bring myself to go inside. I had seen the little convent in the Main Street where they lived before the bitter Fate of opulence drove them, under the guidance of an ambitious Mother Superior, to build this gorgeous sepulchre on the hill.

Ah, that little house in the Main Street!

I shall never forget it. It was late one night when first I saw it. Late? It was a September evening and had been dark two hours and more. A few men were gathered under the light of the two lamps that vainly struggled with their feeble beams to illuminate the street. They talked in desultory conversation. Sometimes a dog slunk by them in the darkness.

We had driven some nine miles or so over an ugly road and were going to stay the night in Cappelquin. A long-standing acquaintance with the Reverend Mother justified our announcing that we would come to breakfast in the morning. I was deputed to knock on the door and acquaint them of our self-invitation.

It was nine o'clock. Conceive the perturbation and commotion, how the hearts of the little sisters fluttered and thumped when, at that ghostly hour of night, a heavy knock resounded through the stillness of their old house. They were just thinking of going to

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bed, like little birds in the tree-tops who know no other night than darkness and no other day than light.

For a while I waited, hearing many whisperings and patterings of feet on the other side of that big, heavy door. Then at last the small, square grill opened in the big panel, and through the mesh of it I saw a white face and a still whiter veil.

“Who are you?”

Such a timid voice, but nerved to courage as though a score of listeners were at her back ready to catch the note of fear.

I said my name. By name alone they knew me then. I had never been to Cappoquin before.

“Oh, indeed; will ye wait a moment, please?”

Now the voice was filled with reassurance and excitement. Let me explain: I am an Englishman—by birth a Protestant—I had come from London and by marriage was distantly related to one of the sisters within.

Now, if you know aught of an Irish Convent, you may understand the excitement that raged at the announcement of my name. Never had I known my name cause so much commotion before—never will it again. I felt quite important.

Presently the Little Sister came back. I saw her face through the grill once more. I saw other peering faces peering out of the darkness beyond.

“We can’t receive any visitors now,” she said in the voice of one who repeats.

“Oh, I don’t want to come in now,” said I, and I gave the message that had been told me. To my mind, then, it seemed rather forcing hospitality to ask oneself to breakfast. But when I heard her answer, I suppose I must more or less have understood. It was an event. It sent them to bed with hearts eager for the morrow. I wonder how many of them slept that night. You know how sparrows chirp and chatter in the ivy on a stormy night. They made me think of that.

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The next morning we breakfasted at nine. They were all ready for us. The table was laid in the parlour where visitors are received. That parlour! How well I remember it, with its print of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius IX, its coloured pictures of the Sacred Heart and its little plaster statue of the Virgin. Through a window looking out on to their beautiful old garden, pushing its way in shapeless patches through the long twining trailers of clematis outside, the sun shone brazenly into the room.

One by one the nuns were brought in to meet us and I was introduced. I could see others yet to come, whispering excitedly in the passage outside the door. There was Sister Mary Ignatius, Sister Mary Conception, Sister Mary Katherine, Sister Mary Cecilia—oh, it is impossible to remember them all, they were all in a way so much alike. Their brogue was charming; their manner delightful. Those who were left in the room vied with one another in waiting

on us. One of us wanted more butter, and you should have seen the look of pleasure on that Sister's face who discovered it first!

For breakfast there was bacon and eggs—there is always bacon, or, as they call it, ham and eggs. And the eggs were fried and burnt and the bacon was stringy and coarse, but the way they served it and the way they waited behind our chairs and talked, made it the most wonderful bacon and eggs in the world.

If only I could see them all in that convent again. If only I could even see them in the new sepulchre on the hill! But they would not know me now.

When breakfast was finished and grace was said, we were taken over the convent, the room where they worked, the refectory where they had their meals, all plainly furnished with good, clean, varnished deal, and in each room on the white walls, the picture of some saint, or the portrait of some eminent authority in the Holy Roman Church. No-

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thing was there to bring them a thought of the great world outside that little grating in the door. The cells where they slept, of course, I was not allowed to see. But I fancy I can picture them. Little three-foot truckle beds all partitioned off one from the other. White walls there as well, with perhaps the picture of the saint whose name they had taken at profession over each bed. No, I think perhaps not the picture—not the picture if the Mother Superior were wise. For the pictures would have glass which in some lights glass can be turned into the service of a mirror, and in a convent a mirror is an abomination. Not the picture then, unless perhaps the pictures were without their glass.

Then last of all the chapel—the most inspiring little chapel I ever saw. It was only a small room, the window covered with transparent-coloured paper representing in pictures the lives of the various saints. The little altar was decked with flowers, fresh

with the dew on them, out of the beautiful old garden. Candles burnt here and there before some little shrine. Everything was very little, very tiny, very sweet. One of the windows had been opened at the top, to let in the sunny air that was blowing over the beds of flowers in the garden outside, and the only thing that seemed large and cumbersome in that little chapel was a heavy bumble-bee that had found its way in through the open window and was buzzing from one flower to another on the altar.

For some moments I stood there in the doorway entrance. I have said I am by birth a Protestant, but what is religion and what is birth when one comes to such a corner in the world as this? God is everywhere. He was shining through those transparent-coloured papers, then, into that little chapel, lighting up the varnished deal stalls of the choir nuns, illuminating them with iridescent blues and reds and golds, shining in quiet and gentle contemplation, quite heedless of

LITTLE SISTERS OF MERCY 65

whether that pretty altar with its fresh white flowers held or did not hold the Actual Presence in the minds of those who worshipped there.

We came out again and, as they closed the door behind us, shutting in that wonderful sunlight alone with its prayer, Sister Mary Conception whispered in my ear—

“It’s a pretty little chapel, isn’t it; but shure, it’s too small. We’re going to have a much bigger one when the new convent is built.”

I watched the enthusiasm in her face, but at that moment I could say nothing.

From the chapel we were taken out into the garden. It must have been many years old, that garden. The trunks of the apple-trees were gnarled and knotted; the vegetation was so thick and luxuriant that the paths were almost hidden beneath its growth. Lavender bushes rose high to the shoulder and brought their scent to your very nostrils as you passed by. The pinks were growing

heavily over all the walks, and the goose-berry bushes at the bottom of the garden were like a forest in their exuberance.

It was all ranged upon a slope, was this old garden, descending from the terrace on a level with the house, down through many gradations of flower beds and fruit bushes to the walk overshadowed by trees at the end.

On that terrace by the house, the Sisters walked during their hour of contemplation. How many feet, I thought, had daily trod that gravel path, beating out a measure to what thoughts? God knows. How many feet I wondered had not trodden that path day by day, year by year, getting feeble and more feeble until at last they had ceased and some other feet, younger and stronger, had begun the same measure to perhaps just the same thoughts, expressed in a little different way, no doubt—but the same thoughts by the time they had sped upwards and reached their Master.

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This musing was still in my mind when I found myself alone with Sister Mary Conception and, following it to its natural end, I asked her where they buried their dead.

"Come along this path here and I'll show ye," said she.

Along the path we went—the path down which many a Little Sister had trod her last measure on earth to that contemplation which is so strangely undisturbed.

Behind a thick yew hedge we found the tiny cemetery. An iron railing was round about it. There, under the shadows of the yew trees, the grass grew high and green—a deeper green than I had ever seen before. Although the sun was high and fierce in the heavens, there was a cool breath from this little place. It seemed as though a gentle shower of rain had just been falling and the grass was still damp and wet.

And there, just lifting their heads above the grass, as crocuses might grow in early spring, were the white gravestones of all

those Little Sisters of Mercy who had gone to sleep. In the form of a cross they were, with a ring encircling the four angles; and on each ring was inscribed in black letters the name of each Little Sister who lay beneath—her name, the date of her renunciation of the world without and the date of departure from the world within. On the cross itself were simply the letters R.I.P.

I took off my hat and stood there. There was no need to speak. Speech more often destroys thought than not, and some thoughts there are which in speech become mutilated. We said nothing.

It would be almost impossible to express the thousand things that crossed my mind. This Little Sister beside me, she would one day be lying there. I wondered could she, in her mind's eye, see the small white wooden cross and the black letters inscribing the name—Sister Mary Conception? I wondered as she stood there, looking at those simple white crosses with me, did she call

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back the faces of those she had known, give them the life and breath of her imagination and speak to them in a silence which I could know nothing of. I wondered whether those Little Sisters who lay there so still and silently in the cool green grass could see us as we stood beside them and if they could, then surely how each one of them must say: "The earth is a peaceful place to sleep in, and this is the most peaceful corner in the world."

I broke the silence then, and with it broke the thread of all my thoughts.

"You may well," said I, "write on each grave—Rest in Peace! I never saw a place so full of rest or so quiet in peace."

We turned away then. We walked back down the path by which we had come. Half way down the path I stopped her as a thought entered my mind.

"And what will you do with them when you go to the new convent on the hill?" I asked.

"The graves?"

"Yes."

"Oh, we shall bring all the coffins with us, and bury them up in the grounds of the new convent."

I looked at her amazed.

"Come back," said I, "for a moment—just for one moment come back."

We retraced our steps to the little graveyard.

"Now," I said, "tell me—do you really mean that you are going to take rough spades and dig up those bodies as they lie?"

"Yes, shure, we can't leave them behind. The constabulary are going to take this house when we leave it."

The constabulary! Just God! And perhaps into that very room where the chapel then was some drunken brawler would one night be brought, on whose filthy breath the name of the Mother of God would be sacrileged.

"And you're going to submit these sleep-

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ing things to that indignity!" said I. "You're going to wrench them from the place where they have slept so quietly all these years and drag them up to that dry barren earth on the hill where not even the shadow of a yew-tree will fall to shelter them!"

"Shure, we can't leave them behind," she repeated.

"But why do you want to go at all?"

"The house isn't big enough for us."

"And do you think these here complain? Do you think if they could be asked they would not a thousand times sooner remain?"

She made no answer.

"And do you want to go to the new convent?"

"We do indeed. We're looking forward to it immensely."

"*We* do! Yes, but you yourself? You talk about our mustard on the refectory table, you talk about our scissors in the workroom,

but there is a single person behind every one of you and that's the person I'm speaking to now. Do *you* want to go?"

She looked nervously up into the yew-trees, and nervously down into the grass.

"Shure, I suppose I shall be sorry to leave here," she replied in a whisper.

"On the night when you're digging these bodies up," said I, "will you be surprised if the Little Sisters down there rise up and say the same. But I believe they'll be more sorry to leave than you."

One night in January—late one night—you might have heard the rumbling of carts and the tramping of horses' feet in the Main Street of Cappoquin outside the convent door.

Presently that door opened and there came out into the street two men, bearing a heavy burden between them. With what gentleness they were able, they lifted it into the cart, then disappeared again within the house.

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Fourteen times they passed in and out, bringing a burden with them each time. At last the door closed altogether, the carts started through the village and the Little Sisters of Mercy began their journeys once more—to the gaunt and barren sepulchre on the hill.

IV

THE GLORY OF A WOMAN

HAIR! You have never seen such hair; and not the quantity alone, but the quality too. It was the colour of amber, but as transparent as if the sun had set in the heart of those heaps of it and left a ray of its light in each single hair. It hung heavily over her shoulders down below her waist; heavily, and yet there was a lightness about the texture of it which took away all sense of burden.

And there she sat, in the window of that hair-restorer shop from ten o'clock in the morning till half-past six, when the premises closed and the people went home from their work.

She was raised on a little dais to the full view of the passers-by in the street. A cheap red curtain, hung with brass rings on a bamboo pole, was stretched in front of her. To the window she turned her back, showing



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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her wonderful hair. And there all day she sat, sewing or reading, eating her tasteless midday meal when they brought it to her at one o'clock, till that welcome moment when the boy in livery, with the name of the hair-restorer in gold braid on his collar, began to carry the shutters through the shop.

You never saw her face. The thick brown hair clustered over her shoulders and hid the slightest profile of it. The red curtain that protected her from the inside was as careful of its secret. No one had ever seen her face but the proprietress of the shop and that boy in livery who carried out the shutters. But when you stood out in the street and looked at her marvellous hair through the window, you could just imagine how wonderful that face must be, crowned by such a halo.

It was a dark evening in November, the clocks were close upon the stroke of half-past six, when two elderly ladies made their way down the street, holding tightly to their reticule bags and umbrellas with one hand

whilst they rigidly gripped their skirts with the other. One, lifting her skirt a little higher than her companion, displayed the hem of a white unfrilled linen petticoat.

Outside the window of the Chevaline hair-restorer shop, they paused.

"Oh—Mary! Look!"

Mary turned towards the window with an impatient gesture.

"Mary—isn't that hair wonderful!"

Mary's hand rose instinctively to the little nob of grey hair which clung tightly to the back of her neck.

"I wonder if it's her own," she said.

"Why, of course."

"But you're so credulous, Lucy—you'd believe anything."

The accusation was quite true: Lucy would believe anything. She was all the happier for it. It is so. The happiest are always those who believe.

They stood for some time before the shop window, debating the wisdom of buying a

bottle of Chevaline. Mary was strongly against it.

"These sort of things are terrible frauds," she said—"I've tried them. They didn't do me a bit of good."

"Oh, but your hair's splendid, dear," said Lucy—"I only wish mine were as good. Mine comes out in handfuls every morning. I really think I ought to buy it."

You gather, and rightly, that Lucy was in favour of buying a bottle of Chevaline. She would have bought anything with a catchy advertisement. It is for her and her type—and the world is full of them—that the art of advertising is so keenly competitive. To tell the honest truth, Lucy wanted more to see the face of the lady in the window than to buy a bottle of the patent hair-restorer. When you come to London for a fortnight and stay in a boarding-house in Bedford Place, you want to see all that there is to be seen, and, if you are a woman, the hidden face of another woman is as likely to attract

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your curiosity as anything. The difficulty was to get into the shop without Mary knowing her real reason. But, God bless you, Mary required no telling. She was just as curious, only she was ashamed even to admit it to herself.

By a series of surreptitious peepings and peerings, Lucy had discovered that it was impossible to see the woman's face from outside.

"She seems to be sewing," she said—"I suppose, poor thing, it's very trying to have to sit there all day doing nothing. It is wonderful hair, though. I wish I had hair like that."

"I don't know that I do," said Mary sternly. "I'm quite satisfied with what I have. In just the same way I should not care to be very beautiful. I always say beauty is a curse."

It was true. She did say that. She frequently said the things which others had said before her, and alluded to the sayings as her own. This particular saying about

beauty, she was really fond of and said it continually, in self-defence, with a snappy tone in her voice.

Lucy looked up with a gentle smile.

"I don't think we need worry, dear," she said amiably; "God's been very good to us like that, and in the matter of hair He's positively blessed me."

"Do you mean I'm ugly, Lucy?"

"Oh—no, dear. You know I wouldn't say such a thing. But this girl's hair is really wonderful. Look at the colour of it!"

"Yes—the colour of it; that may be all very fine. But you may be sure the girl herself is not what she ought to be. There can't be much modesty in her to sit in a window like that."

Well, of course, that made both of them all the more curious. It was certainly worth one-and-six for a four-and-sixpenny bottle to go in to see her now.

"Well—I think I'll go in and buy a bottle," said Lucy.

Mary knew then that her sister had made up her mind. She could afford effectually to cloak her curiosity under a proper and censorious attitude of mind.

"Lucy," she said sternly—"you don't want that stuff any more than I do. You're just anxious to see that girl—that's all."

The guilty look in Lucy's face admitted it. She really felt very ashamed of herself. But there it was. Perhaps she was more worldly, more prone to temptation than her sister Mary. It could not be helped. That was the way God had made her.

She was just about to confess that all that Mary had said was true, when a blind man, knocking piteously with his stick down the pavement, ran into her.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he said.

"Oh—it's my fault," said Lucy—"I'm very sorry, I didn't notice."

She felt in her reticule bag, and brought out her well-worn leather purse—Mary's, which had been bought at the same time,

still looked quite new. Lucy always kept her things shockingly. In one of the pockets of the purse she found a sixpence, and slipped it into the blind man's hand.

"Thank you, miss, indeed," he said gratefully; "thank you, and would you be so kind as to tell me where I am?"

"You're in Oxford Street," said Lucy sympathetically.

He smiled.

"Oh yes, miss—I know that. I know that. But what part of Oxford Street?"

Mary's suspicions were aroused.

"How do you know you're in Oxford Street?" she asked.

"Well—I never leave it, miss. Oxford Street is a long street. It takes me mostly all day to walk up one side and down the other—three times as I do."

"Poor man," said Lucy—"and can't you see at all?" She felt the tears in her eyes which she imagined must also be in his.

"No, miss. The sight of both eyes was

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taken from me when I was working in a smelting furnace up in Lancashire. That's ten years ago, Miss."

Lucy screwed up her eyes. The pain of it!

"And have you no one to take care of you?" she asked.

"Oh yes, miss—my wife takes care of me when she's not working."

"Oh," said Mary—"you're married? I suppose you were married before you went blind?"

"No, miss. I've only been married two years. Two years last January."

"Then you've never seen your wife," said Lucy sadly.

"Never seen her, miss, no—but I know what she's like. She's very beautiful indeed, miss."

The two sisters looked at each other.

"May I ask how you know that?" said Mary incredulously.

"Well, miss—it's like this." He changed

his stick from one hand to the other. "When you go blind, Providence seems to compensate you with a keener sense of touch and a keener sense of understanding. I know, for instance, miss," he added, turning in Mary's direction, "though I didn't see your face, that you didn't believe what I said just now. I could hear that in your voice. And it's the same way with my wife. I know by her voice that she's beautiful. I can feel that she's beautiful, too, when I pass my hand over her face. And then, you see, miss—most of all—I know her mind. That's what's really beautiful about her. She's always telling me that she's not pretty to look at, but I don't believe that, miss. You see, I know her mind. But you didn't tell me where I was, miss, and I should be much obliged. It's getting close to half-past six, and my wife meets me at a certain place near about this time. I don't want to miss her."

Lucy volunteered the information, beginning by describing to him where he was not—

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a process of reduction to impossibility, known only to the logic¹ mind of a woman—until she conveyed to his mind where he actually was.

“Well,” she said finally—“do you know the hair-restorer shop where they sell Chevaline?”

He smiled, nodding his head.

“Oh yes—I know it, miss. I know all the shops mostly by this time. You can learn to see a lot in ten years, even if you are blind.”

“Well—you’re just outside that shop,” she concluded.

“I see. Thank you, miss,” and he ambled off, beating his way patiently with his stick.

Mary looked after him with an enlightened expression of scepticism.

“I expect all that about his wife,” said she, “was made up—just to get our sympathy.”

“Oh, Mary! I’m sure that it wasn’t!”

“I expect it was. You’re so ready to

believe anything you hear. Why, you believe the newspapers. He may not even be blind at all. How could he know of this shop—Chevaline—if he was blind?”

“Oh, I can't think that,” said Lucy pitiably.

Mary turned away from her sister impatiently.

“Well, I'm not going to stay outside this shop any longer,” she said emphatically.

“Either you go inside or we'll go on.”

This was hazardous. But she knew Lucy. There was really very little risk.

“Well, come inside,” she said meekly.

And in they went; the door closed with a rattling sound behind them, but the head of the woman in the window with the wonderful hair moved neither to the right nor to the left.

The people outside still continued to pass and repass—all sorts and conditions of men and women, hurrying about that endless and mysterious business called life. Some looked in the window as they passed. Some

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stopped and peered with attitudes of curiosity to see the woman's face. Others passed without a glance in her direction, having seen her too often and forgotten to wonder what she was like.

Then came two clerks—the modern youth with his cuff-protector and carefully-thought-out tie. With obvious intent, they stopped before the shop window.

"There you are," said one, in a voice of a showman—"gorgeous— isn't it?"

"Yes—I suppose it is a bit wonderful. And she's rather a nice little thing, is she?"

The first clerk laughed.

"No—I was only coddling," he said—"I don't know her. I'm going to—I'm going to speak to her this evening when she comes out."

"You're not?"

"I am."

"But you don't mean to tell me that you take the rest of her for granted, because she's got hair that's a bit out of the way?"

"The glory of a woman, my friend," said the first clerk sententiously, "is her hair."

"Yes—as long as she keeps her back to you. You expect something more when she shows her face. What's this girl like?"

"I don't know. You can't see her face. She always holds her head down—she's always sewing. Her hair partly covers her face too."

"Well," suggested his companion, "why don't you go inside the shop and find out?"

"I have, but they've got a curtain up in front of her. I wonder what time they close."

The door of the shop opened, and the two sisters came out again into the street.

"Well, I'm afraid your curiosity wasn't satisfied," said Mary acidly—acidly because of her own disappointment.

Lucy, carrying a bottle of Chevaline under her arm, ruefully shook her head.

"No, I didn't see her," she said as they walked away. "Did you?"

"No—I had no desire to." She looked

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back critically over her shoulder at the two young clerks. "It was you who were anxious, and it's cost you one-and-six."

The two clerks looked after them and laughed—then they turned back to the window.

"She certainly has wonderful hair," said the second clerk; "but it leaves me cold after that."

The blind man walking laboriously down the pavement, stopped as he heard the words; then took up his position by a lamp-post near by and watched them with his sightless eyes.

"You don't expect me to wait with you till she comes out, do you?" the clerk continued.

"Oh, you may as well. It'll be rather a joke."

"What are you going to say to her?"

"Oh, I don't know. Leave it to the inspiration of the moment, I suppose. I should think a drink—Grenadine and Kirsch, perhaps—would probably suit the case."

"Tap on the window," said his companion;
"see if she turns round."

"Shall I?"

"Yes—go on!"

The blind man leant forward on his stick, straining his head to listen. He heard the tap. Had it had its desired result? No.

"Tap again," said the clerk.

He tapped again.

"We shall have the old woman out from the shop in a minute," he said. "She won't turn. I expect she's used to that sort of trick."

The blind man smiled.

"Is it half-past six yet?" said the first clerk.

His companion looked at his watch.

"Just," he said. "Look!" The figure inside the window was rising to its feet. "She's getting up—she's going. They're going to close."

The blind man leant forward still more. His body was strained and tense. The two

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young men outside the window waited, wondering if she would turn. At first she just stood upright, shaking her head so that those long strands of hair were freed and fell more loosely on her shoulders. Then she stepped down from her little platform, lifted one hand and pulled aside the cheap red curtain and, as she disappeared into the shadows of the shop, turned her head, looking over her shoulder at the two young clerks outside.

It was the worn and weary face of a tired woman of thirty-eight.

They gazed at each other.

"God! what a face!"

"I told you so."

"Why, she looks nearly fifty."

"Yes—it takes time to grow hair like that.

Do you want to meet her now?"

The other turned away in disgust.

"No thanks—come along."

His companion laughed, and they moved away into the stream of pedestrians. The blind man heard them laugh as they mingled

with the crowd, but still he waited there, still leaning against the lamp-post.

Presently the shop boy with the gold-braided collar came out with the shutters. The blind man heard the noise of them as they rattled up against the window. He stood erect. The door of the shop opened once more. The tired woman came out and crossed the pavement to his side, taking his arm.

"Been waiting for me long, dear?" she asked. "I saw you outside just now when I got up to go. I've finished making the little jibber. It'll be so pretty. She'll look lovely in it."

He made no reply.

"Are you tired?" she continued; "you don't say you're glad to see me. Aren't you glad the day's over and we're going back together?"

"Did you see two men when you stood up just now?" he asked, taking no notice of her questions.

"Yes."

"Do you know them?"

"No, dear."

"They were going to wait and speak to you when you came outside."

"I've never seen them before," she replied.

"You can hear I'm telling the truth—can't you?"

He nodded his head.

"What did they say?"

He took her arm, and they walked away down the street.

"What did they say?" he repeated. "Oh—they talked like fools, like beasts, like men. When they saw your face they said—oh, they said you looked as if you were fifty. They said you were ugly." He stared with his sightless eyes up into her face, and clung closer to her arm. "But I know better—don't I, dear?" he added. "I know better. I know your mind, they don't. I know what the glory of a woman is—they don't—how could they? They're only men."

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A COMEDY OF CLASS

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WHEN an American star comes over to England, be it in musical comedy, or what the more select of the profession call—legitimate drama; she either packs up her trunks and shuts the doors of the theatre within a fortnight, or she stays much longer than she ever intended to.

With the case of Julie Farr, in *The Bowery Girl*, it was instantaneous success and a visit which, beginning with a prospect of six months, ripened into three years before she set foot again in New York.

Now success in musical comedy brings with it the flood of notoriety that carries on its torrents the flotsam and jetsam of all sorts and conditions of Society—from prime ministers to prime fools. In order to keep that notoriety as long as she can, the musical comedy actress has a smile and an

intimate signature from an illiterate pen for every one. As a rule, she has a big heart, a generous hand and an inward contempt for all this flare of nonsense that is talked about her, before her face and behind her back. But deeper still than the contempt is the passionate love of it all—the love of the cat for the warmth, as it stretches itself full length in the light of the sun.

When Julie Farr made her hit in London, she became the recipient of all such attention as this. The front rows of the stalls were lined with the young blood of England. Few nights went by but what some garland of flowers was not passed over the footlights by the man who manipulated the drum in the orchestra; picture post-cards poured into her dressing-room every night for signature, sent by the less intrepid of her admirers. Unhesitatingly, it must be admitted that this was a success; for even the Church courts the medium of the picture post-card.

It was a night some twelve months after

Julie's first appearance in London. *The Bowery Girl* had had her run, and now some musical comedy by English writers had taken its place. No money had been spared to lavish the most costly of dresses upon this little heroine of the moment. In each succeeding act, she looked more beautiful than before. Add but the talent of impudence to the gift of beauty and you have men importunate.

Emma, the silent and discreet dresser whom she had brought with her from America, was quietly performing her duties whilst Julie was on the stage. A knock fell on the door; then the call-boy thrust in his head.

"A letter for Miss Farr," said he.

Emma took the envelope, laying it on the dressing-table and continuing with her work, as though there had been no interruption whatsoever. After five minutes, the call-boy knocked again; again thrust in his head.

This time, he handed in a great bouquet of roses—

“For Miss Farr,” he said in the same matter-of-fact voice and, in the same imperturbable way, Emma took it, bringing it across to the dressing-table. Before she laid it down, she hunted amongst the heavy foliage, extracted a note with no expression of surprise, laying it by the side of the other epistle on the dressing-table. Presently, she filled a jug with water from the washing-basin, dropped the roses in and placed them on a small table.

At the sound of an approaching voice, singing with trilling notes in the passage outside, Emma put aside the work she was doing and opened the door. Julie Farr strolled with swaying hips into the room.

With an easy grace she swung herself into the chair before her dressing-table and gazed at her reflection in the mirror. A mirror has no more admiring or grateful

friend than a woman, so long as it befriends her.

When at last, in its reflection, Julie saw the bunch of roses on the little table, she jumped up on the impulse and buried her face in the blossoms.

"Oh, how lovely! How lovely!" she exclaimed with the true note in the voice.—
"How unlike the stage!"

In quite another tone of voice, she asked if there were any letter.

"On the table, miss—the top one came with the roses."

"From the little boy Harrison, I suppose."
She tore it open.

"I suppose so, miss."

She read the letter aloud with exclamations and remarks that might have hurt the feelings of that little boy Harrison had he heard them.

"Dearest in all the world—you said you wouldn't have any more flowers passed over in front——" Julie turned to Emma:

"The little fool used to send 'em every night. Directly I'd finished the Cigarette Song, up they'd come, bobbing over the big drum!

"I'm sending round. I hope you don't mind. Perhaps it's as well you did stop me. The pater and mater are in front to-night; though they're as blind as bats. I've a sort of vague suspicion that they may be coming round to see you. You remember what I told you the other day. You're coming out to supper to-morrow night. Don't forget that. God bless you.'"

She threw down the letter with a laugh.

"God bless me! Sentimental little idiot!"

She picked up the other letter. "When did this come?"

"Just before the roses, miss."

Through the second letter, she read in silence; then burst out into a loud peal of thrilling laughter.

"What do you think of this?" she cried.

"Little Vibart's pater and mater are coming to see me too. Oh—by all means! There is a phrase that suits the occasion. I won't quote it. It's out of date."

She sank back again in her chair and began that polishing of her nails which to some women is their only recreation. Then the telephone bell rang. She looked up as Emma went to answer it.

"Yes—yes—who? All right—hold the line a minute."

"Who is it, Emma?" she asked.

"Sir Charles Vibart, miss."

Julie rose.

"This is the father," she said, and she took the receiver with a smile.

"Good evening—yes—so I understand. Oh yes—yes, I do. We've known each other quite a long time. Nearly five weeks. Well—I don't know that you've chosen the best time. Yes—I can spare you a few moments in the interval after this act—certainly—but doesn't it seem a pity to come away from

the piece you're at? Rotten, eh? You ought to have come here. What? Oh, well, see it again. What? Oh yes—certainly—bring her with you. It's better to have a chaperone. Good-bye."

She hung up the receive "He's coming with his wife in the next interval," she said. "You'd better go up when this act's over, Emma, and bring them down."

She turned, as Emma crossed the room in answer to a knock on the door. A card was handed in by the diligent call-boy. Emma brought it to her and waited imperturbably while Julie read it.

"Mr. Joseph Harrison—44 Acacia Road, St. John's Wood. There's his wife there too. Go and fetch them, Emma."

Emma departed and Julie laughed as the door closed. These are the real comedies of musical comedy. They all take place off the stage. As the door opened again, she turned to face her visitors with a smile of welcome.

Then there entered Mrs. Harrison, a short fat lady dressed in black, the evening bodice cut with so much propriety that it almost looked improper for it to be cut at all. The skin of her face was coarse. It seemed as though she might have ruined her complexion in the past over a cooking-stove. She was a gentle creature, however, who had taken her vow of obedience at the altar of matrimony and had never swerved from it by a hair's breadth. There was no doubt that Mr. Harrison was the dominating personality in that *ménage*. He was a tubby little figure of a man, who might have made his money by tasting things, growing fat in the process. A heavy gold watch-chain stretched tightly across his waistcoat, a large diamond stud protruded from his shirt-front, a large diamond ring glittered on the little finger of his left hand. His other hand was continually engaged in jingling the money in his pocket.

"Good evening," said Julie.

They both said good-evening—they both bowed.

“We’ve just been watching your performance,” began Mr. Harrison with assurance. “Delightful! Positively delightful!”

“It’s very kind of you to say so.”

“Not at all—not at all—I know a good thing when I see it. That’s my business.”

Julie bade them both sit, with gestures that charmed the eyes of the simple-minded Mrs. Harrison.

“Have you come to see me on business?” she asked.

“Oh no!” said Mrs. Harrison quickly.

“Excuse me, my dear,” her husband flatly contradicted—“this is distinctly what I should call a matter of business. I put sentiment entirely out of the question.” He looked sideways at Emma. “I call this private business.”

“Emma,” said Julie, “go and get me another syphon of soda-water.” Imperterbably, Emma departed.

"We've come to speak to you about our son," said Mr. Harrison as soon as the door had closed.

"You know Archie, don't you, Miss Farr?" said the fond mother. She would have her sentiment. She put it into her eyes, into her voice as she asked the question.

Julie smiled to her sweetly. "You mean the little boy with the bad complexion who comes and sits in the front row of the stalls every night? Archie Harrison?"

The fond mother looked pathetic. She saw this matter of the complexion in the light of a personal failing of her own. "His complexion is not so very bad," she pleaded to this young lady whose cheeks were the colour of a rose just budding. "That spottiness will go. He'll grow out of that."

"So that's the way the young cub spends my money," said Mr. Harrison irately. Complexions were nothing to him, as will be seen.

"Oh, you mustn't be hard on him," begged the fond mother.

"Oh no—don't be hard on him," said Julie sweetly. "He's a very generous boy. He brings me a lovely bouquet every night. It was he who gave me those beautiful roses. Aren't they glorious?"

Mr. Harrison looked at them with a vicious eye and grunted—"Roses in February!" Mrs. Harrison fondled the petals. Her son had bought them.

At last Julie came to the sense that they were wasting time. "And what is this private business, Mr. Harrison?" she asked.

The tubby little gentleman coughed. He pulled vigorously at his white waistcoat.

"Well—I'm a self-made man, Miss Farr," he began.

"So I had imagined," she replied charmingly.

He looked at her with a quick question. "Forty-three years ago I was an errand boy in a soap-factory."

"Really!"

"I meant to get on. I've always meant to get on. Am I boring you?" He did not wait for her answer. He did not hear her gentle "Not at all." He had said all this thousands of times before. Mrs. Harrison knew it off by heart. It scarcely ever varied.

"It took me five years to discover that, in the manufacture of soap, they used ingredients that made the soap last longer than was necessary. It took me five more years to discover the use of another ingredient which would make a tablet of soap be used up twice as quick. You're sure I'm not boring you?"

"Not in the least," replied Julie sweetly.

"I use soap myself."

"That's just the point!" said he with a shaking forefinger. "We all use soap. That was the conclusion I came to. I set to work then to put on the market a tablet of soap one penny cheaper than any other quite as good, but which would be used up

twice as quickly. If you have a head for profit and loss, you can grasp my meaning."

"He was making eight shillings a week as the errand boy," put in Mrs. Harrison mildly. Her husband had forgotten that point for the first time in his relation of the story.

"Now I'm worth ten thousand a year. It's not much, I know, but——"

Julie gently interrupted. "Is it—forgive me, but I don't quite follow you—is it that you want me to use the soap?"

"No—no—it's not about the soap. I'll send you a dozen cakes to-morrow if you like, but you probably use it already without knowing. No—it's about my son."

"Oh yes." Julie settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

"I've given Archie a liberal education to fit him for the best. He's been to Oxford. I paid his way while he was there. I made it easy for him. He's mixed with the very best of them. Now he's got to do a little for his own advancement."

"I fancy," said Julie gently, "that if he had a little work to do, it might improve him."

"Oh no—it's not work. He's not got to work. He's got money, why should he work? Work's a degrading thing for a man with education. What's the good of making soap, if you've been brought up on Latin and Greek? They're no good for business. But they have the knack of making a man a gentleman. That's what Archie's got to be."

"Then what do you expect him to do with his education?"

Mr. Harrison swelled out his chest. He summed up the beautiful young lady before him and gathered together all his courage.

"Marry!" he said emphatically. "He's got to marry and he's got to marry the right woman. He's got to marry the sort of woman who will plant him in the set that I've kept him in at Oxford. It cost some money, I can tell you. They're very exclusive. But they liked Archie. I always gave

him plenty of money. Oh yes, they liked him. Those sort of fellows don't borrow money off a boy unless they like him. And there's that young Lord Granthorpe owes him money still."

Julie threw back her head and laughed. There is an enchanting picture post-card of her in just such a position.

"I'm awfully confused," she said through her laughter, "between soap and education and matrimony. Which do you want me to consider most seriously?"

Mr. Harrison gained confidence. "That's simple enough," he said cheerfully. "Archie wants to marry you. I'm not surprised—upon my soul, I'm not surprised. When I saw you on the stage—when I saw you down here——"

"You came to the conclusion that I was more respectable than you had imagined."

Mrs. Harrison felt frightened of the issue. "Oh no, my dear Miss Farr," she interposed quickly. "Not that—only—only——"

"Be quiet, 'dear!" said her husband. "The whole truth of the matter is, Miss Farr—to put it bluntly—Archie's got to marry position. You're at the top of your tree, I know; but it's a different sort of tree that i want him to climb."

A dangerous look leapt into Julie's eyes. "And you want me——?" she began.

"I want you to refuse to see him. Don't let him write letters to you—don't—well, don't in fact know him. He'll get over it. I've no doubt he'll get over it. So will you."

A motherly sentiment swelled in Mrs. Harrison's throat. "I'm sure you'll get over it, dear," she whispered.

"And of course," added the little tubby man with an expression in his eyes remarkably like a wink—"of course, you've got plenty of admirers."

Julie rose to her feet. She gazed at them in amazement. But one never knows how moods in a woman will change. Another moment of silence, and she would have over-

whelmed them with the impulse of her contempt had not a knock fallen upon the door and the shrill voice of the call-boy outside reached them, crying her name.

Then she burst into uncontrollable laughter and, seizing her wrap, ran to the door.

"I shall see you again in the interval," she said merrily. "I'm only on for ten minutes now. You can come down when the interval is nearly over."

She was gone! They stood, these two tubby people, looking at each other in quaint bewilderment.

"Why did she laugh like that?" asked Mrs. Harrison below her breath.

"Oh—you never know with a woman," replied Mr. Harrison sententiously; "especially an actress. They laugh sometimes to conceal their deepest feelings."

When Julie returned after the act, Sir Charles and Lady Vibart were already waiting to see her. They bowed as she entered. There is nothing quite so distant, yet at the

same time quite so polite, as the English aristocrat when he comes to seek a favour of a commoner. Julie came forward and shook hands with them. But the shaking of hands only increased the atmosphere of formality. For a few moments they talked nothing but commonplaces. At last Julie turned with an expression of forbearance to Lady Vibart.

"Well—what can I do for you?" she asked. "Your husband's voice sounded most terribly important over the 'phone—I see now,"—she turned her eyes brilliantly on Sir Charles, who sat screwing his monocle into his eye with an oppressive frown—"I see now, it's his general manner." Sir Charles dropped the frown—the monocle with it. "But what can I do?" she added.

"I want," said Lady Vibart very properly, "to speak to you about my son."

"Oh yes, I know—the little boy who has such a nice refined voice—and such terribly bad manners."

"Bad manners!" exclaimed Sir Charles.
"Bad manners—Bramley?"

"Bramley! Bad manners?" echoed Lady Vibart.

"Oh, I don't mean that unkindly," said Julie charmingly. "He'll get over it. I expect he contracted them at the University. But what about him?"

Lady Vibart felt uncomfortable. She looked gracefully at ease.

"Well," she began slowly—"it's rather difficult. I've—I've come on his behalf—no doubt he's told you—poor boy."

"Told me what? He's told me so many things."

"Well——" she hesitated. Sir Charles coughed and screwed in his monocle. "He's very unhappy."

"Really? Oh, I'm sure that must be his digestion. He eats terrible things at supper. He ought not to eat supper at all. At his age he ought to be in bed at half-past eleven. I don't think one ought ever to eat a meal

unless one does some work just before to justify an appetite. Why don't you let him see a doctor?"

"Ah—you don't understand."

"No?"

"No—he's in love. He's devotedly attached to you."

Julie laughed aloud, throwing back her head, displaying that wonderful curve of her neck. Sir Charles dropped his monocle the better to see her.

"Oh yes—but he'll get over that. It's only a phase. When a young man comes down from the University, it becomes the completion of his education to wear out the steps of a stage-door and the nap off the seats in the front row of the stalls."

Lady Vibart controlled the desire to curl her lip. It required a conscious and deliberate effort, but she succeeded. "Ah, you don't take it seriously," she said graciously. "You probably have so many young men admiring you."

"No doubt you have!" exclaimed Sir Charles. "No doubt you have!"

A twinkle crept into Julie's eyes. "And you want me to take it seriously?" she asked.

"We hope you will."

"But do you think it advisable to so hamper his young career at the very commencement?"

"Hamper it!" exclaimed Sir Charles. "Hamper it! My dear Miss Farr——!" He received a look from his wife and said no more.

"I don't think one can possibly look at it from that point of view," said the anxious mother. "Bramley is going into the Diplomatic Service. The friends you have in this country——"

Julie's eyes lit with intelligence. "Oh—I see. You mean Lord Hepworth?"

"Yes—I believe he's a friend of yours—isn't he?"

"My oldest in this country—my best."

"Exactly," Sir Charles broke in—"exactly."

There's no more influential man in the whole of the Diplomatic——”

He became the recipient of another glance from his wife and the word—Service—died away in the back of his throat.

“Ah—now I think I understand,” said Julie, rising to her feet. She crossed to the door and opened it. Emma was sitting on the stairs outside. She bade her go and bring Mr. and Mrs. Harrison down to her room. Then she turned back to her guests. “To be perfectly plain,” she remarked—“you want me to marry your son.”

“He'll be a disappointed man for the rest of his life if you don't, Miss Farr.”

“Not so disappointed, I hope, as to ruin his chances in the Diplomatic Service?”

“I'm afraid he'll take no further interest in anything.”

“Ruin his chances utterly,” added Sir Charles. He kept his eye rigidly turned from his wife.

“Well,” said Julie, “I see that I must tell

you exactly how I stand." A knock rattled on the door. She moved slowly towards it. "I'm going to introduce you to two of my most influential acquaintances. Influential—of course—not in the Diplomatic way. One would scarcely call them diplomatists. Their influence lies in wealth." She opened the door. "Come in, Mrs. Harrison—come in." And Mr. and Mrs. Harrison walked into the room.

"I want you," she continued, "to meet two acquaintances of mine: Sir Charles and Lady Vibart—Mr. and Mrs. Harrison."

The tubby little man came forward at once and gripped Sir Charles's hand.

"Charmed," he exclaimed—"charmed!"

"I am sure you will be very glad to know each other," Julie went on, smiling from one to the other, "especially when I explain the position. You know Sir Charles Vibart by name, of course, Mr. Harrison?"

"Know him? Oh yes. He sent up his name for the Board of Directors when I

was putting my shares on the market. We were sorry we couldn't accept you, Sir Charles."

Julie smiled again. "And do you know Mr. Harrison by name, Sir Charles?" she asked.

"Harrison? Harrison?" he repeated. "No—the name sounds familiar."

"There are three hundred and forty of that name in the Trades Directory," piped Mrs. Harrison from the back. Julie gave her her sweetest smile.

"Well then, now let me explain," she began. "Mr. Harrison makes soap, Sir Charles. He makes it cheaper than any one else, but it lasts half as long—consequently, he is now worth ten thousand a year. Some of that, his son—a little boy with a bad complexion—spends in coming to see me here at the Globe Theatre every night—buying me roses and taking me out to supper. He gave me those roses this evening—aren't they lovely? But Mr. Harrison is rather afraid

that I might take it into my head to marry his son—then, don't you see, the ten thousand would be wasted. Their purpose is to buy little Archie—the boy with the bad complexion—a position in society; so they have come to beg me not to see him any more and they feel sure that both he and I will soon get over it.”

Her face was wreathed in smiles as she bowed to Sir Charles. Then she turned to Mr. Harrison.

“You say you have heard of Sir Charles, Mr. Harrison,” she went on sweetly—“then there is no need to tell you that he makes nothing. He has a little son too—quite a nice little boy with the most charmingly refined voice I think I have ever heard, but, oh—such bad manners! Now, in my profession here—this silly nonsense of singing foolish songs and painting one's face—I make about five thousand a year; moreover I have a good many friends—men of influence in the world in which Sir Charles moves. Now, Lady Vibart”—she turned, giving that lady

a gracious smile—"is very afraid that I shall not return the devotion of little Bramley—the boy with the charming voice and the bad manners—so she and her husband have come to beg me to marry him."

Once more she turned and faced them all.

"Now doesn't that strike you all as being very quaint—very amusing—very instructive? Perhaps it doesn't, but it is—and I'll show you why."

She took down two photographs from the wall—two from amongst the many that hung there—and handed one to Lady Vibart.

"That's a photo of my husband, Lady Vibart," she said sweetly. "It's not as good as it might be. I think it's got a bit spotty, because really he has a very good complexion indeed."

Turning to Mr. Harrison, she gave him the other—

"And that's my eldest son. He looks awfully cross there, but you know what

photographs are like. He really has the most charming manners in the world."

She stopped and studied their faces in silence. Then came the sound of the call-boy's voice—

"Miss Farr—curtain up!"

"You must excuse me now," she said, bowing to them all. "I'm wanted on the stage."

VI

AN IDYLL OF SCIENCE

THE world has grown some few of its grey hairs in search of the secret of perpetual motion. How many, with their ingeniously contrived keys, have not worn old and feeble in their efforts to open this Bluebeard's chamber, until their curiosity sank exhausted within them? You count them, from the dilettante Marquis of Worcester, playing with his mechanical toy before a king and his court, Jackson, Orffyreus, Bishop Wilkins, Addeley, with the rest of them and, beyond arriving at the decision of the French Academy—"that the only perpetual motion possible . . . would be useless for the purpose of the devisers," you are drawn to the conclusion that mankind shares curiosity with the beasts below it, calling it science lest the world should laugh.

You have now in this idyll here offered

you the story of one who found the secret, and showed it to me alone. Have patience to let your imagination wander through Irish country lanes, strolling hither and thither, drawn to no definite end, led by no ultimate hope, and the history of the blind beggar who discovered the secret of perpetual motion shall be disclosed for you; all the curiosity that ever thrilled you shall be appeased, feasted, satiated.

There was not one in the country-side who knew his name. Name a man in Ireland and you locate him: Murphy, and he comes from Cork; Power, and he comes from Waterford. Why enumerate them all? But this blind beggar had no name. There was no place that claimed him. With that tall silk hat of his which some parish priest had yielded him, with his long black coat which exposure to the sorrowful rains of a sad country had stained a faded green; with his long crooked stick that tapped its wearisome, monotonous dirge and his colourless red

kerchief knotted round his neck, he was a figure well known in three or four counties.

No village owned him. At Clonmel, they denied him; at Dungarvan, they disowned him; yet the whole country-side, at certain seasons of the year, had heard that well-known tapping of the crooked stick, had seen those sightless eyes blinking under the twisted rim of the old silk hat. For a day or so in the place, he was a well-known figure; for a day or so they slipped odd pennies into his sensitively opened palm, but the next morning would find him missing. Where had he gone? Who had seen him go? Not a soul! The rounded cobbles and the uneven pavements that had resounded to the old crooked stick would be silent of that tapping for another year at least.

But had chance taken you out into the surrounding country, and had it taken you in the right direction, you would have found him toiling along by the hedges—oh, but so infinitely slowly!—his shoulders bent, and

his head nodding like some mechanical toy that had escaped the clutches of its inventor and was wandering aimlessly wherever its mechanism directed.

How it came to be known that he sought the secret of perpetual motion, is beyond me. It was one of those facts about him which seem as inseparable from a man as the clothes that belie his trade. You saw him coming up the road towards you and the words "perpetual motion" rushed, whispering, to your mind. About the matter himself, he was sensitively reticent; yet he must have told some one—some one must have told me. Who was it? Some inhabitant of the village of Ardmore must have spread the story. Who could it have been? Foley, the carpenter? Burke, the fisherman? Fitzgerald, the publican? Troy, the farmer? I can trace it to none of these. I cannot remember who told me; and yet, when each year he came round for the ceremonies of the Pattern Day, when they honoured the patron saint, I

said as I saw him: "Here is the blind beggar who tried to invent perpetual motion." The idea became inseparable from the man.

With each succeeding year his movements became more feeble; his head hung lower as he walked. You could see Death stalking behind him in his footsteps, gaining on him inch by inch, until the shadow of it fell before him as he walked.

There were times when I had struggled to draw him into conversation; moments when I had thought that I had won his confidence; but at the critical juncture, those sightless eyes would search me through and through and he would pass me by. There must have been a time when the world had treated him ill. I fancy, in fact, that I have heard such account of him; for he trusted no one. Year after year, he came to Ardmore for the festival of the Pattern and, year after year, I remained in ignorance of his secret.

At last, when I saw the hand of Death stretched out almost to touch his shoulder, I

spoke, straight to the point of the matter, lest another year should bring him there no more.

He was walking down from the Holy Well, where for the last hour, upon his tremulous knees, he had been making his devotions to a saint whose shrine his unseeing eyes had never beheld. This was the opportunity I seized. For the length of many moments, when first I had seen his bent and ill-fed figure, rocking to and fro with the steps he took, I had made up my mind to it.

As he reached my side I slipped a shilling into his half-concealed palm. So do we assess our fellow-kind. The instinct is bestial, but ingrained. Honour, virtue and the like, we only call them priceless to ourselves; yet it takes a great deal to convince us that they are not priceless to others. I priced my blind beggar at a shilling! I watched his withered fingers close over it, rubbing against the minted edge that he might know its worth.

"That has won him," I thought.

What a brutal conception of God's handicraft! A shilling to buy the secret of perpetual motion! Surely I could not have thought that Nature would have sold her mysteries for that! I did. There is the naked truth of it.

"Who gives me this?" he asked, still fingering it as though it yet might burn his hand.

"A friend," said I.

"God's blessing on ye," he answered; and finally his fingers held it tight. There he kept it, clutched within his hand. No pocket was safe in the clothes he wore to store such fortune as that.

"You're leaving Ardmore after the Pattern, I suppose?" I began.

His head nodded as he tapped his stick.

"There's something I want to ask you before you go," I continued.

He stopped, I with him, watching the suspicion pass across his face.

"Some one has told me——" I sought desperately, clumsily, for my satisfaction now—"some one has told me that you have found the secret of perpetual motion. Is that true?"

The milk-white, sightless eyes rushed querulously to mine. All the expression of yearning to see seemed to lie hidden behind them. A flame that was not a flame—the ghost of a flame burnt there, intense with questioning. He could not see—I knew he could not see; yet those vacant globes of matter were charged with unerring perception. In that moment, his soul was looking into mine, searching it for integrity, scouring the very corners of it for the true reason of my question.

I met his gaze. It seemed then to me, that if I failed and my eyes fell before his, he would have weighed and found me wanting. It is one of the few things in this world which I am glad of, that those empty sockets found me worthy of the truth.

"Who told ye that?" he asked.

I answered him truthfully that I did not know. "But is it the case?" I added.

He shifted his position. I could see that he was listening.

"There is no one on the road," I said. "We are quite alone."

He coughed nervously.

"'Tis a matter of fifteen years since I first thought the thing out at all. Shure, I dunno what made it come into me head; but 'twas the way I used to be working in a forge before I lost the sight of my eyes. I thought of it there, I suppose."

He stopped, and I prompted him.

"What principle did you go on?" I asked. "Was it magnetism? How did you set to work to avoid friction?"

This time, as he looked at me, his eyes were expressionless. I felt that he was blind. He had not understood a word I had said.

"Are ye trying to get the secret out av

me?" he asked at length. "Shure, there's many have done that. They all try and get it out av me. The blacksmith—him that was working at the forge where I was myself before I lost the sight in me eyes—he wanted to make the machine for me. But I'd known him before I was blind, and I hadn't lost the knowledge with me eyesight."

"Are you makin' it yourself, then?"

He nodded his head.

"As well as I can," he continued. "But, shure, what can these fingers do wid feeling alone? I must see what I'm doing. Faith, I've all the pieces here now in me pocket, only for the putting of 'em together; and, glory be to God, I've tried and tried, but they won't go. Ye can't do it with feelin' alone."

Some lump threatened to rise in my throat.

"Good God," I thought, "this is tragedy!" And I looked in vain for sight in his eyes.

"Would ye like to see the pieces?" he asked.

I assured him that the secret would be safe in my keeping were he so generous.

"No one about?" he asked.

"Not a soul!"

Then from his pocket—one by one—he took them out and laid them down on a grass bank by our side. I watched each piece as he produced it and, with the placing of them on the bank of grass, I watched his face. These were the parts in the construction of his intricate mechanism that he showed to me—a foot of rod iron, a small tin pot that once perhaps had held its pound of coffee, a strip of hoop iron, and an injured lock.

"There!" he said proudly. "But if I were to give these to that blacksmith, he'd steal the secret before my face. I wouldn't trust him with 'em, and I working these fifteen years."

I thanked God he could not see my face then. The foot of rod iron! The small tin pot! The injured lock! They stared at me in derision. Only they and I knew the secret;

only they and I could tell it as they themselves had told it to me. His wits were gone. Perpetual motion! The wretched man was mad!

Perpetual motion out of these old rusty things—rusting for fifteen years in the corners of his pockets! Perpetual motion!

But here the reality of it all broke upon me—burst out with its thundering sense of truth. Mad the blind beggar might be; yet there, before my very eyes, in those motionless objects, was the secret of perpetual motion. Rust, decay, change—the obstinate metal of the iron rod, the flimsy substance of the tin pot, always under the condition of change; rusting in his pocket, where they had lain for fifteen years—never quiescent, never still—always moving, moving, moving, in obedience to the inviolable law of change, as we all, in servile obedience to that law as well, are moving continually, from childhood into youth, youth to middle-age, middle-age to senility, then death, the last change of all!

All this giant structure of manhood, the very essence of complicated intricacy compared to that piece of rod iron, passing into the dust from which the thousands of years had contrived to make it. What more could one want of perpetual motion than that?

I looked up into his face again.

"You've taught me a wonderful lesson," I said quietly.

"Ah," he replied, "it's all there—all there—the whole secret of it—if only I had the eyes to put it together!"

If he only had the eyes! Have *any* of us the eyes? Have *any* of us the eyes?

VII
THE DEAREST POSSESSION

THE dearest thing that a man can call his own—his manhood—fetches but a poor price when once he is compelled to offer it upon the market. Truly, Nature does her best to compensate. Little by little she takes away the garments of shame with which he has clothed himself; she tempers the wind, as Sterne would have it, to the shorn lamb. In time to come, then, so temperate is the wind that he needs his garments of shame no longer.

He suffers less than when the garments of shame had clothed him. And since in these days we would alleviate suffering, it were as well not to criticise Nature, our greatest philanthropist.

Some men there are, however, who refuse all aid; hold fast their pride to the very end, and not one gentle effort of Nature to divest

them of their garments of shame can ever avail. With dogged persistence they cling to them to the very last. Doubtless they feel that shame is the receipt for the manhood they have sold—and who knows? Perhaps they might one day buy it back.

There are not many such men to be found, for it is a fine and a rare mould from which such men are cast. Once, indeed, I knew one, and this was his story.

I walked down Regent Street late one night. The restaurants were giving up their dead—I cannot think the habitués of those supper-rooms are really alive. In their sables and their ermine, with their pearl studs and their jewelled waistcoat buttons, the young women and the young men were pouring forth.

“Good Lord!” said a young man—“a free country, and at half-past twelve they pack us off to bed like a lot of kids.”

His gaze as he said it had been directed to the dim, drab figure of a man who stood,

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one foot upon the kerbstone, the other in the gutter, selling matches. For the instant it made a contact between the two—one of those momentary relationships which exist between human beings, making us all in one brotherhood.

I looked from the one, with his opera hat stuck jauntily on his head, to the other with his torn cap, his faded coat, and his little handful of match-boxes. For the moment a look of unutterable despair, and not only that, but an expression of bewildered incomprehension, stole into his eyes. And so plainly you could see what they meant.

I pushed a way out of the crowd and came towards him. He might have known that I was a probable customer, yet never did he thrust out that expectant hand which it must be so hard to refrain from doing when the thousand people have passed you by unnoticed.

“You heard what that gentleman said?” said I, as I took my box of matches.

He nodded.

“Hard to understand, isn’t it?”

He nodded again.

“Don’t they want ter go to bed?” he asked.

“It’s the law of Nature,” said I—“that you never want what you haven’t earned. They’ve been in there eating supper, but not one of them have wanted it.”

He looked at me with a wondering expression and then he said just one word—

“Gawd!”

For a little while longer we talked, and then I gave him the supper he needed, the bed God knows he had earned.

“Come to-morrow morning,” said I, “and clean my windows.”

It was this way that our acquaintance began. Once a week he came to my rooms and cleaned the windows. My goodness, how those windows shone!

I learned much about him in those days. I learned much, too, of what it is really to

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be poor, to stand upon the kerbstone selling matches, counting your chances in the faces of the passers-by. I feel that I know more what it must mean, that singling out of a kind face from among the thousands who approach you through the day; that swift investment of your small capital of hope, risking it all upon the one likely face. Nearer it comes and nearer. In another moment, if you have read those gentle eyes aright, there will be another penny to add to the four in your pocket which the last six hours have brought you. Now! Now! And then in silence they have passed you by. Your little fortune of hope has been spent. Was ever the bursting of the South Sea Bubble like to this!

Yes, I think I learnt from him what poverty can mean. Whenever I could, I got him employment. It was never permanent. There seemed to be no steady work to do. Yet it relieved that monotony of selling matches in Regent Street; it gave him the

bed he had earned, the supper he had paid for a thousand times and again.

At last one day he came to me with news.

"I've got a job," said he, as he breathed upon the windows.

"Splendid!" I exclaimed. "But why do you say it in that tone of voice? Isn't it permanent?"

"It is if I like," he replied.

"But you don't like?"

For the moment all my belief in him was shaken.

"It is always the way with these poor," said I to myself. "In the heart of them they hate work."

"Would you like ter earn yer living," he asked, "by dressing up in woman's togs, by walking up and down the streets in broad day, makin' a guy of yerself, makin' people laugh at yer, and say what a blessed fool yer was? D'yer think yer'd like a job like that, sir?"

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I knew in a moment what he meant. They had come to him to offer him money for the dearest possession that he had. They would have him sell his manhood.

“This is an advertisement?” I asked.

He bent his head.

“The pantomime—they want a lot of Widow Twankeys—or whatever they call ’em—peradin’ the streets. And the pay ain’t bad—worse luck!”

“And you don’t want to refuse, and you don’t want to do it?”

He stood for a moment in deep thought.

“I’d do a good deal,” he said at last; “but supposin’ any one saw me I knew? It’s not only putting on the togs——”

“They do that on the stage,” said I.

He hadn’t thought of that. I saw it cheered him.

“There’ll be a man dressed up as Widow Twankey when the pantomime comes out,” I went on.

“Yes,” said he; “but ’avin’ paid to come

and see 'im, they'll think 'e's clever. It's more'n they'll think of me."

It was a nice point, that. I realised that one can appreciate fine distinctions when one's manhood is at stake.

"Then why are you going to accept it?" I asked; for from the tone in his voice I knew that he was.

There was a woman, it seemed. I wonder how many men have sold their manhood for such a price as that. There was a woman—oh, less—she was a girl. For three months he had been taking her out in those few spare moments when the poor can cease from labour. For three months he had been spending on her those few spare coppers which in a golden day fall from the rich man's table.

"Does she know you can't get work?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"I've been kiddin' 'er I've got a job," said he; "a reg'lar job. She mightn't take

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ter me if she knew I was only sellin' matches. But she thinks no end of me now. I've told 'er I can't afford to marry just yet—but as soon as I get somethin' reg'lar——”

“And now,” said I—“you've got it.”

“Yus”—and he pulled out the duster with his two hands till I thought it would tear. Oh, it was all so easy to see. You would think, would you not, that the only problem of the poor was to live? But they have their other little problems just the same as we.

“I'm so afraid what she'll think of me when she knows,” he went on. “If I tell 'er I'm playin' the fool in the streets—dressin' up in old woman's togs—p'raps she won't look at me again.”

“You know very little about her if you think that,” said I.

“Do you know much about women?” he asked in return. “What their 'usbands is, is what they are.”

“Not always,” said I; “some of them go one better than that. If their husband is a

politician, some of them would act as if they were the wife of a Prime Minister. Only some of them, though. The best, and that's the majority of them, don't care what he is, so long as he's theirs. If you're afraid of her knowing, is there any reason why you should tell her? A man's work is his own, thank God. It isn't his wife's."

"But what would I say?" he asked helplessly. Invention was no quality of his.

"Tell her," said I, "anything, so long as she doesn't find it out. But if I were you I'd tell her the truth."

It was the best advice to give him, but he did not follow it. He was selling his manhood and, in marrying her, doubtless it seemed that he was offering her something that he did not possess, and so he tried to make the best of it. He told her vaguely that he was working in a printing office down Fleet Street way, and he chose the rooms where they lived, off Hammersmith, so that she might never find him out. A compositor, he

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said he was, for he had a friend pursuing that trade, and knew what tricky work it was.

"We set up the type for all sorts of books," he told her; "books same as you see on the railway platforms what the folk read when they're goin' on journeys. It's a fair job, too, I can tell yer. We 'ave to correct the mistakes what the writers make, punctuation they calls it, and grammar and all that."

So much his friend, the compositor, had told him. But doubtless he added to it. In the joy of being believed, I can conceive of him putting all sorts of additions to his story. It is a great help, when telling lies, to be believed.

And all the time he was marching in a row of Widow Twankeys up Oxford Street, down Regent Street, through Piccadilly, and all those thoroughfares where they hope to catch the idle eye of the idle rich.

One day I came across them all. There they were, stepping towards me in their black alpaca skirts, a sorry sight for men to behold.

I realised what might happen, so I turned my face to a window that he might not see me when he passed. It was a study in shame and shamelessness to see those men go by. On the lips of one was an idiotic grin—a smile, as though to say, "I know I'm a fool—but what's it matter? It's all in the day's work."

Upon the face of another was a scowl of sulky indifference; yet another joked and laughed with the people on the pavement as he passed. But I saw the look of shame in him. He tried to hide it behind his jokes, but the scar of it was there. He strove—perhaps not in vain—to hide the self-contempt he felt. Maybe he hid it successfully even from himself.

And then, the last one, came my friend. From a mirror within the shop, I could see his face as he went by. The blood burnt suddenly in my forehead as I saw the suffering of shame upon his lips. Never once did he look up, never once turned his glance in

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the direction of the pavement; but with down-cast eyes walked as one who has no right to call himself a man. I think I knew then, more than I shall ever know again, how truly tangible and great a thing one's dignity is. He never saw me, I am glad to say, and on into the blur of traffic they marched in their sorry procession.

Now this is the end of my story, for it has an end in view. No man suffers such tortures as he suffered without termination. And the end of shame is generally to find that things are not worth being ashamed about.

It chanced that his wife came up to the West from that far, far West that is no West at all. And there, in Regent Street, as you may well suppose, she came face to face with the Widow Twankeys. Such was the advertisement that you must have looked. There was created in you, at the sight of those unsexed figures, the same morbid curiosity as urges those to see murder trials.

By the side of the pavement she stood as

they all filed past and, into the face of each she looked, drawn, unconsciously perhaps, to that study of human nature which is in all of us.

At the sight of her husband, her breath was caught between her lips. His name as she tried to say it would not come—there was no sound with it. It died away in her throat. For a few moments after they had passed she stood there motionless; then, beginning to feel the doubt of it all, she followed them.

From street to street they went on their eternal journey, and street by street as she followed at their heels she pieced it all together in her mind. That look which she had seen in his face as she recognised him, that was the keynote of it all; from that she solved her mystery.

And then, when she understood—for of every creature in the world, women have that greatest gift of all—when she understood, she turned back and silently went home.

It was that night, when their little candle

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had been extinguished, when she lay close to his side holding his hand in the darkness, it was then—but not till then—that she whispered what she knew.

I can hear the “Oh, Gawd!” as I know it must have been wrenched from him, and I know what she said to him. He told me days and days afterwards.

“I’d do as much,” she had said, “if I’d the pluck—I’d do as much for you.”

“Well,” said I, when he repeated it, “I know that much about women——”

“You know nothing better than that,” he said.

“I do,” returned I—“but I shan’t tell you now.”

VIII
THE ACTUAL PRESENCE



It was near midnight. The little chapel of San Domenico was still in gloom. Soon they would be coming to light the candles on the altar. With burning tapers and with pattering feet, they would awaken the slumber of the silent darkness, driving shadows before them into the corners and the crevices as rats are driven before the flames. Then there would be the scintillations of a hundred points of light, finding reflection in every surface of the glittering brass that decked the altar. You would see the bright colours, the blue, the red and the gold of the Virgin's robe as she stands upon her altar nursing her Divine Babe. Every part of the little chapel would be lit with a burning brilliance, for it was the night of Christmas Eve, and as soon as the clocks should strike the hour of twelve the Padre would perform Mass in honour of

those first moments of Christ's birth and the new year of the Church on earth.

But as yet everything was dark and still. The red lamp, swinging with scarcely perceptible oscillations before the High Altar, cast no light, but looked like a great drop of blood illuminated into radiance.

And in the Tabernacle breathed the Presence of God, sleeping, yet seeing all, abiding there at rest until the quivering moment of Elevation.

Presently came the chapel-woman, Gigia Antonietti. Her key grated in the lock of the big door and the sound of it leapt in startling echoes through the empty chapel, stirring the Presence of God.

Closing the door, she found her taper and lit it, bearing it down between the rows of benches to the altar where, without emotion, with a face impassive and as white as stone, she bowed her head.

One by one, then, she passed from candle to candle, making a new little star in the

darkness wherever her taper rested on the white pinnacle of wax. One by one the stars grew in number, until all was a glowing firmament of light.

At last every candle was lighted and, with face still impassive, with eyes dullened by a heavy look of bitterness and despair, Gigia surveyed the work she had done. There was no pleasure to be seen in the expression of her face, none of that human pride which, when beautifying with flowers or with light the House of the Almighty, preens itself pardonably before God. Only in her eyes was to be found a sullen indifference, a thankless relief that her work was finished.

And in the Tabernacle breathed the Presence of God, sleeping no longer, yet still abiding at rest until the quivering moment of Elevation.

Gigia crossed herself kneeling before the altar. For a while her lips were still. In the desolation of the bitterness that was in her mind, she could find no words to pray.

The conception of prayer is warped—in a groove. The ages have made it a formality. But in the heart of the chapel-woman there was no formality left. Bitterness had become a disease in her. She was unable even to frame an Ave or a Pater Noster with her lips. Her beads rattled through her fingers like pebbles in the bottom of a rushing stream, but there was no song of a prayer as there is of the stream to accompany them.

At last her lips began to move; slowly at first in spasmodic sentences. By degrees her thoughts became more fluid and her lips moved quicker, pouring forth in a strange silence the passion in her soul.

“O God!” she began, and her thin hand clutched the shawl that crossed her bosom. “How can I pray? How can I say the prayers that I’ve been taught when I don’t believe? I don’t believe! How can I believe? You have taken my belief from me! Once I believed, as all these believe who are coming to Mass to-night. They will say the

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very prayers that I used to say—the prayers I can say no longer. How can I pray? You have taken all prayer from me, just as You have taken my husband and my son—both in one night. O God! How could You do it! Weren't they more to me than they ever could be to You? I am trembling, alone. They supported me; they helped me; they loved me. You are Almighty. What were they worth to You, compared to my need of them? Young men, both, full of life, full of health! What are You doing with them there that You must take them from me? How can I believe in Mercy, in Justice, in Kindness now that You have stolen them from me? What is left for me to believe in, now that they are gone? I am only human, only weak and foolish and tired. My mind has no strength to grasp the Almighty power of Your wisdom. So long as they lived, so long as they loved me, You were wise, You were wonderful. They were my belief in God. And You have taken

them from me. Their ignorance was Your wisdom, their love Your Mercy. And now You have taken them from me. And what is left for me to believe? Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! I come and light these candles at Your altar, but it is only because You have stolen the bread out of my mouth and told me that I must still live on. I only light these candles, and sweep this chapel, and clean the brass upon Your altar because I must feed my body. That is the cruelty of it. I come and decorate Your altar, You who have stolen everything from me. But I do not believe as these will believe who are coming to Mass to-night. They believe, because they have got their husbands and their wives, their sons and their daughters; but steal them from them as you have stolen them from me, threaten their peace, disturb their happiness and watch if they believe then. They will become just the same as I am who believe in nothing! Nothing! Nothing!"

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The saliva gathered at the corners of her mouth as she closed her lips and bent her head to silence. The door of the chapel had opened and shut. She could hear the steps of the Padre hurrying up between the benches. He passed her where she knelt, looking down with a smile of benign pleasure at the sight of her, intense and silent upon her knees.

When he had disappeared into the little sacristy to array himself in his vestments, she rose slowly to her feet. What she had felt she had shown to God; but she could not show it to the Padre. It was too fierce; an element such as fire, which she locked away in that brazier of the heart where all fires burn.

Presently the little cracked bell of the chapel began its tolling. She passed down between the benches again, opened the doors and gave entrance to those who were waiting outside. In a short space of time the chapel was full; every bench was occupied. Two

hundred heads were bowed devoutly in two hundred pairs of hands. As the little bell ceased tolling, you might have heard in the stillness the murmured rattling of beads passing between hidden fingers.

At last came the acolytes, little olive-skinned boys with deep black hair and brown eyes glittering in the light of the candles. With his hands held before him as in prayer and a devout expression upon his face, the Padre followed them and the Mass began.

And in the Tabernacle breathed the Presence of God, aglow with consciousness, abiding there at rest until the quivering moment of Elevation.

Gigia took her wooden chair near the altar and, hiding her face, as were the others, within her hands, tried vainly to pray as they were praying. But the spirit of prayer had left her. Her whole mind was consumed with the disease of despair. When she rose to her feet for the reading of the Gospel, the words she heard had lost their meaning. God

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was no longer merciful; God was no longer just. He had wrenched all mercy and all justice from her heart; had buried them at sea with the bodies of her husband and her son. Watching the devout faces of those around her, she wondered how much of their faith depended upon ease and how pleasing it was in such dependence unto God.

Now the moment of Elevation was drawing near. The Padre had unlocked the Tabernacle and taken from it the Chalice with its silken coverlet.

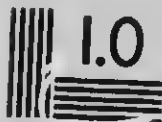
And the Presence of God was stirring in the world. A tremor passed through the bodies of those who waited as the sacred vessel stood before them.

Then, as the Padre faced his people from the altar steps, there came a quivering vibration through the whole chapel, as though a heavy vehicle had passed upon the cobbles outside. You might have heard the sigh of the inward-taken breath as those two hundred people listened to its passing.



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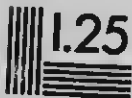
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With troubled eyes and voice just hesitating in his throat, the Padre began the words of the blessing. Before they scarce had passed his lips, the ground beneath them trembled like some sleeping animal troubled in its dreams.

The Padre stopped. A silence fell, more heavy and more muffled than a velvet cloth. The next moment it was rent with a thunderous roll of sound and the cry: "An earthquake! An earthquake!" from two hundred throats.

And from the altar the quickened Presence of God was watching with all-seeing eyes.

It was all a transfiguration of human beings into the lusting cries of beasts. As the pictures of the journeys of the Cross fell clattering from the trembling walls, two hundred animals were let loose from the binding cages of religion and fell upon each others' throats for freedom. With knives snatched from their pockets the men hewed their way to the door. Women, with hair matted in

the blood of wounds that gashed their faces, bit with their teeth at anything that came in their way. Little children were crushed beneath the trampling feet. All in one living, moving, seething mass, it surged its way to the doors.

The Padre wrung his hands; he cried to them to stay, to leave their safety in the hands of God. But there was not one in all that sweating mass of humanity who heard his voice. Then, as the earth shook itself once more and the doors of the chapel burst down before the crowd, the love of life crept in a terror into the little Padre's eyes. He looked this way and he looked that. He saw the cross above the altar totter like some drunken thing, then fall headlong, flinging its sacred burden far into the chapel. His eyes followed the pale white ivory figure of the Christ as it slid along the ground. He heard the muffled cries of those trampled underfoot, the bestial shouts of those still uppermost who blocked their way to the doors,

and then, turning to the little door that led to the sacristy, he fled, leaving Gigia Antonietti leaning against the trembling wall behind her, her eyes glazed in the sight of that slowly diminishing mass of loathsome humanity stamping its way through death to life.

Then on the altar turned the Presence of God to the woman who remained.

* * * * *

When they made their excavations of the ruins of San Domenico, they came with pick and with shovel upon the débris of the little chapel. The Padre was foremost amongst those who sought for the Sacred Chalice which had held the Blood of Christ.

"It must be found!" he cried pitifully, as stone after stone, rafter upon rafter was lifted. "It must be found!" he cried.

Presently there was a cry from one of the searchers as he dragged away the débris of a wall. The little Padre hurried to the spot.

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There lay the crushed and lifeless figure of Gigia Antonietti, the chapel-woman, and in the pulpy, shapeless mass of her hand was the battered cup of silver, studded with precious stones.

The Padre snatched it to him and tears of gratitude were falling from his eyes.

"Thank God!" he muttered within himself, raising his eyes to the blue sky. "Thank God! When the new chapel will be built this shall stand upon the altar so that they who see it may believe in the Presence of God!"

IX
GROWN-UPS

N

If you come to think of it, the children are eternally right when they make-believe. We do it ourselves through life only with toys that are more elaborate, more expensive and infinitely less simple.

In an age when marriage is so much more of a social contract and so little of a sacrament, one must make-believe with love. And that is the favourite game which the grown-ups play. It never becomes half so real as Red Indians. There is not in it that exhilarating sensation as when you hunt bears in the Alleghany Mountains and the grizzly beast crawls out of a canyon from under the nursery table with his awful hearth-rug skin bristling with anger. It is not fraught with such danger as when you set forth in a boat to discover that river which sweeps through the bowels of the earth into a country inhabited

by men and women whose skins are blue. The make-believe of love, as the grown-ups play it, has no such thrilling adventures as these; but it is make-belief nevertheless, and married people who have entered into the social contract with those whom they have scarcely ever regarded with the eyes of love, play it until they are old and tired.

There were two who played at it once and with such issue to their make-believe as I shall set about to tell you. She had married and he had married. Her husband went his own way, which concerns us not at all in this story; his wife had endeavoured to win his affections, but through jealousy had lost them. They were both disconsolate, children without playmates, when one day they met.

These meetings are much as those when children, passing through Kensington Gardens in the unyielding hands of their nurses, just glance at each other, approve and then are dragged away. Another morning

and they meet again. For a moment they slip from their nurses' grasp and a word is spoken.

"Hullo," says one.

"Hullo," says the other.

For the time being that is all. But there comes a day when their nurses are gossiping. It is then that they slip away behind the trees which circuit the Round Pond and there they play their make-believe.

So did these two meet, she with her nurse, he with his; both held in an unyielding grasp. They found each other's eyes as they passed by. In each of them was that same glance of approval, which is the beginning of the playing of all games. You may call it the cry of sex, but it is little more than that need of companionship between two people in a lonely world. What there may be in it of sex comes later. Nature is never importunate.

Later on they met again and spoke, spoke of nothing—little more than the "Hullo" of

one and the "Hullo" of the other. The greatest of games begin in such silly ways as these.

It came in time that they met alone—in Kensington Gardens, too. And when they play their games of love in Kensington Gardens, the grown-ups sit about on penny chairs under the trees. You may see them, as many as the babies there, you may see them in their hundreds. They grow under every tree like mushrooms. And late into the evening they sometimes sit till that dismal bell begins its tolling and the far-off cry—"All out—all out!" drives them like Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden.

They sat about on penny chairs under the chestnut trees, these two, and he told her the most wonderful stories in the world. It is not really so fascinating a game to watch as a circus in the long grass, or a pirate cutter sent forth upon the waters of the Round Pond, yet you will scarcely find one passer-by

whose eye does not turn into the corner to watch them as he saunters through the Gardens.

"If we had met, just three years ago," he told her one day—and this is one of the thousand ways the game of make-believe is begun—"if we had met, just three years ago, I wonder what we should have thought of each other then?"

She looked at him quickly—as quickly looked away. They had been discussing the future of China in the Far East, the likelihood of an amalgamation of East and West its possible effects upon modern civilisation, but more especially the changes it might bring about in the Christian religion. And then he said that—

"If we had met just three years ago, I wonder what we should have thought of each other then?"

It had so much bearing upon the political situation in the Far East! That is why, in this game, it is called the lightning gambit.

No wonder she looked at him quickly—no wonder she quickly looked away.

They went far into the game that day. He played it so well that she sat there silently upon her penny chair, staring down with troubled eyes into the grass beneath the chestnut trees, and her little heart was beating like a bird in a cage. It longed to be free. But there was no freedom for either of them.

It came at last that they believed they had met before, and, though he was a Roman Catholic and she was a Protestant, all difficulties had readily been overcome. Though the obstacles in the way of a Roman Catholic man marrying a Protestant woman are almost insurmountable—for the Roman Church declares that in matters of religion the woman has the greater influence of the two—yet he had easily surmounted them. A dispensation had been granted by the Pope. They were wed in a little Catholic chapel where all candles were put out, for the

Church will not shed its light upon such marriages as these.

Such realism as this is not difficult to introduce into the game, for it alters not one jot or tittle of the issue in hand.

"I think we might have the candles, though," she objected.

"They never do," said he.

"No—but it's such an insult."

"Oh, they don't mean it like that," said he. "Besides, it's what would really happen."

"But I'm allowing that we're not married in a Protestant Church," said she. "I think we might have the candles."

"But they never do," said he; "of course it doesn't matter, really. Only it's what would really happen."

She succumbed at last to realism, and the candles were blown out.

"It makes it seem as if they were ashamed of marrying us," she whispered when the last flame had been extinguished.

"They don't mean it like that," said he.

So they were wed, and together, under the chestnut trees, they set up house in Kensington Gardens. It was a beautiful little white house, in Kensington Gore. He raised some difficulty at first about the rent, but with an infinite power of tact she overcame it.

"I couldn't live away from the Gardens," she whispered. "After all, it was there we came to know, wasn't it?"

There was no gainsaying that. It was there they had met on common ground to play this marvellous game. And, after all, what did the rent really matter, however high it was? Except that a reasonable income is always another touch of realism in matters such as these. It were easy for any one to be happy on seven thousand a year; but love such as theirs could really be happy with seven hundred.

One morning, then, the blinds in an upper window of that little white house in Ken-

sington Gore were drawn. A doctor's brougham was at the door.

"What will you do?" she asked.

"I? My God! I don't know. I suppose I shall walk up and down outside till it's over."

That was exactly what he did do—paced the pavement, muttering to himself a thousand prayers of pleading for her welfare. Presently a nurse came to the door and beckoned him. That was her idea. He flew within. This was his.

"It was a girl," said she.

"No," said he quickly, "it was a boy. A fine little chubby chap."

Suddenly she saw what a splendid fellow he might be, and she agreed. It was a boy. They called him John. When next they met in the Gardens it had come to the day of the christening.

"We'll hire one of those *coupé* carriages," said he, "and we'll drive to the Oratory. I like the Oratory better than Farm Street."

She sat round in her penny chair and she looked straightly in his eyes.

"He's not going to be a Catholic," said she quietly.

And just as quietly he said—

"But he must."

She tightened her grasp upon her parasol.

"I didn't mind the candles," said she, "but I won't have this."

He flew to his realism again, for it is always in these games amongst the grown-ups that, when he is in difficulty, the man relies upon what is real.

"They'd never have granted the dispensation," said he, "if it hadn't been agreed upon that the children were all to be baptised Catholics."

"All?" she exclaimed. For this was not the last they meant to have. She had made it a condition that the next should be a girl. No wonder she made that exclamation.

"All!" she said.

"I'm afraid so," he replied.

"But how terribly bigoted!" she returned, and there was a sick feeling at the heart of both of them that this was a difficulty which could never be overcome. "That's the most bigoted thing I've ever heard."

"I don't suppose anybody 'ud know," said he, "if you brought up one of the girls to be a Protestant. She could be baptised again."

"Why not one of the boys?" she asked.

"Oh no, they *must* be Catholics," said he firmly.

She rose slowly from her penny chair. Her face was white, her lips were cold. Life was a most lonely and most terrible thing. She knew then that the little white house in Kensington Gore had tumbled to the earth.

"Of course, there's no more to be said," she muttered. "I couldn't allow a thing like that. The candles were bad enough. But I couldn't allow the other thing."

He rose as well.

"Does this mean you're going?" he asked.

She nodded her head.

"I have to meet my husband at lunch," said she. And then she turned away.

There is no doubt of it—the children must eternally be right.

X

KEATS AND ORANGE

THERE used to be capacious houses in Brixton; houses with large gardens, big lawns and dense shrubberies. They may exist still. In one of them—meticulously called The Cedar, because of the one tree of that order which grew in front of the house—lived the family of Beddoes. There were Mr. and Mrs. Beddoes and two daughters—Alice and Edith. The name Beddoes, the neighbourhood Brixton, and the house—The Cedar; from this you should know all about them. But it is of those things which you would never imagine that I am going to tell you.

Doubtless you can picture the tennis parties on the lawn at the back of the house, the sort of lawn it would be, the tennis net which had stood the rains of three winters and stood them badly. You can imagine the tennis balls they played with, their colour,

their bounce; the racquets they used of the most obsolete pattern, some which had reposed in the shrubbery all the year round and would never see the symmetry of shape again. You can conceive of the young gentleman who came there to play with Miss Alice and Miss Edith, and of the cries they uttered when a ball was actually sent over the net and bounced as you might have expected it would. You can fancy the tea-service brought out under the laburnum tree, the maid who brought it, and the little pleasantries that passed with reference to the sweetness of the tea when Miss Alice or Miss Edith poured it out. You can realise how eagerly Mrs. Beddoes watched all those proceedings from the drawing-room window, how she speculated upon the possibilities of the young men as future sons-in-law. But you cannot conceive of the hatred of Mr. Beddoes for those tennis parties, or how much he detested in silence these incursions of young men upon the privacy of his garden

in order that his daughters might enter the wedded state.

"What does it matter?" he frequently asked his wife—"what does it matter whether they marry or not? I can support 'em. They won't want for anything."

To which his wife replied that it was not a question of support at all.

"If my daughters can't find husbands," she said, "then there's something wrong with 'em—and if there's something wrong with 'em, then there's something wrong with me."

This was an argument, the force of which he never denied. Mrs. Beddoes always waited for his denial, but he never offered it.

"I suppose you think that's what it is?" she said one day.

"I've never contradicted you, Kate," said he, by which he subtly implied that he dared not, and that flattered her vanity.

The parties, however, continued until Mr. Beddoes found a means of checking them. He made it his custom to wander in the

shrubbery whenever they were playing. The tennis balls found their way there and, at various intervals, when the supply had been reduced to one, were hunted for with racquets for all the world like a crowd of beaters in a spinney.

Mr. Beddoes conceived the notion of finding them himself—finding and hiding them where they were safely out of reach. You cannot play tennis with one ball. The Beddoes girls tried to, but all enthusiasm soon went out of the game, and when that ball was lost, the party usually broke up. It came to be known amongst the young men about Brixton that the tennis at The Cedar was not worth while. They were so stingy about tennis balls. And so the seasons went by and the Miss Beddoes were never married. Undoubtedly there was something wrong with them.

Now whether or no it was borne in upon Mrs. Beddoes that there was something wrong also with her, it is impossible to say;

certainly she fell ill, and one day all the blinds in The Cedar were drawn. Mourning is a custom in this country as in most. In a great many cases it is an aid to the expression of feelings you do not possess. The man who really mourns hates mourning. It is a state of mind one would far rather not expose, having as little as possible to do with crêpe, jet, flowers and darkness. Mr. Beddoes did not mourn the loss of his wife, but, obedient to the custom of his country, and, above all, living in Brixton, he went into mourning. The Misses Beddoes did the same, spending long hours with their dressmaker.

There is a certain period for these matters, limiting grief to a day and adding a certain sense of decorum to the intentions of a man who would marry again. Society is offended if these limitations are not strictly kept. Mr. Beddoes strictly kept them. On the day after the period of mourning was over, he went up to a theatre in town and thoroughly enjoyed himself.

The play he saw was one which turned upon a marriage arranged by a matrimonial agency. Why so charming a lady should resort to such means for finding a husband, he did not question. She was charming, so charming, that, having heard of men who successfully made the acquaintance of stage ladies merely by sending up a visiting card to the dressing-rooms, he found sudden courage to do the same.

Directly the play was over, he made his way to the stage door, asking the door-keeper that his card might be taken up to the lady's dressing-room. Then, in company with two young men in faultless evening dress, he kicked his heels on the mat and read the fireman's regulations till he knew them off by heart. At last the swing door opened, and a dresser approached him.

"You want to see Miss Leyland?"

He admitted that he did.

"Is it on business?"

It swiftly passed through his mind that

this was just a catch phrase and he answered—"Yes."

The dresser retired, and presently came back.

"Will you come up?" said she.

Mr. Beddoes climbed the stairs, quickly making various sentences for the opening of their conversation. His brain worked swiftly but very ineffectually. By the time he had reached her dressing-room door the best sentences had gone out of his mind.

The difficulty of opening the conversation, however, was solved for him. Directly the dresser had left the room Miss Leyland said—

"You've come from Mr. Philips of the Princess Theatre?"

"Oh—no," said he.

She apologised.

"I had been expecting some one," she explained. "Then what do you want?"

When Mr. Beddoes had time he was a man of resource. It was only a man of resource

who would have thought of hiding the tennis balls. But when he had to act upon the moment, his brain gyrated like an autumn leaf. It did nothing else. In answer to her question, then, he said the first thing which came into his head. It was the only thing that was there; his real reason for coming to see her.

"Will you come out and have some supper?" he said.

Miss Leyland pulled her dressing-gown very tightly round her and looked, but could not speak, her amazement.

"Isn't there some mistake?" she said at last.

He gained confidence with her confusion.

"No," said he. "I've been seeing the piece. You look lovely on the stage——"

Before he could finish his sentence, she had rung a little bell beside her table, and the dresser came in.

"Show this man downstairs," said she. "If he tries to resist call the hall porter."

"Oh—I shan't try to resist," said Mr. Beddoes quickly—"I'll go all right. I'm sorry I made the mistake," and taking his hat, he left the room. This was evidently not the way these things were done.

"I wonder what Alice would say," he kept on asking himself as he went back to Brixton; "I wonder what Alice would say if she knew I'd been in an actress's dressing-room this evening?"

The definite result of this incident was merely to incline him seriously to the consideration of matrimonial agencies. The continual sight of his daughters, still unmarried, now girls of thirty-three and four, whose expressions were soured by their failure in life, was growing very irksome to him. He wanted a young face about the house. He liked hair that was brown in a woman—brown with faint threads of gold that would glisten under the light of the lamp as she played the piano to him in the evening. When Alice played the piano, and played it

badly, he could just see the strands of grey hair that crept up into the mass of dull brown upon her temples.

At last he began to buy the papers of matrimonial agencies, searching their columns for the description of a girl whom he might wed. In all of these proceedings he was silent and secretive. Alice and Edith knew nothing. A man who marries again has no sympathy from the children of his first wife. In their hearts they quietly question whether their father has a moral sense at all. Mr. Beddoes, therefore, said nothing, and when at last he had, through the agency, placed himself in communication with a lady, he gave as his address one of those places where all letters are kept for those people who are conducting a secret correspondence. The lady herself gave the address of the agency.

She was young—twenty-six.

“That is young,” she said in a letter to him—“young for a woman nowadays.”

Her hair was that very brown he admired

so much. She was, moreover, an accomplished pianist.

"I prefer a man," said she, in another letter where she replied to his question about his age—"I prefer a man who has passed the extravagances of youth. You say you are forty-five. Isn't that the prime of a man's life? You hint that you have been wild in youth. What man has not? When you say you have been to see actresses in their dressing-rooms, I do not blame you. Only there must be nothing of that sort of thing when we marry."

"She's a sensible woman," said Beddoes to himself when he read that—"and twenty-six is young—twenty-six is very young."

After a severe criticism of his reflection in the mirror, when he came to the unprejudiced conclusion that he looked not a day older than forty-five, he wrote to No. A, 6530, asking for a meeting, and signed his letter with the number which the matrimonial agency had allotted to him.

They were to meet at the National Portrait Gallery. She was to be looking at the bronze death-mask of Keats—"who," said he in his letter, "is my favourite poet. I know that his famous line must surely apply to you: 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.' You must love Keats with me. We shall read him together."

In case there were other ladies of twenty-six years of age, interested at that moment in the death-mask of Keats, she was to wear a patch of orange velvet ribbon in her hat.

"Orange," he wrote playfully, "is my favourite colour. It will go with your hair."

"I shall be there at the time you say," she replied. "Fancy your liking Keats and Orange too. I love them."

Mr. Beddoes ate but little breakfast that morning. A man of sixty years of age in sudden pursuit of Romance is apt to become breathless, at least in spirit. This breathlessness always has a disquieting effect upon the appetite. It seems as though there were not

time to eat. Mr. Beddoes found that to be the case on this particular morning.

"I am going up to the City to-day," he said to Alice as he departed, some hours before the appointed time. There was no need for this explanation of his absence: but when a man is doing a thing in secret, it seems he must openly tell a lie about it. A woman says nothing. Neither is telling the truth.

For the three hours which he had to spare, he walked through the most frequented thoroughfares alternately looking in the shop windows or at the various women who passed him by. His interest in women had suddenly become intense. Every one he saw he regarded as the possible applicant for a husband in the columns of the paper issued by the matrimonial agency.

"I wouldn't mind if it was that one," he told himself—"or that—or even that. This is no good. That's better," and so on with every woman he passed. His morning was fully occupied.

At last it came to the moment when with eager though somewhat nervous steps he entered the doors of the National Portrait Gallery. Inquiring of an official, he made his way up to the room where the death-mask of Keats reposed upon its pedestal. One might have thought that he knew all about it. In reality he knew nothing. That line from "Endymion" was the only line of Keats he knew. It was from hearing his daughter Alice speak of the death-mask and a belief that all young women like a touch of poetry in a man, which had led to his selection of this particular meeting place.

"I must read Keats," he said to himself as he climbed the stairs. Then he entered the room to which he had been directed. Only one person was there—the figure of a woman. She stood with her back towards him, looking down at the death-mask of Keats. Her costume filled him with delight. Undoubtedly it was new. She had bought it for this great occasion. It was all orange, but orange

as only a skilled dressmaker can employ so strong a colour; and there, in her hat, was the little bow of orange-coloured ribbon.

He looked quickly about him. Not even an attendant was in sight to spoil their first meeting. Undoubtedly a matrimonial agency is an excellent way of doing these things. And to think that just because he had said that he liked orange, she had had a dress made to please him. Orange and Keats. He vowed he would read Keats.

Once more he looked about him. Then he approached. At the first sound of his footsteps she never moved. One cannot be too careful in these matters. When he was quite close to her, she turned.

There are moments in life when the earth is far too solid for ordinary human purposes. This was just such a moment for Mr. Beddoes. He could but say one word—

“Alice!”

She could only reply—

“Father!”

Then after that pause in which Human Nature always steadies itself from the stupendous to the commonplace, he exclaimed—

“Twenty-six! Thirty-five next birthday!”

To which she retorted bitterly—

“Keats and Orange! Why, you’ve never read a line of Keats! Keats and Orange!”

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XI
HOLY ANN

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MR. HEMBRY was dying. The doctor had not told Mrs. Hembry about it, but he had mentioned the fact to his wife; she had told the wife of the County Inspector who had let it fall, in conversation with Mrs. McGuire while they were making their morning purchases in Egan's—the butcher's. It reached the ears of Egan's messenger boy as he was catching flies with his hand from a sirloin of beef which was waiting in the basket ready to go to the doctor's house, and when the first opportunity had arrived he had told it to Holy Ann.

Holy Ann was Mrs. Hembry's servant. She filled a position which is to be found commonly in Ireland, that of general servant, doing all the cooking, all the washing, all the waiting—all the work in fact—for eight pounds a year. She filled that position,

moreover, in a way that many another round the country-side fills a similar place, with servile, hero-worshipping contentment; never looking elsewhere for better wages; never dreaming that better wages were to be had.

The Parish Priest had once alluded to her as Holy Ann, because she came to confession regularly every Saturday, telling him such sins as that she had lost her temper, or had wished she were dead, circumstances that occurred with blameless regularity and were due mainly to the improper condition of her digestion at the time. For ten years she had not missed one morning of the week at Mass, except on one occasion when she had fainted in the pew where she was sitting and had to be carried out before the Gospel was over. Taking all of which facts into consideration, the title became her, and from that moment Wexford had known her as Holy Ann.

When the boy from Egan's told her that her master, Mr. Hembry, was dying, she lost

her temper once more and *smacked* him with a sound blow of her open hand across the face. There is no doubt that he deserved it, for repeating gossip not meant for his ears; but, refusing to look at it in that light, he gave her the source of his information in an injured voice with one hand rubbing the smarting cheek. Then Holy Ann was convinced and threw up her hands to her head.

“O God! O God! Shure, glory be to God! An’ them two like childher, the things they’d do for each other. O God!”

Thereupon she shut the door and went back into the kitchen where, half-an-hour later, Mrs. Hembry found her, her head buried in her arms that stretched across the kitchen table with her dirty cap hanging loose from one hairpin and trailing in a soup-plateful of beef-tea.

In ten minutes, Mrs. Hembry knew the worst. In half-an-hour the doctor came and confirmed it. The two distracted women

stood at the foot of the bed when he had gone, their eyes red with weeping, forcing smiles which were distorted and pitiful, to cheer the invalid's last moments.

"I'm afraid I'm going, Martha," the old man said, when he had watched their faces for some length of time.

Martha burst into tears and Holy Ann left the room with sobs that grew louder the further she got away.

"We've been a long time together—haven't we, Martha?" Mr. Hembry went on when Holy Ann had gone. "Say we have, dear."

"We have," moaned Martha.

"But I shan't be gone for long—shall I? Shall I?"

She looked up quickly at his eyes and thought he was wandering.

"You'll see me again—I shall come here again."

His voice was like a puff of wind striking through a bundle of reeds.

"And do you know, Martha—there's one

thing I should like very much. I feel very sleepy. I should like it very much."

"What's that?" she asked brokenly.

"Some of my cheese."

She knew she was wandering then.

"Jack—you couldn't," she exclaimed.

"Oh yes—I could," he said. "Oh yes, I could. Get me some of my cheese. Do! Get me some of my cheese."

Every day, for his lunch, Mr. Hembry had partaken of Dutch cheese—every day for fifteen years. It was lunch-time now. Martha looked at him not knowing what to do. His eyes met hers and he asked no more; but there was such a pitiful look in them that she ran out of the room and tumbled downstairs to the kitchen.

"Ann, where's the Dutch cheese?" she asked.

"In the name av God!" said Holy Ann.

"I can't help it—give it me!" she said.

"He wants it."

"Is ut give him cheese, an' he dyin'?"

"He wants it," Martha repeated feebly.

"Shure, God 'a' mercy—it's the last bite an' sup he'll have. Is ut out av yer sinses ye are?"

She gave the piece of cheese nevertheless and a nice piece of crusty bread with it, because Mr. Hembry always liked the crust.

"Cheese!" she muttered contemptuously as Martha left the kitchen.

A look of intelligence came into Mr. Hembry's eyes when the plate was laid before him. He even smiled. Then, with an effort, he sat up in bed. It was the last effort he made. One hand clutched at a hand of his wife's as he fell forward over the plate of Dutch cheese and there, in that position, Holy Ann found them after she had patiently listened outside the door for ten weary minutes.

He was buried in the churchyard of St. Peter's, which extends down the full length of the wall that forms a boundary to the

playground of Mr. Hayes's Grammar School; and from that day Mrs. Hembry became a recluse. She entered her house after the funeral and, closing the door, was not seen again for three months.

During all that time, Holy Ann never left her side, though she believed the poor woman to have lost her reason.

The last words her husband had said to her, clung persistently in her mind. She was continually repeating them to Holy Ann.

"'I shall come here again'—that's what he said, Ann—but he doesn't come. I sit up every night—and wait. D'you think he'll come, Ann? And he never had his cheese—he never had his cheese."

Holy Ann used to blink her eyes during these conversations. Convinced that her mistress was out of her mind, she felt that there was nothing to be said. She still stayed on, upon the understanding that she was to receive her eight pounds a year, but at the end of the first three months after

Mr. Hembry's death, she was given no wages: the first time for ten years that she had not been paid upon the stroke of the clock. She waited for a week and then was on the point of mentioning it, but the look in Mrs. Hembry's eyes opposed her. She could not bring herself to do it.

Two or three days after this, Mrs. Hembry came into the kitchen a little breathless and with flushed cheeks.

"Ann," she said—"Ann——" She spoke in the low whisper of awe and her eyes burnt with an unnatural brightness. "I've taken him his cheese and he's finished it all—every bit of it."

"Yirra, God help the pore woman!" muttered Holy Ann.

"I put it on the grave, Ann, and he's finished it all."

This eliminated the last doubt in the mind of Holy Ann. Mrs. Hembry was out of her mind. Holy Ann had heard that in such cases it was wise to humour the person

afflicted, and, inspired with sympathy, she rose to the occasion.

"Maybe if ye left it on the table in the parlour, he'd come and take it there."

Mrs. Hembry searched her with her eyes for a sign of levity, but Holy Ann's face bore the solemnity of a judge.

"I'll try it, Ann," she said—"I'll try it. Cut me a piece of cheese and put it on his plate, the plate he used to have, with a nice piece of crusty bread. I'll try it."

The piece of Dutch cheese was cut and the piece of crusty bread and Mrs. Hembry sat at the table in the parlour refusing to touch a meal for the rest of that day. She sat there all night. With all her persuasions, Holy Ann could not induce her to go to bed; but the next morning, the cheese was untouched and there were deep black hollows under the unnatural brilliancy of Mrs. Hembry's eyes.

"Maybe he doesn't like to take it while ye're there," said Holy Ann. "Come away

and sleep for a piece and then go back and try."

Mrs. Hembry consented to this. Holy Ann fed her like a baby and then watched her go to sleep. Directly she woke up, she hurried downstairs to the parlour. The tears rushed into Holy Ann's eyes as she saw the pathetic figure of Mrs. Hembry creeping to the parlour door, opening it, as though some sleeping child were in the room, then looking round the corner of the door.

The despairing look of disappointment was in her eyes when she found Holy Ann again.

"He hasn't touched it, Ann," she said.

"P'raps ye'd better take it to the graveyard, ma'am."

"Perhaps I had. But I can't take that. It's not fresh. He always liked it fresh."

So another piece of Dutch cheese was cut and Holy Ann accompanied her to St. Peter's graveyard. There, on the little grassy mound, they left the plate of crusty bread

and cheese, and as they turned away, Holy Ann espied the figures of two of the Grammar School boys perched in a tree. With intense merriment they had been watching all that had passed. She turned back again as they left the churchyard and saw two legs astride the wall that marked the playground boundary. The boys were only waiting till they were out of sight.

That night the cheese was gone—the plate was empty.

“He takes it when I put it here, you see,” said Mrs. Hembry.

Holy Ann nodded her head.

“’Tis the way ’tis more convaynient for him, I suppose,” she said sadly and she looked towards the windows of the Grammar School.

This was repeated every day and every evening the plate was empty.

“I’m going to try the parlour again,” said Mrs. Hembry one day.

“Ah, shure, ’tis not much good in the

parlour, ma'am," said Holy Ann. "'Tis too much av a stretch for him it is."

"But he said he'd come, Ann."

"Well, he did av course—shure he did—O God!"

"I think I'll try the parlour," she repeated with rising hope in her poor wild eyes.

"Very well, ma'am," said Holy Ann resignedly. "I'll cut a piece av the cheese for ye."

The plate was put on the parlour table. Mrs. Hembry sat by it all that day. When night came, she refused to go to bed.

"You go to bed, Ann," she whispered. "You go to bed. He'll most likely come to-night. You see he'll miss it from the graveyard. He'll most likely come to-night."

Holy Ann toiled wearily up to bed, knelt down by the bedside, crossed herself and began the lengthy repetition of the Rosary. Before she was half-way through it, she had fallen asleep, kneeling there on her knees.

It was probably four o'clock in the morn-

ing when she awoke. Realisation came to her immediately. She slipped quickly down-stairs to the parlour, opened the door softly and walked in.

"Ma'am," she whispered — "ma'am." There was no answer. She found her way across the room to where Mrs. Hembry was sitting beside the plate of bread and cheese.

"Ma'am," she repeated.

The crumpled form of Mrs. Hembry made no reply.

"Are ye asleep, ma'am?" She shook her. Still there was no movement.

"O God!" she whispered. She put her old wrinkled face against Mrs. Hembry's. It was cold—that coldness as of something wh'ch has been warm but a few hours before.

Holy Ann stood upright.

"O God!" she whispered again. "Shure, glory be to God, she's found the pore man at last."



XII

MAKE BELIEVE

THE daffodils were in bloom in the Embankment Gardens below Charing Cross; the sparrows were house-hunting, or they were pursuing, in sudden, noisy flights through the bushes. On the paths children were playing with skipping-ropes—the little girls with pale hair, tight-knotted in numberless plaits, secured at the end with thin fragments of cotton, in preparation for the service next morning in St. Paul's, Covent Garden.

It was a Saturday afternoon.

Almost every seat had its occupant. There were old men, looking out across the river as the trams thundered by, who mused with tired eyes upon times when the Embankment was a quieter spot than it is now. There were old women, resting for a moment or two with odd parcels under their arms, then passing on towards Villiers Street and the Strand,

having come perhaps some little distance out of the way in order to catch a glimpse of the flowers in the garden—their garden—the only garden beyond their window-sill that they knew. There were young women and young men, in company or alone—there were nurses with prams, wheeling pale-faced babies. Now and then a soldier in his tight-fitting trousers would pass by, with little peaked jacket, with brilliant stripes, clinking spurs, and perhaps a medal dangling on his breast—a gallant soldier, who flicked at his well-polished boots as he hurried on to keep his appointment with the fair lady of his heart. And many a nursemaid's eye would try to catch his as he went by; and many a little sigh would flutter in many a simple heart as he strode on, still clinking in the distance, through the gate, and vanished out of sight.

There was even a moment of wistfulness in the eye of Emily Allpress, as she watched the last glint of the spurs, the last flick of the cane. The next instant, she was sitting

sedately erect in her corner of the seat as a young man strolled up and, with a glance at her, took the opposite corner.

He leant back, crossing his legs with the ease of one who is accustomed to leisure. He gave a little hitch to his trousers from the knee; it saved them from bagging—incidentally, it gave better display to a pair of violet-coloured socks which matched the tie he was wearing, his shirt, and the handkerchief obviously concealed within his sleeve. There was even a bunch of violets in his coat.

While he was settling himself, Emily had the opportunity for one glimpse—the briefest. Then she arranged herself more comfortably in her corner of the seat. Undoubtedly he was a gentleman.

By means of a series of quick glances, escaping observation, which, if you are a woman, you know so well how to do, Emily noticed him take out a cigarette case. It looked as though it must be gold; and if the

sun is shining on a Saturday afternoon in April and there be but the taint of romance in your nature, you give these matters the benefit of the doubt. She felt sure it was gold. He hesitated—glanced in her direction, to find her gazing after the top of a passing tram—then he opened the case. He hesitated once more—glanced again in her direction to find her looking pensively at the point of her shoe—then he took out a cigarette.

“Would you have any violent objection if I smoked?” he asked.

She coughed, to make her voice sound nice and clear.

“Not at all,” she replied, and for one moment she gave her eyes fully to his. He had nice grey eyes. Of course, he was a gentleman. The way he had asked her—had she any violent objection—violent objection was just what a gentleman would say. “Please smoke,” she added. “I like the aroma of tobacco.”

Mr. Simpson lit his cigarette. Who would have thought to run across a lady sitting on a seat in Charing Cross Gardens! That was quite a nice phrase—the aroma of tobacco. He determined to make use of it himself in future.

“The daffodils are luxuriant, aren’t they?” he ventured presently.

Emily awoke from a reverie of wondering what he was going to say next.

“Glorious! Such a wonderful harmony of colour.”

In a few minutes they had overcome these formalities.

Mr. Simpson had leant his arm over the back of the seat and drawn imperceptibly nearer to her. They were becoming friends. Both knew it; both felt that indescribable thrill of interest as when, opening the door of his house, a stranger says to you: “This is where I live.”

“Do you come to the Gardens often?” Mr. Simpson asked presently.

"Not often—Saturday afternoons occasionally. The people you find here then are quite interesting."

"Mostly out of shops," said Mr. Simpson, with a faint note of contempt.

"I suppose they are really," replied Emily; and, as though she refused to have her illusions spoiled, she added, "I don't think I find them the less interesting because of that."

He looked at her with admiration. "You're like me," he said. "You're broad-minded. One person's as good as another in my eyes. I'm by way of being a Socialist."

"A Socialist?" She lifted her eyebrows.

"Yes—I believe in every one dividing their incomes—everybody being equal—everybody making the same amount of money."

"It would be nice," mused Emily. "I don't think I should like that, though," she added quickly. "Oh no! Surely not! Why, one's servant would be as good as oneself."

"Yes, I hadn't thought of that," said Mr. Simpson. "I hadn't thought of that. That would be awkward. Still one would always know the difference."

"I suppose you would," she agreed. "At first you would of course. Do you live in London?"

"I've rooms in town," said he, taking out that gold cigarette case once more and extracting another cigarette. "But my place is up in—in Norfolk."

Emily cast her imagination into the country—the country as it was then—the blackthorn in blossom, heaping its white snow on the dark black hedges; the birds building; black-birds, deep-throated, making sudden chattering flights from the undergrowth; a thrush on the tree-top singing with swelling breast to the sunset.

"I get very little opportunity of seeing the country," she said—"far too little. I idolise the country. No—what little time I have to spare, I generally go abroad."

He nodded his head casually. It was the thing to do, of course, to go abroad—it was the thing to do.

“Where do you go as a rule?” he inquired.

Emily shrugged her shoulders. There were so many places—abroad was such a comprehensive term. “I like Paris, very much,” she said, “and Boulogne.”

“Charming place, Boulogne,” said he with feeling.

“Oh, quite,” she replied. “You know it, of course. I do so like to have French spoken all round me—don’t you?—there’s something I don’t quite know what about it.”

“That’s funny—we think very much alike,” he said with a smile of admiration into her eyes. “I feel that, too. You speak French, of course.”

“Oh—oui—oui,” said Emily, and she shrugged her shoulders. She had pretty shoulders. To say that she knew it is no disparagement of the woman. The woman

who does not know her beauties is a fool. It is the basis of her education to acquire such knowledge, and is of more service to her than all the classics she will learn at Girton.

"And where do you live when you're in town?" continued Mr. Simpson presently.

"I've a pretty little house in Kensington," said Emily. "Quite small, of course. But it's the only part of London to live in."

"For a woman undoubtedly," said Mr. Simpson. "My chambers are—are just off Piccadilly. But if you're ever up in Suffolk—Norfolk I mean—I shall be delighted if you will look me up."

"Charmed, I'm sure," said Emily. "Where is it?"

"Near Norwich—not far from Norwich—about six miles or so. Takes me about—well, about ten minutes or so in the motor."

"Oh, you have a motor?"

"Yes. A—a—what's the name of it?—a Panhard?"

"Of course, that's lovely," said Emily

quietly. "One of these days, I think I must get one. Oh, certainly; I shall be delighted to come and see you."

"Simpson is my name—Simpson—I'm sorry I haven't got a card with me." He laughed. "Scarcely thought I should want one coming here this afternoon."

"Quite so," said Emily; "of course." She rose reluctantly to her feet. "Well—I'm afraid I must say good-bye now, Mr. Simpson. It's been very pleasant meeting you. I hope we shall see each other again."

He rose quickly, gallantly, from his seat.

"It's always a pleasure to meet a lady," said he, holding out his hand.

She smiled gratefully at his recognition, in such a place, of her good breeding. She took his hand and, when she felt the slight pressure on her own, she returned it, letting her eyes just fall in delicate submission.

"Are you likely to be this way again?" he inquired, encouraged by her responsive humour.

She smiled. "Oh—I don't know. It's not a place I usually come to, of course. I may be here next Saturday afternoon—if you like I will."

"Same time?" he said eagerly.

"The same time—certainly."

"Well—I was going up to my place in Norfolk next week-end. But I'll stay in town if you're sure to be here."

"Why, of course," said Emily, and she smiled so graciously when she left him that his heart beat a lively tattoo as he sat back again in his seat.

He followed her rapturously with his eyes as she walked down the path towards the band-stand and Villiers Street. There are certain ways of telling a lady—even when you know nothing about her living in Kensington and spending her spare time abroad—one of the most reliable is the way she holds her dress. Mr. Simpson could see at a glance, by the way Emily held her skirt, that she was not the ordinary frequenter of

Charing Cross Gardens. She had nice ankles too—and what was that? A ladder in her stocking! For a moment his heart faltered. But, of course, what did that prove. If she were not a lady, she would be over-particular about such little details of her garments, fearing that they might disclose her want of breeding. With a real lady, such things need not be considered—not to the extent of a ladder in the stocking. Stockings do not make a lady—sometimes they become her, but that is entirely another matter and need not be mentioned here.

But whether there were a ladder in her stocking or not, she was coming there to the Gardens to meet him next Saturday afternoon.

That was scarcely outside the province of a lady. Ten minutes later, Mr. Simpson rose from his seat, his whole mind steeped in the possibilities of romance.

* * * * *

It was the Wednesday after—midday—and

the little restaurants in the Strand—the cafés, the tea-shops and eating-houses were beginning to fill up with their regular customers at lunch-time. As the clock struck one, Mr. Simpson, leaning familiarly on the arms of two friends, emerged from a hosier's shop into the street. It was an attractive-looking shop, the windows crowded with brightly coloured garments of underwear, festooned with ties of every conceivable shade and texture. It is quite possible he may have been purchasing a dainty coloured shirt and socks to match.

On the previous Saturday afternoon his attire had been faultless. Perhaps it was not quite so immaculate on this occasion. The clothes he wore were not new—they had fitted well once. There was really not much to be said against them now. Otherwise his appearance was just as gentlemanly. His tie had evidently been bought to suit his shirt—his socks as well. One missed the handkerchief up the sleeve; but that was nothing.

He wore his gold signet ring, cut with his crest—a swan riding upon flames. Only a person very meticulous would have noticed any difference in Mr. Simpson that Wednesday morning in the Strand.

“Well, where do we go?” he said to his friends.

Mr. Harper suggested one place for lunch; Mr. Lonsdale another.

“I’m going to try an A B C,” said Mr. Simpson, and he said it in all simplicity. When a man has a place in the country and a motor-car that can take him over six miles in the space of ten minutes, it is quite an unaffected taste to prefer an A B C where he may eat his lunch.

To the A B C accordingly they went and on the way Mr. Simpson unburdened to their attentive ears the little story of his romance in Charing Cross Gardens. He was finishing it as they entered the shop and descended the stairs to the gentlemen’s smoking-room.

“I shall probably call on her in Kensing-

ton," he said, but the last word withered on his lips.

In a white cap and apron—set prettily, no doubt, upon her dainty head of hair—was his lady of Charing Cross engaged in pouring Bovril into a cup at the counter. He hurried by with his friends, taking a seat at a table in a far corner of the room.

From that moment he scarcely spoke to them, complaining of a headache—any excuse that might gain him the liberty of the thoughts that were gyrating wildly in his brain. She had told him a whole tissue of falsehoods! She had deceived him! She was not a lady! Only a girl in an ABC! Lived in Kensington! More probably it was Clapham—a bed-sitting-room at seven shillings a week! But she was pretty—undeniably, she was pretty. He suddenly thought of the ladder in her stocking. Of course, really, that was characteristic of a girl in an ABC shop.

He watched her as she departed from the

counter with her tray of cups and plates. She was coming in their direction. That was Fate that he had chosen one of her tables.

When she saw him the whole tray trembled in her hands. She almost dropped it then on the floor at her feet. Even the next moment, as she steadied herself, it clattered down on to the nearest table she could find.

When she had delivered the various dishes to their respective owners, she came hesitatingly to their table, swinging the empty tray nervously in her hand.

"You look nice and fresh this morning, miss," said Mr. Harper.

Emily took out her order sheet, wetted the tip of her pencil and waited, saying nothing.

"I'll have a poached egg on toast, miss," continued Mr. Harper, unconscious of the dignity of her silence.

"You always have 'em poached," said Mr. Lonsdale.

"That's just as a check—know what you're eating—and a cup of coffee, miss—plenty of

milk—if you please. Some of the stuff that's seen a cow for preference."

"As distinguished from that which comes out of the chalk pit," added Mr. Lonsdale. They relapsed into a paroxysm of laughter, of which neither Mr. Simpson nor Emily took any notice. Mr. Simpson, in fact, took out his cigarette-case and lit a cigarette.

Then Mr. Lonsdale gave his order. While this was proceeding, Mr. Harper leaned across the table to his friend.

"You sold the old gentleman his half-dozen pair of pants, didn't you?" he asked. His eyes caught the expression on Emily's face. "Excuse my language, miss—it's just a little bit of business—pretend you didn't hear." He looked back to Mr. Simpson. "I saw you leaning over the counter, taking him right into your confidence. That's the only way to do it. What I always say is, trade's a confidence trick, nothing more, nothing less."

Mr. Simpson said nothing. He just closed his cigarette-case with a snap.

"That's a nice case you've got, Bertie," said Mr. Lonsdale looking round at the noise. "Three-and-six, aren't they? I'm going to get one. Give us a cigarette."

Mr. Simpson's eyes tried to meet Emily's as he gave her his order. It was quite impossible. Hers clung to the little block of order-papers—his lowered to the table.

When lunch was over and they rose with their bills in their hands to depart, Mr. Simpson allowed them to reach the top of the stairs, then he suddenly remembered that he had left something behind him. He told them they need not wait.

At the foot of the stairs he met Emily. He lifted his hat—just as he had done in Charing Cross Gardens.

"I beg your pardon," said he in an undertone. "Does it make any difference? Will you be there on Saturday?"

"If you can find somebody to introduce us," she replied, lifting her eyes. And then she smiled.

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XIII

THE SALVATION OF ALBERT T'ARPY

PART I

No moral is offered in this story—God forbid!

You have here for your inward digestion a study in neurotics, wherein you will see how honour can be a feather in the scales when balanced against that hysterical cry of the religious fanatic.

Albert Tarpy was a walker—a shop-walker in the establishment of John Graham & Co. Their business premises number from seventy-one to eighty-five in a principal street in Kensington. Seventy-one to eighty-five—that describes them. You see one department crowding upon another—a monopoly—the smaller tradesman crushed, capital over-riding him like a juggernaut.

In the ladies' underlinen department Albert Tarpy moved gracefully; in a bypath

of Hammersmith he had his being. It would be difficult to say exactly where he lived; whether in fact he lived at all. Can it be called life, when a man wanders from nine o'clock in the morning until seven in the evening between piles of flimsy garments, varying the everlasting monotony by speaking in delicate tones to a customer of her requirements? What time is left for life after that?

Mr. Tarpy found time for it—or what he chose to look upon as life: the spoiling of Amy Sandford.

“Miss Sandford—forward!”

He had said it numberless times before his eyes fell fully on her. You find them wakening then, like an animal from its sleep to the scent of food—a stretching of paws, muscles tautened, the claws unsheathing warningly.

But there was dignity to maintain. The shop-walker in a ladies' underlinen department is a man flushed with importance,

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polished with finesse. Watch the delicate way he handles the touchy subjects that come in his domain. The fat hands—clean perhaps—can lift with the grace and ease of an accomplished artist, a garment that would ridicule the dignity of any man. He can talk of these frothy fineries, yet still be a man, above them all, lifted by intellect, empowered with d'ignity.

Mr. Tarpv would have proved himself egregiously wanting in tact, had he shown Miss Sandford in that first moment of his realisation, that he considered her—quite classy. Consider his position in comparison with hers! His eyes lifted as she passed him on her way to the customer. He sighed audibly, showing that he was thinking of other things. But while she attended to the lady in question, he watched her pleurably from behind the displayed beauties of a lace night-dress adorned with blue silk baby-ribbon.

This now, and just such incidents as

these, go to make up the lives of such men as Mr. Tarpy. A succession of intrigues follow one another on this quaint and ill-equipped stage, where the properties are as grotesque as one can well imagine. They seldom, however, become serious in their development. You find the *dénouement* in spiteful retaliations which usually end in the parties ignoring each other like children; speaking in far from alluring tones only when business demands.

But the glance that sped from Mr. Tarpy's eye in the assessment of Amy Sandford's many undoubtable attractions was one that conveyed no vulgar or common or petty termination to the intrigue bound to follow. To employ a vivid expression of Mr. Tarpy's own choosing—he was clean bowled, first ball.

That evening he rode back on his 'bus to Hammersmith Broadway in a contemplative frame of mind. You can imagine him seated inside the lumbering vehicle gripping an

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umbrella before him between his knees, gazing abstractedly at the lighted windows or other places of business, licking his fingers sometimes and grinding a point on his moustaches.

What do you make of him? That carefully brushed top-hat, the reasonably well-cut coat, the excellent silk pocket handkerchief, which from time to time he extracts from an inner pocket and uses with economical consideration; what do you make of all these? Scarcely a walker; scarcely the slave in the hands of the capitalist, making bricks without straw with the singing lash of the taskmaster's whip for ever humming in his ears.

But look a little closer—the frayed ends of the trousers, the shine at the elbows of that reasonably well-cut coat. Consider that if that coat were not kept buttoned, a strikingly different impression would be given you. And those cuffs, that protrude with delicate ostentation over the wrists—you find

them immaculately clean. They are paper, cunningly bound over the material that is concealed beneath. Expose all these things and you will arrive at the actual condition of Mr. Tarpy who, on three pounds a week, subject to fines, scarcely admitting of perquisites—unless it were in the form of an occasional silk handkerchief—maintains himself and Mrs. Tarpy in the neighbourhood of Hammersmith Broadway.

In Mrs. Tarpy, now, you have a personality, a woman who by sheer force of will and domination of character has kept her son Albert by her side and compelled him to support her. What else could you reasonably expect the man to do? Mrs. Tarpy had anticipated many things and thwarted them all. On three pounds a week Albert could have led a gay bachelor life. On a sum such as this he could have married some light-headed young creature and brought children into the world to the extermination of Mrs. Tarpy. She read the nature of her

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son as you read the exaggerated type of an advertisement and fought it all with her ablest weapon—the Bible.

Every night before they retired to sleep, a portion of the Holy Book was selected by Mrs. Tarpv according to Albert's state of mind and intoned at him with an occasional lifting of the eyes and a pause of the voice over a particularly apt passage of Holy Writ.

All condemnations of the lusts of the flesh she dwelt upon with lingering and prophetic insistence. Lusts of the flesh were matters which incurred heavy expense. If the comfort of her declining years, depending upon Albert's three pounds a week were to be considered, such luxuries as these had to be avoided. For the last seven years, ever since her husband had died, Mrs. Tarpv had made certain of the two pounds twelve and sixpence from Albert's weekly remuneration, and with one hand upon the Sacred Book, the other placed upon her hard, unsympathetic breast,

she could have sworn that the instrument of her success was the Word of God.

She found Albert's obedience. That was sufficient for her. Whether she ever converted his mind to her way of thinking was distinctly another matter. When in good spirits and excessively candid with herself, she would admit that men had none of the spirit of religion in the whole of their compositions. Her husband had been such a man as this. A heathen, she had called him in the silence of her own heart—a heathen undoubtedly he may have been; but as with Albert, so it had been with him. She had ruled him with a rod of iron, wrapped, concealed in the tender passages of the Gospels, peeping sometimes out of the Epistles of St. Paul, at others exposed warningly to view in the curses of the Old Testament.

To the prospect of this, Mr. Tarpy returned unwillingly every evening. To this he returned the evening after his eye had fallen upon Amy Sandford.

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Mrs. Tarpy greeted him with her usual thin-lipped kiss—a peck on the cheek—no love in it, the vulture toying with its food.

At the meal which was always in waiting for his return, they talked of the incidents of the day.

“A lady came in this morning,” Mr. Tarpy announced in his most casual voice; “she had a piece of real, Carrickmacross lace—wanted it worked into the neck of an elaborate night-dress. By the time it’s finished, it’ll cost her fifty pounds.”

Silently Mrs. Tarpy’s thin lips opened and expressively her eyes were raised.

“If God strikes her dead the first sinful night she wears that, I suppose people would be surprised. Fifty pounds—what a shameful woman! Did you have to attend to her, Albert?”

Albert nodded as though he were tired of doing such things, and Mrs. Tarpy shook her head at his callousness. What doubt that

the heathen element was predominant in every man.

"If I'd been in your place—I wouldn't have served her shameful demands."

Mr. Tarpy smiled into his teacup.

"You'd have got the sack then," he said consolingly.

Wisely, she let that matter drop. Something of far greater importance had to be pursued and, with tactful consideration of his wants after the meal was finished, she discreetly led up the conversation to the affair in hand.

"One of these days, Albert," she said with an assumption of motherly gentleness, "you'll have to marry."

Sucking affectionately the cigar which he always indulged in after tea, Mr. Tarpy was strangely considering that matter at that very moment. The face and figure of Amy Sandford was looming largely in his imagination. In a clumsy, indelicate way, he was picturing his wooing of her; her unspeakable pride at

fascination. "One of these days, you'll have passive resistance to his persuasions and the ultimate, undoubted yielding to his power of fascination. "One of these days, you'll have to marry."

The name of Amy Sandford sprang to his lips, but he closed them on it with a snap. His mother had more to say. It was not in her nature to yield up the place of honour without some definite motive in her mind. He waited for the motive to be expressed.

"You're thirty-one, aren't you, Albert?"

He nodded his head three or four times. This was acting—the mummer rising to the occasion. Expectation was rife in him.

"Well, I've been thinking——" Mr. Tarpy endeavoured to the best of his ability to maintain his casual attitude of somnolent attention—"I've been thinking who there could be. Whether there was any one in your mind. You meet a lot of young girls at Graham's—I'm quite aware of that. But

how are they going to benefit you?" She twisted her sharp eyes on his; but he made no answer.

"It's like this," she went on, gaining encouragement from his silence. "If you marry, you'll have a lot of children. God's blessing—no one knows that better than I do—but you will have a lot—you're the living image of your father. But children aren't cheap luxuries—they cost money. Three pounds a week won't go far with them. So what are you going to do?"

She put the question with a direct, penetrating glance from her small, cold eyes. Still Mr. Tarpv clung to his guise of silence and again his mother gathered encouragement from it.

"Now, I'll tell you what I think," she continued. "It's God's will that a man should marry"—her hands folded resignedly—"but it's not His will that a man should make a fool of himself. If you marry, Albert, it must be some nice girl who has a little of her

own. Something that'll be a help—d'yer see?"

Mr. Tarpv saw further than she gave him credit for. With a swift intuition, which, when it concerns his own affairs, no amount of slavery can exterminate from a man, he realised that, not only was this a casually expressed opinion of his mother's, but that that same nice girl was actually in person in her mind's eye.

"Well—who is it?" he asked with disconcerting directness—"what's her name?"

His question helped to crystallise matters. Mrs. Tarpv took the plunge with characteristic fortitude.

"Miss Tucker," she said. There was no need to speak any further. For the present, she was content to let that name of Miss Tucker sink, like a stone flung into a pond, down to the depths of his understanding. It satisfied her to watch covertly the expression of his face—the rings on the surface of the water that the dropping stone creates.

Who was Miss Tucker? You presume a nice girl, with a little of her own. Miss Tucker was the only daughter—only child—of the landlady where Mr. Tarpy and his mother lodged. That she was a nice girl must be left to Mrs. Tarpy's description of her, to her mother's fond hopes of her and your own unerring judgment. That she possessed a little of her own, is an undoubted fact. The house, No. 23 Sherbrook Road, was the property of Mrs. Tucker, left to her by a more considerate husband than Mr. Tarpy senior had ever been. It contained accommodation for two families of the dimensions of the Tarpy household; and, besides, afforded a comfortable sitting-room and two rooms in the basement for the use of Mrs. Tucker and her daughter. What finer legacy than this?

For the last year Mrs. Tarpy's ambition had been strained towards its possession. Now she was beginning to effect her realisation. Albert was malleable—putty in her

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fingers, so she thought him and, still armed with the invincibility of the Bible, she set to work to accomplish her ends.

"Don't think much of Miss Tucker," said Mr. Tarpay gloomily. Already he felt the inflexibility of his mother's set purpose. She had merely suggested Miss Tucker; but in the heart of her, he knew that her mind was made up.

"The whole of this house will belong to her," replied Mrs. Tarpay equably. "And it's worth two pounds a week to her any day. We pay one pound ten for our rooms—so do the people upstairs."

"Don't care for the looks of her."

"But you never take any notice of her. I've seen her eyes fixed on you—full of admiration."

"Have you?" This was more encouraging.

"I know she waits downstairs at the window of their sitting-room in the basement to see you come in of an evening. You see

if you don't like the looks of her this evening."

"This evening? I shan't see her this evening."

"Yes, you will—she's coming up for prayers and the Bible-reading. I like that about her. She's none of your fly-away creatures that you get behind the counter at Graham's. How do you know that you could trust one of them out of your sight? Girls in shops aren't what they used to be. How do they get those little trinkets—brooches and things—that they all wear? Not out of their wages."

"Did you ask Miss Tucker to come up this evening?"

"No—she said she'd like to come herself."

Your reading of the Bible by no means makes you exempt from being a child of the father of lies. Mrs. Tarpy had gently preached her religion into the ears of Miss Tucker for the last few weeks with the intention of bringing about her invitation with-

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out a fear of its refusal, and the relationship to the father of lies was not wanting in her.

"You notice her this evening," she proceeded hurriedly, lest in the pause the lie should expose itself. "To my way of thinking she's quite an attractive girl—doesn't spend too much on dress either, considering the amount of spare pocket-money that she has."

Spare pocket-money! To Mr. Tarpv with the weekly seven-and-sixpence! Spare pocket-money! For the time being the vision of Amy Sandford, with her kissable mouth and that fascinating upward glance of the eyes, vanished. It is not always money that is the root of all evil—far oftener the need of it.

Accordingly, when Miss Tucker came up to the family reading and the family prayers, Mr. Tarpv's eyes rested on her. On his knees, with a lengthy prayer of her own composition droning from his mother's lips into his ears; he watched Sarah Tucker through

carefully formed gaps in his fingers, comparing her ill-developed womanhood with the budding graces of Amy Sandford. He found the comparison odious—revolted before it. Why draw the pictures that he drew? One's own mind revolts before that. In every one of them he shrank from Miss Tucker; could not even bring his mind to be influenced by the magic power of those two or three words his mother had so cautiously let slide from her lips—"spare pocket-money."

"Bless and preserve all those here present in this room this night—make them to learn the true blessing of Thy mercy and lead them into the contemplation of those things which are spiritual rather than the pomps and vanities of this wicked world and all the sinful lusts of the flesh."

This unaccustomed ending to the family prayer brought Mr. Tarpy with a rush to the consideration of realities. It was not within the range of his intuition to conceive the

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undivided care with which Mrs. Tarpy had spent one whole hour of the afternoon to the composition of that suggestive conclusion. He did not even see the little slip of paper which she kept in the palm of her hand, lest in the excitement of the moment she might forget her own effusion. The only realisation that assailed him was the earnestness of his mother's intentions that he should marry Miss Tucker.

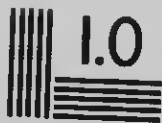
Marry Sarah Tucker! Marry her for the sake of a little spare money for unacquainted luxuries when there was a girl such as Amy Sandford—his for the asking. He determined on immediate action.

"Amen," he said—audibly—and with the saying of it the determination was sealed.



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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PART II

HERE you come then to the wooing of Amy Sandford. A pitiable affair—one of those little tragedies that are played out to the end, over and over again. Scarcely a soul hears of them. The curtain rises to an impoverished and empty house. There is no applause to be won by the injured woman, no hissing to be heard by the heartless man. They begin in silence in a faded light that flickers its life into nothing and dies out as the curtain falls. This was the tragedy of Amy Sandford.

From allowing his glance to be seen and welcomed by her, Mr. Tarpy honoured her with his conversation. They would meet after the establishment closed and, living more or less in his own direction, he frequently saw her home. All this is known as the first rudiments of courting—the “walking

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out" that constitutes the birth of hope in the girl and the generation of desire in the man.

From his exalted level of shop-walking, perhaps, Mr. Tarpy found her at times inclined to be wanting in breeding. She dropped an occasional "h" in her conversation. He did the same himself; but so very infrequently that to him it was unnoticeable. Taking her from every point of view, however, Mr. Tarpy found her even more alluring than when he had studied her from behind the dainty garment which he had used as a point of vantage when first her charms had assailed him.

Then they became more intimate. His relations with Sarah Tucker at No. 23 Sherbrook Road, he kept at a safe though not impossible distance. She came every night to family prayers and once when he found her, too, studying him from between the interstices of her reverent fingers, he had smiled a gentle encouragement.

But with Amy Sandford, the matter took on its serious and vital aspect. He took her one Saturday to Wembley Park, where a fête was being held in honour of a holiday in which the whole of London participated. Kiss-in-the-ring was played there; young men and young girls joining together in pursuit of this elusive quality we call Pleasure, yet so often find to be the ultimate refinement of Pain. It was here, after a heated chase, far from the ring where the others were gathered, that Mr. Tarpy first kissed her. Breathless with her half-hearted efforts to evade him, she yielded under it with a sigh of overstrung sensation as a hunted animal gives way to its pursuers.

Before they left Wembley Park that evening, Mr. Tarpy had sworn that he would marry her.

"You have my word for it," he said—"my word—I'll get an engagement ring for you the first moment I can spare the money."

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That night, he kept his eyes rigidly away from the amorous glances of Sarah Tucker. He felt that he was not a free man. Honour was at stake. He rose to it with a fervid "Amen" that had but one thought concealed behind—that his mother should hear of nothing before the whole matter was inevitable.

For a month or so, matters drifted on in a more or less uneventful way. Mr. Tarpy renewed his promises, pledging his word as the impoverished artisan week after week pledges the possessions that will bring him relief from the immediate demand.

Then London—all London—all London known to Mrs. Tarpy was roused to a pitch of fanatical enthusiasm. The preachings of Torrey and Alexander began to twang the strings of an overwrought nervous system. All those creatures whom the daily round has worn to the vibrating thread; every sensitive mind that has lost the true balance of consideration in things spiritual, all kinds and

conditions of these people thronged to the dramatic utterances of these two men. They took the Albert Hall—this is past history. In its thousands London flocked to hear them. Mrs. Tarpy went. She returned to Sherbrook Road as though a sandstorm had swept her.

Her hands trembled as she held the Bible that night. In her voice there was that tragic tone of one who carries damnation in the hollow of one hand—salvation in the other. She hummed the Glory Song as she moved about the house and, in her incantation of her prayers, there was the suspicion of an American twang which had been driven into the furthest corners of her brain.

“Albert,” she said—“I shan’t be happy till you’ve been to hear them. These two men—sacrificing everything—all their worldly possessions—leaving their homes thousands of miles away to come and save these sinful men and women in the London

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Society. How I should enjoy watching the face of that woman who bought that night-dress for fifty pounds—the one you told me about. How she would writhe under the wonderful truths that Mr. Torrey floods over you like a bath.”

“What’s the charge?” asked Mr. Tarpy.

“Nothing!” You hear the triumph confuting the base insinuation. “Not a penny. Will you go and hear them—will you? Promise me you will.”

Beholding with sudden vision the possibility of an evening alone with Amy Sandford, Tarpy willingly agreed. So willingly did he consent that his mother had doubts of his really going at all. But the promise was a genuine one. Mr. Tarpy went.

With the prospect of an evening’s amusement before them he took Amy with him to the Albert Hall.

“They stamp about and shout like lunatics,” he told her—“make your sides ache

laughing." Here he was drawing from the information of a walker in the meat department of Graham's establishment who had washed his hands and taken out the lady cashier for the entertainment that the evening might afford.

"Worth any melodramar on the Surrey side," he had told Tarpv. Moreover there was no charge. That was an appeal in itself to Tarpv.

Uniting themselves, then, with the thousands who surrounded that noble edifice, they waited to gain admission to hear the singing of the Glory Song. The seats that they obtained were well to the fore and there they waited for the commencement, Tarpv supplying humorous remarks upon the devout expression on the faces of those about him. Amy begged relief, declaring that she would make herself conspicuous by laughing; but Tarpv had risen to the occasion, his humour was at its best. He felt himself that he was

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amusing and his own laughter became at times immoderate.

Then the vast platform began to fill with those who were to swell the chorus of the Glory Song and finally the two men, upon whom all eyes centred, made their way to the front. Tarp's laugh broke into a titter and died away—the silence that fell over all was like a dense fog descending upon a city. Then the Glory Song began—rent from thousands of throats as the cries from the souls in hell. Tarp found himself drawn into it; the swimmer battling against the flood, dragged into the eddying whirlpool. He joined in with the chorus. Amy Sandford stole a glance at him thinking that the love for music was drawing the sound from his lips.

When the singing was finished, Mr. Torrey came forward and with slow and measured tones began his discourse. It was like the gradual approach of a distant storm. At first

his words were slow, considered, unemotional; but as the fire lighted in him, his voice lifted—one note to another as you mount a steady scale. Amy looked about her. There were young men and old women, every age and every type together, like sheep driven in the fear of the shepherd's dog. Here it was all hysteria. The agonies of hell were driven in like nails. She listened to the hammering voice as it drove each warning home. One nail followed another as she listened. If you had not repented before the final nail were driven to the head, you were damned to the everlasting punishment of death. But stand up, lift up your hand and brave the criticism of those around you and there lay salvation at your feet. Women behind her were groaning in the torture of their minds—the lips of men and boys were quivering. She looked at Tarpy, seated on the outside of the line; his face was blanched, his mouth open; breath came

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between his lips as though some pump were forcing it. What did it mean? She felt a cold sickness at her heart.

"Albert," she whispered—he took no notice. "Albert," she repeated.

He looked at her and there was an expression of loathing in his eyes, an expression as though he had gained some hateful and unexpected knowledge of her. What was changing him? Surely not the thought of her yielding to his importunate wishes? Could a man win a woman to him and then, because he had won her—despise her? Was that life?

You may gather from this, the ingenuousness of Amy Sandford's idea of human nature. It was some time before she realised that this man to whom she had given everything was being won from her, torn from her, stolen from her by these threats of hell and promises of everlasting salvation.

In the meanwhile the emissaries of these

preachers, shock-headed men with hollow eyes alive with faith but bereft of intellect, were pushing their way in and out amongst the audience, exhorting those who by their expression they saw to be caught in the storm of hysterical emotion.

Seeing his open mouth, hearing his uncertain breaths, one of them had approached Albert Tarpy. He laid his hand on his shoulder and whispered into his ear. Amy Sandford pulled his sleeve, trying to distract his attention, but he shook her off.

"Now is the time—the appointed time," she heard the man whisper hoarsely into his ear. "Throw off the lusts of the flesh—give your body and your soul to God rather than to the devil."

Tarpy looked fixedly before him. A combat, a struggle of life and death was working in his face. Sweat rose in beads on his forehead. Even then he was half in the agonies of hell.

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At last the hammering voice on the platform ceased its beating upon brass. There was a heavy—a cumbrous silence. Then the voice spoke again.

“Let those who would be saved now from the awful tortures of hell which know no ending—let them stand right up now and raise their hands in token that they acknowledge Christ as their Saviour.”

“Stand up! Stand up, man!” the emissary whispered in Tarp’s ear. “Stand up—this is your only chance. If you don’t, you go out of this place a doomed man.”

“Albert!” whispered Amy—“Albert—don’t leave me—you’ve promised to marry me—you’ve promised!” She felt that he was slipping from her and he— Heavens! In that state of hysteria, she seemed a harlot whispering damnation to his soul. With a wrench he rose to his feet and his hand shot into the air—the blackguard proclaiming Christ.

They hurried him off then—like cattle with the rest—to see the leader, the preacher, in an ante-room. Amy Sandford was left alone.

When he got home that night Tarpy was a shadow of himself—a string that has been over-taut and then relaxed.

His mother was waiting for him. He found her with the Bible in her lap, prayers hovering on her lips.

“Albert!” she exclaimed—his face told its story. “Then—they’ve saved you!”

“Yes—I’m saved,” he replied—“from to-night—God helping me—I’m a different man.”

Then Mrs. Tarpy sobbed, though no tears were visible.

“How happy Sarah will be,” she moaned in her untainted happiness. “How happy Sarah will be.”

“Do you think it matters to her?” asked Mr. Tarpy with a change of tone.

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"Couldn't you see?" was the comprehensive reply.

"Well—there's no reason why we shouldn't be married soon, is there?" said Mr. Tarpy.

"You said I ought to marry—God meant a man to marry—there's no sin in that."

"Only His blessing," murmured the good woman.

THE END

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