§3

Then so far as he could subsequently remember, Kipps had "another," and then it would seem that suddenly, regardless of the tragedy, he insisted that he "reelly *must* be getting on," and from that point his memory became irregular. Certain things have remained quite clearly, and as it is a matter of common knowledge that intoxicated people forget what happens to them, it follows that he was not intoxicated. Chitterlow came with him partly to see him home and partly for a freshener before turning in. Kipps recalled afterwards very distinctly how in Little Fenchurch Street he discovered that he could not walk straight and also that Chitterlow's needle and thread in his still unmended trouser leg was making an annoying little noise on the pavement behind him. He tried to pick up the needle suddenly by surprise and somehow tripped and fell and then Chitterlow, laughing uproariously, helped him up. "It wasn't a bicycle this time, old boy," said Chitterlow, and that appeared to them both at the time as being a quite [Pg 106]extraordinarily good joke indeed. They punched each other about on the strength of it.

For a time after that Kipps certainly pretended to be quite desperately drunk and unable to walk and Chitterlow entered into the pretence and supported him. After that Kipps remembered being struck with the extremely laughable absurdity of going down hill to Tontine Street in order to go up hill again to the Emporium, and trying to get that idea into Chitterlow's head and being unable to do so on account of his own merriment or Chitterlow's evident intoxication, and his next memory after that was of the exterior of the Emporium, shut and darkened, and, as it were, frowning at him with all its stripes of yellow and green. The chilly way in which "Shalford" glittered in the moonlight printed itself with particular vividness on his mind. It appeared to Kipps that that establishment was closed to him for evermore. Those gilded letters, in spite of appearances, spelt Finis for him and exile from Folkestone. He would never do wood-carving, never see Miss Walshingham again. Not that he had ever hoped to see her again. But this was the knife, this was final. He had stayed out, he had got drunk, there had been that row about the Manchester window dressing only three days ago.... In the retrospect he was quite sure that he was perfectly sober then and at bottom extremely unhappy, but he kept a brave face on the matter nevertheless, and declared stoutly he didn't care if he *was* locked out.

[Pg 107]

Whereupon Chitterlow slapped him on the back very hard and told him that was a "Bit of All Right," and assured him that when he himself had been a clerk in Sheffield before he took to acting he had been locked out sometimes for six nights running.

"What's the result?" said Chitterlow. "I could go back to that place now, and they'd be glad to have me.... Glad to have me," he repeated, and then added, "that is to say, if they remember me—which isn't very likely."

Kipps asked a little weakly, "What am I to do?"

"Keep out," said Chitterlow. "You can't knock 'em up now—that would give you Right away. You'd better try and sneak in in the morning with the Cat. That'll do you. You'll probably get in all right in the morning if nobody gives you away."

Then for a time—perhaps as the result of that slap in the back—Kipps felt decidedly queer, and acting on Chitterlow's advice went for a bit of a freshener upon the Leas. After a time he threw off the temporary queerness and found Chitterlow patting him on the shoulder and telling him that he'd be all right now in a minute and all the better for it—which he was. And the wind having dropped and the night being now a really very beautiful moonlight night indeed, and all before Kipps to spend as he liked and with only a very little tendency to spin round now and again to mar its splendour, they set out to walk the whole length of the Leas to the Sandgate lift and back, and as they walked Chitterlow spoke first of[Pg 108] moonlight transfiguring the sea and then of moonlight transfiguring faces, and so at last he came to the topic of Love, and upon that he dwelt a great while, and with a wealth of experience and illustrative anecdote that seemed remarkably pungent and material to Kipps. He forgot his lost Miss Walshingham and his outraged employer again. He became as it were a desperado by reflection.

Chitterlow had had adventures, a quite astonishing variety of adventures in this direction; he was a man with a past, a really opulent past, and he certainly seemed to like to look back and see himself amidst its opulence.

He made no consecutive history, but he gave Kipps vivid, momentary pictures of relations and entanglements. One moment he was in flight—only too worthily in flight—before the husband of a Malay woman in Cape Town. At the next he was having passionate complications with the daughter of a clergyman in York. Then he passed to a remarkable grouping at Seaford.

"They say you can't love two women at once," said Chitterlow. "But I tell you——" He gesticulated and raised his ample voice. "It's *Rot! Rot!*"

"I know that," said Kipps.

"Why, when I was in the smalls with Bessie Hopper's company there were three." He laughed and decided to add, "Not counting Bessie, that is."

He set out to reveal Life as it is lived in touring companies, a quite amazing jungle of interwoven[Pg 109] "affairs" it appeared to be, a mere amorous winepress for the crushing of hearts.

"People say this sort of thing's a nuisance and interferes with Work. I tell you it isn't. The Work couldn't go on without it. They *must* do it. They haven't the Temperament if they don't. If they hadn't the Temperament they wouldn't want to act, if they have—Bif!"

"You're right," said Kipps. "I see that."

Chitterlow proceeded to a close criticism of certain historical indiscretions of Mr. Clement Scott respecting the morals of the stage. Speaking in confidence and not as one who addresses the public, he admitted regretfully the general truth of these comments. He proceeded to examine various typical instances that had almost forced themselves upon him personally, and with especial regard to the contrast between his own character towards women and that of the Hon. Thomas Norgate, with whom it appeared he had once been on terms of great intimacy....

Kipps listened with emotion to these extraordinary recollections. They were wonderful to him, they were incredibly credible. Of course the tumultuous, passionate course was the way life ran—except in high-class establishments! Such things happened in novels, in plays—only he had been fool enough not to understand they happened. His share in the conversation was now indeed no more than faint writing in the margin; Chitterlow was talking quite continuously. He expanded his magnificent voice into huge[Pg 110] guffaws, he drew it together into a confidential intensity, it became drawlingly reminiscent, he was frank, frank with the effect of a revelation, reticent also with the effect of a revelation, a stupendously gesticulating, moonlit black figure, wallowing in itself, preaching Adventure and the Flesh to Kipps. Yet withal shot with something of sentiment, with a sort of sentimental refinement very coarsely and egotistically done. The Times he had had!—even before he was as old as Kipps he had had innumerable times.

Well, he said with a sudden transition, he had sown his wild oats—one had to somewhen—and now he fancied he had mentioned it earlier in the evening, he was happily married. She was, he indicated, a "born lady." Her father was a prominent lawyer, a solicitor in Kentish Town, "done a lot of public house business"; her mother was second cousin to the wife of Abel Jones, the fashionable portrait painter—"almost Society people in a way." That didn't count with Chitterlow. He was no snob. What *did* count was that she possessed, what he ventured to assert without much fear of contradiction, was the very finest, completely untrained contralto voice in all the world. ("But to hear it properly," said Chitterlow, "you want a Big Hall.") He became rather vague and jerked his head about to indicate when and how he had entered matrimony. She was, it seemed, "away with her people." It was clear that Chitterlow did not get on with these people very well. It would seem they failed to appreciate his playwright, [Pg 111]regarding it as an unremunerative pursuit, whereas as he and Kipps knew, wealth beyond the dreams of avarice would presently accrue. Only patience and persistence were needful.

He went off at a tangent to hospitality. Kipps must come down home with him. They couldn't wander about all night, with a bottle of the right sort pining at home for them. "You can sleep on the sofa. You won't be worried by broken springs anyhow, for I took 'em all out myself two or three weeks ago. I don't see what they even put 'em in for. It's a point I know about. I took particular notice of it when I was with Bessie Hopper. Three months we were and all over England, North Wales and the Isle of Man, and I never struck a sofa in diggings anywhere that hadn't a broken spring. Not once—all the time."

He added almost absently: "It happens like that at times."

They descended the slant road towards Harbour Street and went on past the Pavilion Hotel.

§4

They came into the presence of old Methusaleh again, and that worthy under Chitterlow's direction at once resumed the illumination of Kipps' interior with the conscientious thoroughness that distinguished him. Chitterlow took a tall portion to himself with an air of asbestos, lit the bulldog pipe again, and lapsed for a space into meditation, from which Kipps[Pg 112] roused him by remarking that he expected "an acter 'as a lot of ups and downs like, now and then."

At which Chitterlow seemed to bestir himself. "Ra-ther," he said. "And sometimes it's his own fault and sometimes it isn't. Usually it is. If it isn't one thing it's another. If it isn't the manager's wife it's bar-bragging. I tell you things happen at times. I'm a fatalist. The fact is Character has you. You can't get away from it. You may think you do, but you don't."

He reflected for a moment. "It's that what makes tragedy Psychology really. It's the Greek irony—Ibsen and—all that. Up to date."

He emitted this exhaustive summary of high-toned modern criticism as if he was repeating a lesson while thinking of something else, but it seemed to rouse him as it passed his lips, by including the name of Ibsen.

He became interested in telling Kipps, who was indeed open to any information whatever about this quite novel name, exactly where he thought Ibsen fell short, points where it happened that Ibsen was defective just where it chanced that he, Chitterlow, was strong. Of course he had no desire to place himself in any way on an equality with Ibsen; still the fact remained that his own experience in England and America and the colonies was altogether more extensive than Ibsen could have had. Ibsen had probably never seen "one decent bar scrap" in his life. That, of course, was not Ibsen's fault or his own merit, but there the thing was. Genius, he knew, was supposed[Pg 113] to be able to do anything or to do without anything; still he was now inclined to doubt that. He had a play in hand that might perhaps not please William Archer—whose opinion, after all, he did not value as he valued Kipps' opinion—but which he thought was at any rate as well constructed as anything Ibsen ever did.

So with infinite deviousness Chitterlow came at last to his play. He decided he would not read it to Kipps, but tell him about it. This was the simpler because much of it was still unwritten. He began to explain his plot. It was a complicated plot and all about a nobleman who had seen everything and done everything and knew practically all that Chitterlow knew about women; that is to say, "all about women" and suchlike matters. It warmed and excited Chitterlow. Presently he stood up to act a situation—which could not be explained. It was an extremely vivid situation.

Kipps applauded the situation vehemently. "Tha's dam' fine," said the new dramatic critic, quite familiar with his part now, striking the table with his fist and almost upsetting his third portion (in the second series) of old Methusaleh. "Tha's dam' fine, Chit'low!"

"You see it?" said Chitterlow, with the last vestiges of that incidental gloom disappearing. "Good, old boy! I thought you'd see it. But it's just the sort of thing the literary critic can't see. However, it's only a beginning——"

[Pg 114]

He replenished Kipps and proceeded with his exposition.

In a little while it was no longer necessary to give that over-advertised Ibsen the purely conventional precedence he had hitherto had. Kipps and Chitterlow were friends and they could speak frankly and openly of things not usually admitted. "Any 'ow," said Kipps, a little irrelevantly and speaking over the brim of the replenishment, "what you read jus' now was dam' fine. Nothing can't alter that."

He perceived a sort of faint, buzzing vibration about things that was very nice and pleasant and with a little care he had no difficulty whatever in putting his glass back on the table. Then he perceived Chitterlow was going on with the scenario, and then that old Methusaleh had almost entirely left his bottle. He was glad there was so little more Methusaleh to drink because that would prevent his getting drunk. He knew that he was not now drunk, but he knew that he had had enough. He was one of those who always know when they have had enough. He tried to interrupt Chitterlow to tell him this, but he could not get a suitable opening. He doubted whether Chitterlow might not be one of those people who did not know when they had had enough. He discovered that he disapproved of Chitterlow. Highly. It seemed to him that Chitterlow went on and on like a river. For a time he was inexplicably and quite unjustly cross with Chitterlow and wanted to say to him, "you got the gift of the gab," but he only got so far[Pg 115] as to say "the gift," and then Chitterlow thanked him and said he was better than Archer any day. So he eyed Chitterlow with a baleful eye until it dawned upon him that a most extraordinary thing was taking place. Chitterlow kept mentioning someone named Kipps. This presently began to perplex Kipps very greatly. Dimly but decidedly he perceived this was wrong.

"Look 'ere," he said suddenly, "*what* Kipps?"

"This chap Kipps I'm telling you about."

"What chap Kipps you're telling which about?"

"I told you."

Kipps struggled with a difficulty in silence for a space. Then he reiterated firmly, "*What* chap Kipps?"

"This chap in my play—man who kisses the girl."

"Never kissed a girl," said Kipps; "leastwise——" and subsided for a space. He could not remember whether he had kissed Ann or not—he knew he had meant to. Then suddenly in a tone of great sadness and addressing the hearth he said, "*My* name's Kipps."

"Eh?" said Chitterlow.

"Kipps," said Kipps, smiling a little cynically.

"What about him?"

"He's me." He tapped his breastbone with his middle finger to indicate his essential self.

He leant forward very gravely towards Chitterlow. "Look 'ere, Chit'low," he said, "you haven't no business putting my name into play. You mustn't[Pg 116] do things like that. You'd lose me my crib, right away." And they had a little argument—so far as Kipps could remember. Chitterlow entered upon a general explanation of how he got his names. These, he had for the most part got out of a newspaper that was still, he believed, "lying about." He even made to look for it, and while he was doing so Kipps went on with the argument, addressing himself more particularly to the photograph of the girl in tights. He said that at first her costume had not commended her to him, but now he perceived she had an extremely sensible face. He told her she would like Buggins if she met him; he could see she was just that sort. She would admit, all sensible people would admit, that using names in plays was wrong. You could, for example, have the law of him.

He became confidential. He explained that he was already in sufficient trouble for stopping out all night without having his name put in plays. He was certain to be in the deuce of a row, the deuce of a row. Why had he done it? Why hadn't he gone at ten? Because one thing leads to another. One thing, he generalized, always does lead to another....

He was trying to tell her that he was utterly unworthy of Miss Walshingham, when Chitterlow gave up the search and suddenly accused him of being drunk and talking "Rot——."

[Pg 117]

CHAPTER V"SWAPPED"

§1

He awoke on the thoroughly comfortable sofa that had had all its springs removed, and although he had certainly not been intoxicated, he awoke with what Chitterlow pronounced to be, quite indisputably, a Head and a Mouth. He had slept in his clothes and he felt stiff and uncomfortable all over, but the head and mouth insisted that he must not bother over little things like that. In the head was one large, angular idea that it was physically painful to have there. If he moved his head the angular idea shifted about in the most agonising way. This idea was that he had lost his situation and was utterly ruined and that it really mattered very little. Shalford was certain to hear of his escapade, and that coupled with that row about the Manchester window——!

He raised himself into a sitting position under Chitterlow's urgent encouragement.

He submitted apathetically to his host's attentions. Chitterlow, who admitted being a "bit off it" himself and in need of an egg-cupful of brandy, just an egg-cupful neat, dealt with that Head and Mouth as a[Pg 118] mother might deal with the fall of an only child. He compared it with other Heads and Mouths that he had met, and in particular to certain experienced by the Hon. Thomas Norgate. "Right up to the last," said Chitterlow, "he couldn't stand his liquor. It happens like that at times." And after Chitterlow had pumped on the young beginner's head and given him some anchovy paste piping hot on buttered toast, which he preferred to all the other remedies he had encountered, Kipps resumed his crumpled collar, brushed his clothes, tacked up his knee, and prepared to face Mr. Shalford and the reckoning for this wild, unprecedented night, the first "night out" that ever he had taken.

Acting on Chitterlow's advice to have a bit of a freshener before returning to the Emporium, Kipps walked some way along the Leas and back and then went down to a shop near the Harbour to get a cup of coffee. He found that extremely reinvigorating, and he went on up the High Street to face the inevitable terrors of the office, a faint touch of pride in his depravity tempering his extreme self-abasement. After all, it was not an unmanly headache; he had been out all night, and he had been drinking and his physical disorder was there to witness the fact. If it wasn't for the thought of Shalford he would have been even a proud man to discover himself at last in such a condition. But the thought of Shalford was very dreadful. He met two of the apprentices snatching a walk before shop began. At

the sight of them[Pg 119] he pulled his spirits together, put his hat back from his pallid brow, thrust his hands into his trouser pockets and adopted an altogether more dissipated carriage; he met their innocent faces with a wan smile. Just for a moment he was glad that his patch at the knee was, after all, visible and that some at least of the mud on his clothes had refused to move at Chitterlow's brushing. What wouldn't they think he had been up to? He passed them without speaking. He could imagine how they regarded his back. Then he recollected Mr. Shalford....

The deuce of a row certainly and perhaps——! He tried to think of plausible versions of the affair. He could explain he had been run down by rather a wild sort of fellow who was riding a bicycle, almost stunned for the moment (even now he felt the effects of the concussion in his head) and had been given whiskey to restore him, and "the fact is, sir"—with an upward inflection of the voice, an upward inflection of the eyebrows and an air of its being the last thing one would have expected whiskey to do, the manifestation indeed of a practically unique physiological weakness—"it got into my *'ed*!"

Put like that it didn't look so bad.

He got to the Emporium a little before eight and the housekeeper with whom he was something of a favourite ("There's no harm in Mr. Kipps," she used to say) seemed to like him if anything better for having broken the rules and gave him a piece of dry toast and a good hot cup of tea.

[Pg 120]

"I suppose the G. V.——" began Kipps.

"He knows," said the housekeeper.

He went down to shop a little before time, and presently Booch summoned him to the presence.

He emerged from the private office after an interval of ten minutes.

The junior clerk scrutinised his visage. Buggins put the frank question.

Kipps answered with one word.

"Swapped!" said Kipps.

§2

Kipps leant against the fixtures with his hands in his pockets and talked to the two apprentices under him.

"I don't care if I *am* swapped," said Kipps. "I been sick of Teddy and his System some time. I was a good mind to chuck it when my time was up. Wish I 'ad now."

Afterwards Pierce came round and Kipps repeated this.

"What's it for?" said Pierce. "That row about the window tickets?"

"No fear!" said Kipps and sought to convey a perspective of splendid depravity. "I wasn't in las' night," he said and made even Pierce, "man about town" Pierce, open his eyes.

"Why! where did you get to?" asked Pierce.

He conveyed that he had been "fair round the town." "With a Nactor chap, I know."

[Pg 121]

"One can't *always* be living like a curit," he said.

"No fear," said Pierce, trying to play up to him.

But Kipps had the top place in that conversation.

"My Lor'!" said Kipps, when Pierce had gone, "but wasn't my mouth and 'ed bad this morning before I 'ad a pick-me-up!"

"Whad jer 'ave?"

"Anchovy on 'ot buttered toast. It's the very best pick-me-up there is. You trust me, Rodgers. I never take no other and I don't advise you to. See?"

And when pressed for further particulars, he said again he had been "fair all *round* the town, with a Nactor chap" he knew. They asked curiously all he had done and he said, "Well, what do *you* think?" And when they pressed for still further details he said there were things little boys ought not to know and laughed darkly and found them some huckaback to roll.

And in this manner for a space did Kipps fend off the contemplation of the "key of the street" that Shalford had presented him.

§3

This sort of thing was all very well when junior apprentices were about, but when Kipps was alone with himself it served him not at all. He was uncomfortable

inside and his skin was uncomfortable, and Head and Mouth palliated perhaps, but certainly not cured, were still with him. He felt, to tell the truth, nasty and dirty and extremely disgusted with[Pg 122] himself. To work was dreadful and to stand still and think still more dreadful. His patched knee reproached him. These were the second best of his three pairs of trousers, and they had cost him thirteen and sixpence. Practically ruined they were. His dusting pair was unfit for shop and he would have to degrade his best. When he was under inspection he affected the slouch of a desperado, but directly he found himself alone, this passed insensibly into the droop.

The financial aspect of things grew large before him. His whole capital in the world was the sum of five pounds in the Post Office Savings Bank and four and sixpence cash. Besides there would be two months' screw. His little tin box upstairs was no longer big enough for his belongings; he would have to buy another, let alone that it was not calculated to make a good impression in a new "crib." Then there would be paper and stamps needed in some abundance for answering advertisements and railway fares when he went "crib hunting." He would have to write letters, and he never wrote letters. There was spelling for example to consider. Probably if nothing turned up before his month was up he would have to go home to his Uncle and Aunt.

How would they take it?...

For the present at any rate he resolved not to write to them.

Such disagreeable things as this it was that lurked below the fair surface of Kipps' assertion, "I've been[Pg 123] wanting a chance. If 'e 'adn't swapped me, I should very likely 'ave swapped *'im*."

In the perplexed privacies of his own mind he could not understand how everything had happened. He had been the Victim of Fate, or at least of one as inexorable—Chitterlow. He tried to recall the successive steps that had culminated so disastrously. They were difficult to recall....

Buggins that night abounded in counsel and reminiscence.

"Curious thing," said Buggins, "but every time I've had the swap I've never believed I should get another Crib—never. But I have," said Buggins. "Always. So don't lose heart, whatever you do....

"Whatever you do," said Buggins, "keep hold of your collars and cuffs—shirts if you can, but collars anyhow. Spout them last. And anyhow, it's summer!—you won't want your coat.... You got a good umbrella....

"You'll no more get a shop from New Romney, than—anything. Go straight up to London, get the cheapest room you can find—and hang out. Don't eat too much. Many a chap's put his prospects in his stomach. Get a cup o' coffee and a slice—egg if you like—but remember you got to turn up at the Warehouse tidy. The best places *now*, I believe, are the old cabmen's eating houses. Keep your watch and chain as long as you can....

"There's lots of shops going," said Buggins. "Lots!"

[Pg 124]

And added reflectively, "But not this time of year perhaps."

He began to recall his own researches. "'Stonishing lot of chaps you see," he said. "All sorts. Look like Dukes some of 'em. High hat. Patent boots. Frock coat. All there. All right for a West End crib. Others—Lord! It's a caution, Kipps. Boots been inked in some reading rooms—*I* used to write in a Reading Room in Fleet Street, regular penny club—hat been wetted, collar frayed, tail coat buttoned up, black chest-plaster tie—spread out. Shirt, you know, gone——" Buggins pointed upward with a pious expression.

"No shirt, I expect?"

"Eat it," said Buggins.

Kipps meditated. "I wonder where old Merton is," he said at last. "I often wondered about 'im."

§4

It was the morning following Kipps' notice of dismissal that Miss Walshingham came into the shop. She came in with a dark, slender lady, rather faded, rather tightly dressed, whom Kipps was to know some day as her mother. He discovered them in the main shop at the counter of the ribbon department. He had come to the opposite glove counter with some goods enclosed in a parcel that he had unpacked in his own department. The two ladies were both bent over a box of black ribbon.

[Pg 125]

He had a moment of tumultuous hesitations. The etiquette of the situation was incomprehensible. He put down his goods very quietly and stood hands on counter, staring at these two ladies. Then, as Miss Walshingham sat back, the instinct of flight seized him....

He returned to his Manchester shop wildly agitated. Directly he was out of sight of her he wanted to see her. He fretted up and down the counter, and addressed some snappish remarks to the apprentice in the window. He fumbled for a moment with a parcel, untied it needlessly, began to tie it up again and then bolted back again into the main shop. He could hear his own heart beating.

The two ladies were standing in the manner of those who have completed their purchases and are waiting for their change. Mrs. Walshingham regarded some remnants with impersonal interest; Helen's eyes searched the shop. They distinctly lit up when they discovered Kipps.

He dropped his hands to the counter by habit and stood for a moment regarding her awkwardly. What would she do? Would she cut him? She came across the shop to him.

"How are *you*, Mr. Kipps?" she said, in her clear, distinct tones, and she held out her hand.

"Very well, thank you," said Kipps; "how are you?"

She said she had been buying some ribbon.

He became aware of Mrs. Walshingham very[Pg 126] much surprised. This checked something allusive about the class and he said instead that he supposed she was glad to be having her holidays now. She said she was, it gave her more time for reading and that sort of thing. He supposed that she would be going abroad and she thought that perhaps they *would* go to Knocke or Bruges for a time.

Then came a pause and Kipps' soul surged within him. He wanted to tell her he was leaving and would never see her again. He could find neither words nor voice to say it. The swift seconds passed. The girl in the ribbons was handing Mrs. Walshingham her change. "Well," said Miss Walshingham, "Good-bye," and gave him her hand again.

Kipps bowed over her hand. His manners, his counter manners, were the easiest she had ever seen upon him. She turned to her mother. It was no good now, no good. Her mother! You couldn't say a thing like that before her mother! All was

lost but politeness. Kipps rushed for the door. He stood at the door bowing with infinite gravity, and she smiled and nodded as she went out. She saw nothing of the struggle within him, nothing but a satisfactory emotion. She smiled like a satisfied goddess as the incense ascends.

Mrs. Walshingham bowed stiffly and a little awkwardly.

He remained holding the door open for some seconds after they had passed out, then rushed suddenly to the back of the "costume" window to watch them[Pg 127] go down the street. His hands tightened on the window rack as he stared. Her mother appeared to be asking discreet questions. Helen's bearing suggested the off-hand replies of a person who found the world a satisfactory place to live in. "Really, Mumsie, you cannot expect me to cut my own students dead," she was in fact saying....

They vanished round Henderson's corner.

Gone! And he would never see her again—never!

It was as though someone had struck his heart with a whip. Never! Never! Never! And she didn't know! He turned back from the window and the department with its two apprentices was impossible. The whole glaring world was insupportable.

He hesitated and made a rush head down for the cellar that was his Manchester warehouse. Rodgers asked him a question that he pretended not to hear.

The Manchester warehouse was a small cellar apart from the general basement of the building and dimly lit by a small gas flare. He did not turn that up, but rushed for the darkest corner, where on the lowest shelf the sale window tickets were stored. He drew out the box of these with trembling hands and upset them on the floor, and so having made himself a justifiable excuse for being on the ground, with his head well in the dark, he could let his poor bursting little heart have its way with him for a space.

And there he remained until the cry of "Kipps! Forward!" summoned him once more to face the world.

[Pg 128]

CHAPTER VITHE UNEXPECTED

§1

Now in the slack of that same day, after the midday dinner and before the coming of the afternoon customers, this disastrous Chitterlow descended upon Kipps with the most amazing coincidence in the world. He did not call formally, entering and demanding Kipps, but privately, in a confidential and mysterious manner.

Kipps was first aware of him as a dark object bobbing about excitedly outside the hosiery window. He was stooping and craning and peering in the endeavour to see into the interior between and over the socks and stockings. Then he transferred his attention to the door, and after a hovering scrutiny, tried the baby-linen display. His movements and gestures suggested a suppressed excitement.

Seen by daylight, Chitterlow was not nearly such a magnificent figure as he had been by the subdued nocturnal lightings and beneath the glamour of his own interpretation. The lines were the same indeed, but the texture was different. There was a quality about[Pg 129] the yachting cap, an indefinable finality of dustiness, a shiny finish on all the salient surfaces of the reefer coat. The red hair and the profile, though still forcible and fine, were less in the quality of Michael Angelo and more in that of the merely picturesque. But it was a bright brown eye still that sought amidst the interstices of the baby-linen.

Kipps was by no means anxious to interview Chitterlow again. If he had felt sure that Chitterlow would not enter the shop he would have hid in the warehouse until the danger was past, but he had no idea of Chitterlow's limitations. He decided to keep up the shop in the shadows until Chitterlow reached the side window of the Manchester department and then to go outside as if to inspect the condition of the window and explain to him that things were unfavourable to immediate intercourse. He might tell him he had already lost his situation....

"Ullo, Chit'low," he said, emerging.

"Very man I want to see," said Chitterlow, shaking with vigour. "Very man I want to see." He laid a hand on Kipps' arm. "How *old* are you, Kipps?"

"One and twenty," said Kipps. "Why?"

"Talk about coincidences! And your name now? Wait a minute." He held out a finger. "*Is* it Arthur?"

"Yes," said Kipps.

"You're the man," said Chitterlow.

"What man?"

[Pg 130]

"It's about the thickest coincidence I ever struck," said Chitterlow, plunging his extensive hand into his breast coat pocket. "Half a jiff and I'll tell you your mother's Christian name." He laughed and struggled with his coat for a space, produced a washing book and two pencils, which he deposited in his side pocket; then in one capacious handful, a bent but by no means finally disabled cigar, the rubber proboscis of a bicycle pump, some twine and a lady's purse, and finally a small pocket book, and from this, after dropping and recovering several visiting cards, he extracted a carelessly torn piece of newspaper. "Euphemia," he read and brought his face close to Kipps'. "Eh?" He laughed noisily. "It's about as fair a Bit of All Right as anyone *could* have—outside a coincidence play. Don't say her name wasn't Euphemia, Kipps, and spoil the whole blessed show."

"Whose name—Euphemia?" asked Kipps.

"Your mother's."

"Lemme see what it says on the paper."

Chitterlow handed him the fragment and turned away. "You may say what you like," he said, addressing a vast, deep laugh to the street generally.

Kipps attempted to read. "'WADDY or KIPPS. If Arthur Waddy or Arthur Kipps, the son of Margaret Euphemia Kipps, who——'"

Chitterlow's finger swept over the print. "I went down the column and every blessed name that seemed to fit my play I took. I don't believe in made-up names. As I told you. I'm all with Zola in that.[Pg 131] Documents whenever you can. I like 'em hot and real. See? Who was Waddy?"

"Never heard his name."

"Not Waddy?"

"No!"

Kipps tried to read again and abandoned the attempt. "What does it mean?" he said. "I don't understand."

"It means," said Chitterlow, with a momentary note of lucid exposition, "so far as I can make out that you're going to strike it Rich. Never mind about the Waddy—that's a detail. What does it usually mean? You'll hear of something to your advantage—very well. I took that newspaper up to get my names by the merest

chance. Directly I saw it again and read that—I knew it was you. I believe in coincidences. People say they don't happen. *I* say they do. Everything's a coincidence. Seen properly. Here you are. Here's one! Incredible? Not a bit of it! See? It's you! Kipps! Waddy be damned! It's a Mascot. There's luck in my play. Bif! You're there. *I'm* there. Fair *in* it! Snap!" And he discharged his fingers like a pistol. "Never you mind about the 'Waddy.'"

"Eh?" said Kipps, with a nervous eye on Chitterlow's fingers.

"You're all right," said Chitterlow; "you may bet the seat of your only breeches on that! Don't you worry about the Waddy—that's as clear as day. You're about as right side up as a billiard ball[Pg 132]—whatever you do. Don't stand there gaping, man! Read the paper if you don't believe me. Read it!"

He shook it under Kipps' nose.

Kipps became aware of the second apprentice watching them from the shop. His air of perplexity gave place to a more confident bearing.

"'—— who was born at East Grinstead.' I certainly was born there. I've 'eard my Aunt say——"

"I knew it," said Chitterlow, taking hold of one edge of the paper and bringing his face close alongside Kipps'.

"'——on September the first, eighteen hundred and seventy-eight——'"

"*That's* all right," said Chitterlow. "It's all, all right, and all you have to do is write to Watson and Bean and get it——"

"Get what?"

"Whatever it is."

Kipps sought his moustache. "You'd write?" he asked.

"Ra-ther."

"But what d'you think it is?"

"That's the fun of it!" said Chitterlow, taking three steps in some as yet uninvented dance. "That's where the joke comes in. It may be anything—it may be a million. If so! Where does little Harry come in? Eh?"

Kipps was trembling slightly. "But——" he said, and thought. "If you was me——" he began. "About that Waddy——?"

[Pg 133]

He glanced up and saw the second apprentice disappear with amazing swiftness from behind the goods in the window.

"*What?*" asked Chitterlow, but he never had an answer.

"Lor'! There's the guv'nor!" said Kipps, and made a prompt dive for the door.

He dashed in only to discover that Shalford, with the junior apprentice in attendance, had come to mark off remnants of Kipps' cotton dresses and was demanding him. "Hullo, Kipps," he said, "outside——?"

"Seein' if the window was straight, Sir," said Kipps.

"Umph!" said Shalford.

For a space Kipps was too busily employed to think at all of Chitterlow or the crumpled bit of paper in his trouser pocket. He was, however, painfully aware of a suddenly disconcerted excitement at large in the street. There came one awful moment when Chitterlow's nose loomed interrogatively over the ground glass of the department door, and his bright, little, red-brown eye sought for the reason of Kipps' disappearance, and then it became evident that he saw the high light of Shalford's baldness and grasped the situation and went away. And then Kipps (with that advertisement in his pocket) was able to come back to the business in hand.

He became aware that Shalford had asked a question. "Yessir, nosir, rightsir. I'm sorting up zephyrs to-morrow, Sir," said Kipps.

[Pg 134]

Presently he had a moment to himself again, and, taking up a safe position behind a newly unpacked pile of summer lace curtains, he straightened out the piece of paper and reperused it. It was a little perplexing. That "Arthur Waddy or Arthur Kipps"—did that imply two persons or one? He would ask Pierce or Buggins. Only——

It had always been impressed upon him that there was something demanding secrecy about his mother.

"Don't you answer no questions about your mother," his aunt had been wont to say. "Tell them you don't know, whatever it is they ask you."

"Now this——?"

Kipps' face became portentously careful and he tugged at his moustache, such as it was, hard.

He had always represented his father as being a "gentleman farmer." "It didn't pay," he used to say with a picture in his own mind of a penny magazine aristocrat prematurely worn out by worry. "I'm a Norfan, both sides," he would explain, with the air of one who had seen trouble. He said he lived with his uncle and aunt, but he did not say that they kept a toy shop, and to tell anyone that his uncle had been a butler—*a servant!*—would have seemed the maddest of indiscretions. Almost all the assistants in the Emporium were equally reticent and vague, so great is their horror of "Lowness" of any sort. To ask about this "Waddy or Kipps" would upset all these little fictions. He was not, as a matter of fact, perfectly clear about his real status in the world (he was not,[Pg 135] as a matter of fact, perfectly clear about anything), but he knew that there was a quality about his status that was—detrimental.

Under the circumstances——?

It occurred to him that it would save a lot of trouble to destroy the advertisement there and then.

In which case he would have to explain to Chitterlow!

"Eng!" said Mr. Kipps.

"Kipps," cried Carshot, who was shopwalking; "Kipps, Forward!"

He thrust back the crumpled paper into his pocket and sallied forth to the customers.

"I want," said the customer, looking vaguely about her through glasses, "a little bit of something to cover a little stool I have. Anything would do—a remnant or anything——"

The matter of the advertisement remained in abeyance for half an hour, and at the end the little stool was still a candidate for covering and Kipps had a thoroughly representative collection of the textile fabrics in his department to clear away. He was so angry about the little stool that the crumpled advertisement lay for a space in his pocket, absolutely forgotten.

§2

Kipps sat on his tin box under the gas bracket that evening, and looked up the name Euphemia and[Pg 136] learnt what it meant in the "Enquire Within About

Everything" that constituted Buggins' reference library. He hoped Buggins, according to his habit, would ask him what he was looking for, but Buggins was busy turning out his week's washing. "Two collars," said Buggins, "half pair socks, two dickeys. Shirt?... M'm. There ought to be another collar somewhere."

"Euphemia," said Kipps at last, unable altogether to keep to himself this suspicion of a high origin that floated so delightfully about him, "Eu—phemia; it isn't a name *common* people would give to a girl, is it?"

"It isn't the name any decent people would give to a girl," said Buggins, "—— common or not."

"Lor'!" said Kipps. "Why?"

"It's giving girls names like that," said Buggins, "that nine times out of ten makes 'em go wrong. It unsettles 'em. If ever I was to have a girl, if ever I was to have a dozen girls, I'd call 'em all Jane. Every one of 'em. You couldn't have a better name than that. Euphemia indeed! What next?... Good Lord!... That isn't one of my collars there, is it? under your bed?"...

Kipps got him the collar.

"I don't see no great 'arm in Euphemia," he said as he did so.

After that he became restless. "I'm a good mind to write that letter," he said, and then, finding Buggins preoccupied wrapping his washing up in the[Pg 137] "half sox," added to himself, "a thundering good mind."

So he got his penny bottle of ink, borrowed the pen from Buggins and with no very serious difficulty in spelling or composition, did as he had resolved.

He came back into the bedroom about an hour afterwards a little out of breath and pale. "Where you been?" said Buggins, who was now reading the *Daily World Manager*, which came to him in rotation from Carshot.

"Out to post some letters," said Kipps, hanging up his hat.

"Crib hunting?"

"Mostly," said Kipps.

"Rather," he added, with a nervous laugh; "what else?"

Buggins went on reading. Kipps sat on his bed and regarded the back of the *Daily World Manager* thoughtfully.

"Buggins," he said at last.

Buggins lowered his paper and looked.

"I say, Buggins, what do these here advertisements mean that say so-and-so will hear of something greatly to his advantage?"

"Missin' people," said Buggins, making to resume reading.

"How d'yer mean?" asked Kipps. "Money left and that sort of thing?"

Buggins shook his head. "Debts," he said, "more often than not."

[Pg 138]

"But that ain't to his advantage."

"They put that to get 'old of 'em," said Buggins. "Often it's wives."

"What you mean?"

"Deserted wives, try and get their husbands back that way."

"I suppose it *is* legacies sometimes, eh? Perhaps if someone was left a hundred pounds by someone——"

"Hardly ever," said Buggins.

"Well, 'ow——?" began Kipps and hesitated.

Buggins resumed reading. He was very much excited by a leader on Indian affairs. "By Jove!" he said, "it won't do to give these here Blacks votes."

"No fear," said Kipps.

"They're different altogether," said Buggins. "They 'aven't the sound sense of Englishmen, and they 'aven't the character. There's a sort of tricky dishonesty about 'em—false witness and all that—of which an Englishman has no idea. Outside their courts of law—it's a pos'tive fact, Kipps—there's witnesses waitin' to be 'ired. Reg'lar trade. Touch their 'ats as you go in. Englishmen 'ave no idea, I tell you—not ord'nary Englishmen. It's in their blood. They're too timid to be honest. Too slavish. They aren't used to being free like we are, and if you gave 'em freedom they wouldn't make a proper use of it. Now *we*——. Oh, *Damn*!"

For the gas had suddenly gone out and Buggins[Pg 139] had the whole column of Society Club Chat still to read.

Buggins could talk of nothing after that but Shalford's meanness in turning off the gas, and after being extremely satirical indeed about their employer, undressed in the dark, hit his bare toe against a box and subsided after unseemly ejaculations into silent ill-temper.

Though Kipps tried to get to sleep before the affair of the letter he had just posted resumed possession of his mind he could not do so. He went over the whole thing again, quite exhaustively. Now that his first terror was abating he couldn't quite determine whether he was glad or sorry that he had posted that letter. If it *should* happen to be a hundred pounds!

It *must* be a hundred pounds!

If it was he could hold out for a year, for a couple of years even, before he got a Crib.

Even if it was fifty pounds——!

Buggins was already breathing regularly when Kipps spoke again. "*Bug*-gins," he said.

Buggins pretended to be asleep, and thickened his regular breathing (a little too hastily) to a snore.

"I say Buggins," said Kipps after an interval.

"*What's* up now?" said Buggins unamiably.

"'Spose *you* saw an advertisement in a paper, with your name in it, see, asking you to come and see someone, like, so as to hear of something very much to your——"

"Hide," said Buggins shortly.

[Pg 140]

"But——"

"I'd hide."

"Er?"

"Goonight, o' man," said Buggins, with convincing earnestness. Kipps lay still for a long time, then blew profoundly, turned over and stared at the other side of the dark.

He had been a fool to post that letter!

Lord! *Hadn't* he been a fool!

§3

It was just five days and a half after the light had been turned out while Buggins was reading, that a young man with a white face and eyes bright and wide-open, emerged from a side road upon the Leas front. He was dressed in his best clothes, and, although the weather was fine, he carried his umbrella, just as if he had been to church. He hesitated and turned to the right. He scanned each house narrowly as he passed it, and presently came to an abrupt stop. "Hughenden," said the gateposts in firm, black letters, and the fanlight in gold repeated "Hughenden." It was a stucco house fit to take your breath away, and its balcony was painted a beautiful sea-green, enlivened with gilding. He stood looking up at it.

"Gollys!" he said at last in an awestricken whisper.

It had rich-looking crimson curtains to all the lower windows and brass railed blinds above. There was a splendid tropical plant in a large, artistic pot in[Pg 141] the drawing-room window. There was a splendid bronzed knocker (ring also) and two bells—one marked "servants." Gollys! *Servants*, eh?

He walked past away from it, with his eyes regarding it, and then turned and came back. He passed through a further indecision, and finally drifted away to the sea front and sat down on a seat a little way along the Leas and put his arm over the back and regarded "Hughenden." He whistled an air very softly to himself, put his head first on one side and then on the other. Then for a space he scowled fixedly at it.

A very stout old gentleman, with a very red face and very protuberant eyes, sat down beside Kipps, removed a Panama hat of the most abandoned desperado cut, and mopped his brow and blew. Then he began mopping the inside of his hat. Kipps watched him for a space, wondering how much he might have a year, and where he bought his hat. Then "Hughenden" reasserted itself.

An impulse overwhelmed him. "I say," he said, leaning forward, to the old gentleman.

The old gentleman started and stared.

"*Whad* do you say?" he asked fiercely.

"You wouldn't think," said Kipps, indicating with his forefinger, "that that 'ouse there belongs to me."

The old gentleman twisted his neck round to look at "Hughenden." Then he came back to Kipps, looked at his mean, little garments with apoplectic intensity and blew at him by way of reply.

[Pg 142]

"It does," said Kipps, a little less confidently.

"Don't be a Fool," said the old gentleman, and put his hat on and wiped out the corners of his eyes. "It's hot enough," panted the old gentleman indignantly, "without Fools." Kipps looked from the old gentleman to the house and back to the old gentleman. The old gentleman looked at Kipps and snorted and looked out to sea, and again, snorting very contemptuously, at Kipps.

"Mean to say it doesn't belong to me?" said Kipps.

The old gentleman just glanced over his shoulder at the house in dispute and then fell to pretending Kipps didn't exist. "It's been lef' me this very morning," said Kipps. "It ain't the only one that's been lef' me, neither."

"Aw!" said the old gentleman, like one who is sorely tried. He seemed to expect the passers-by presently to remove Kipps.

"It *'as*," said Kipps. He made no further remark to the old gentleman for a space, but looked with a little less certitude at the house....

"I got——" he said and stopped.

"It's no good telling you if you don't believe," he said.

The old gentleman, after a struggle with himself, decided not to have a fit. "Try that game on with me," he panted. "Give you in charge."

"What game?"

"Wasn't born yesterday," said the old gentleman, and blew. "Besides," he added, "*look* at you! I[Pg 143] know you," and the old gentleman coughed shortly and nodded to the horizon and coughed again.

Kipps looked dubiously from the house to the old gentleman and back to the house. Their conversation, he gathered, was over. Presently he got up and went slowly across the grass to its stucco portal again. He stood and his mouth shaped

the precious word, "Hughenden." It was all *right*! He looked over his shoulder as if in appeal to the old gentleman, then turned and went his way. The old gentleman was so evidently past all reason!

He hung for a moment some distance along the parade, as though some invisible string was pulling him back. When he could no longer see the house from the pavement he went out into the road. Then with an effort he snapped the string.

He went on down a quiet side street, unbuttoned his coat furtively, took out three bank notes in an envelope, looked at them and replaced them. Then he fished up five new sovereigns from his trouser pocket and examined them. To such a confidence had his exact resemblance to his dead mother's portrait carried Messrs. Watson and Bean.

It was right enough.

It really was *all* right.

He replaced the coins with grave precaution and went his way with a sudden briskness. It was all right—he had it now—he was a rich man at large. He went up a street and round a corner and along another street, and started towards the Pavilion and[Pg 144] changed his mind and came round back, resolved to go straight to the Emporium and tell them all.

He was aware of someone crossing a road far off ahead of him, someone curiously relevant to his present extraordinary state of mind. It was Chitterlow. Of course it was Chitterlow who had told him first of the whole thing! The playwright was marching buoyantly along a cross street. His nose was in the air, the yachting cap was on the back of his head and the large freckled hand grasped two novels from the library, a morning newspaper, a new hat done up in paper and a lady's net bag full of onions and tomatoes....

He passed out of sight behind the wine merchant's at the corner, as Kipps decided to hurry forward and tell him of the amazing change in the Order of the Universe that had just occurred.

Kipps uttered a feeble shout, arrested as it began, and waved his umbrella. Then he set off at a smart pace in pursuit. He came round the corner and Chitterlow had gone; he hurried to the next and there was no Chitterlow, he turned back unavailingly and his eyes sought some other possible corner. His hand fluttered to his mouth and he stood for a space at the pavement edge, staring about him. No good!

But the sight of Chitterlow was a wholesome thing, it connected events together, joined him on again to the past at a new point, and that was what he so badly needed....

It was all right—all right.

[Pg 145]

He became suddenly very anxious to tell everybody at the Emporium, absolutely everybody, all about it. That was what wanted doing. He felt that telling was the thing to make this business real. He gripped his umbrella about the middle and walked very eagerly.

He entered the Emporium through the Manchester department. He flung open the door (over whose ground glass he had so recently, in infinite apprehension, watched the nose of Chitterlow) and discovered the second apprentice and Pierce in conversation. Pierce was prodding his hollow tooth with a pin and talking in fragments about the distinctive characteristics of Good Style.

Kipps came up in front of the counter.

"I say," he said; "what d'yer think?"

"What?" said Pierce over the pin.

"Guess."

"You've slipped out because Teddy's in London."

"Something more."

"What?"

"Been left a fortune."

"Garn!"

"I 'ave."

"Get out!"

"Straight. I been lef' twelve 'undred pounds—twelve 'undred pounds a year!"

He moved towards the little door out of the department into the house, moving, as heralds say, *regardant passant*. Pierce stood with mouth[Pg 146] wide open and pin poised in air. "No!" he said at last.

"It's right," said Kipps, "and I'm going."

And he fell over the doormat into the house.

§4

It happened that Mr. Shalford was in London buying summer sale goods—and no doubt also interviewing aspirants to succeed Kipps.

So that there was positively nothing to hinder a wild rush of rumour from end to end of the Emporium. All the masculine members began their report with the same formula. "Heard about Kipps?"

The new girl in the cash desk had had it from Pierce and had dashed out into the fancy shop to be the first with the news on the fancy side. Kipps had been left a thousand pounds a year, twelve thousand pounds a year. Kipps had been left twelve hundred thousand pounds. The figures were uncertain, but the essential facts they had correct. Kipps had gone upstairs. Kipps was packing his box. He said he wouldn't stop another day in the old Emporium, not for a thousand pounds! It was said that he was singing ribaldry about old Shalford.

He had come down! He was in the counting house. There was a general movement thither. Poor old Buggins had a customer and couldn't make out what the deuce it was all about! Completely out of it was Buggins.

There was a sound of running to and fro and[Pg 147] voices saying this, that and the other thing about Kipps. Ring-a-dinger, ring-a-dinger went the dinner bell all unheeded. The whole of the Emporium was suddenly bright-eyed, excited, hungry to tell somebody, to find at any cost somebody who didn't know and be first to tell them, "Kipps has been left thirty—forty—fifty thousand pounds!"

"*What!*" cried the senior porter, "Him!" and ran up to the counting house as eagerly as though Kipps had broken his neck.

"One of our chaps just been left sixty thousand pounds," said the first apprentice, returning after a great absence, to his customer.

"Unexpectedly?" said the customer.

"Quite," said the first apprentice....

"I'm sure if Anyone deserves it, it's Mr. Kipps," said Miss Mergle, and her train rustled as she hurried to the counting house.

There stood Kipps amidst a pelting shower of congratulations. His face was flushed and his hair disordered. He still clutched his hat and best umbrella in his left hand. His right hand was anyone's to shake rather than his own. (Ring-a-dinger, ring-a-dinger ding, ding, ding, dang you! went the neglected dinner bell.)

"Good old Kipps," said Pierce, shaking; "Good old Kipps."

Booch rubbed one anæmic hand upon the other. "You're sure it's all right, Mr. Kipps," he said in the background.

[Pg 148]

"I'm sure we all congratulate him," said Miss Mergle.

"Great Scott!" said the new young lady in the glove department. "Twelve hundred a year! Great Scott! You aren't thinking of marrying anyone, are you, Mr. Kipps?"

"Three pounds, five and ninepence a day," said Mr. Booch, working in his head almost miraculously....

Everyone, it seemed, was saying how glad they were it was Kipps, except the junior apprentice, upon whom—he being the only son of a widow and used to having the best of everything as a right—an intolerable envy, a sense of unbearable wrong, had cast its gloomy shade. All the rest were quite honestly and simply glad—gladder perhaps at that time than Kipps because they were not so overpowered....

Kipps went downstairs to dinner, emitting fragmentary, disconnected statements. "Never expected anything of the sort.... When this here old Bean told me, you could have knocked me down with a feather.... He says, 'You b'en lef' money.' Even then I didn't expect it'd be mor'n a hundred pounds perhaps. Something like that."

With the sitting down to dinner and the handing of plates the excitement assumed a more orderly quality. The housekeeper emitted congratulations as she carved and the maidservant became dangerous to clothes with the plates—she held them anyhow, one expected to see one upside down even—she found[Pg 149] Kipps so fascinating to look at. Everyone was the brisker and hungrier for the news (except the junior apprentice) and the housekeeper carved with unusual liberality. It was High Old Times there under the gaslight, High Old Times. "I'm sure if Anyone deserves it," said Miss Mergle—"pass the salt, please—it's Kipps."

The babble died away a little as Carshot began barking across the table at Kipps. "You'll be a bit of a Swell, Kipps," he said. "You won't hardly know yourself."

"Quite the gentleman," said Miss Mergle.

"Many real gentlemen's families," said the housekeeper, "have to do with less."

"See you on the Leas," said Carshot. "My gu—!" He met the housekeeper's eye. She had spoken about that before. "My eye!" he said tamely, lest words should mar the day.

"You'll go to London, I reckon," said Pierce. "You'll be a man about town. We shall see you mashing 'em, with violets in your button'ole down the Burlington Arcade."

"One of these West End Flats. That'd be my style," said Pierce. "And a first-class club."

"Aren't these clubs a bit 'ard to get into?" asked Kipps, open-eyed, over a mouthful of potato.

"No fear. Not for Money," said Pierce. And the girl in the laces who had acquired a cynical view of Modern Society from the fearless exposures of[Pg 150] Miss Marie Corelli, said, "Money goes everywhere nowadays, Mr. Kipps."

But Carshot showed the true British strain.

"If I was Kipps," he said, pausing momentarily for a knifeful of gravy, "I should go to the Rockies and shoot bears."

"I'd certainly 'ave a run over to Boulogne," said Pierce, "and look about a bit. I'm going to do that next Easter myself, anyhow—see if I don't."

"Go to Oireland, Mr. Kipps," came the soft insistence of Biddy Murphy, who managed the big workroom, flushed and shining in the Irish way, as she spoke. "Go to Oireland. Ut's the loveliest country in the world. Outside Car-rs. Fishin', shootin', huntin'. An' pretty gals! Eh! You should see the Lakes of Killarney, Mr. Kipps!" And she expressed ecstasy by a facial pantomime and smacked her lips.

And presently they crowned the event.

It was Pierce who said, "Kipps, you ought to stand Sham!"

And it was Carshot who found the more poetical word, "Champagne."

"Rather!" said Kipps hilariously, and the rest was a question of detail and willing emissaries. "Here it comes!" they said as the apprentice came down the

staircase. "How about the shop?" said someone. "Oh! *hang* the shop!" said Carshot and made gruntulous demands for a corkscrew with a thing to cut the wire. Pierce, the dog! had a wire cutter in his pocket knife. How Shalford would have stared at[Pg 151] the gold tipped bottles if he had chanced to take an early train! Bang with the corks, and bang! Gluck, gluck, gluck, and sizzle!

When Kipps found them all standing about him under the gas flare, saying almost solemnly "Kipps!" with tumblers upheld—"Have it in tumblers," Carshot had said; "have it in tumblers. It isn't a wine like you have in glasses. Not like port and sherry. It cheers you up, but you don't get drunk. It isn't hardly stronger than lemonade. They drink it at dinner, some of 'em, every day."

"What! At three and six a bottle!" said the housekeeper incredulously.

"*They* don't stick at *that*," said Carshot; "not the champagne sort."

The housekeeper pursed her lips and shook her head....

When Kipps, I say, found them all standing up to toast him in that manner, there came such a feeling in his throat and face that for the life of him he scarcely knew for a moment whether he was not going to cry. "Kipps!" they all said, with kindly eyes. It was very good of them, it was very good of them, and hard there wasn't a stroke of luck for them all!

But the sight of upturned chins and glasses pulled him together again....

They did him honour. Unenviously and freely they did him honour.

For example, Carshot being subsequently engaged in serving cretonne and desiring to push a number of[Pg 152] rejected blocks up the counter in order to have space for measuring, swept them by a powerful and ill-calculated movement of the arm, with a noise like thunder partly on to the floor and partly on to the foot of the still gloomily preoccupied junior apprentice. And Buggins, whose place it was to shopwalk while Carshot served, shopwalked with quite unparalleled dignity, dangling a new season's sunshade with a crooked handle on one finger. He arrested each customer who came down the shop with a grave and penetrating look. "Showing very 'tractive line new sheason's shun-shade," he would remark, and, after a suitable pause, "'Markable thing, one our 'sistant leg'sy twelve 'undred a year. V'ry 'tractive. Nothing more to-day, mum? No!" And he would then go and hold the door open for them with perfect decorum and with the sunshade dangling elegantly from his left hand....

And the second apprentice, serving a customer with cheap ticking, and being asked suddenly if it was strong, answered remarkably,

"Oo! *no*, mum! Strong! Why it ain't 'ardly stronger than lemonade...."

The head porter, moreover, was filled with a virtuous resolve to break the record as a lightning packer and make up for lost time. Mr. Swaffenham, of the Sandgate Riviera, for example, who was going out to dinner that night at seven, received at half-past six, instead of the urgently needed dress shirt he expected, a corset specially adapted to the needs of persons [Pg 153]inclined to embonpoint. A parcel of summer underclothing selected by the elder Miss Waldershawe, was somehow distributed in the form of gratis additions throughout a number of parcels of a less intimate nature, and a box of millinery on approval to Lady Pamshort (at Wampachs) was enriched by the addition of the junior porter's cap....

These little things, slight in themselves, witness perhaps none the less eloquently to the unselfish exhilaration felt throughout the Emporium at the extraordinary and unexpected enrichment of Mr. Kipps.

§5

The 'bus that plies between New Romney and Folkestone is painted a British red and inscribed on either side with the word "Tip-top" in gold amidst voluptuous scrolls. It is a slow and portly 'bus. Below it swings a sort of hold, hung by chains between the wheels, and in the summer time the top has garden seats. The front over the two dauntless unhurrying horses rises in tiers like a theatre; there is first a seat for the driver and his company, and above that a seat and above that, unless my memory plays me false, a seat. There are days when this 'bus goes and days when it doesn't go—you have to find out. And so you get to New Romney.

This 'bus it was, this ruddy, venerable and immortal 'bus, that came down the Folkestone hill with unflinching deliberation, and trundled through Sandgate and Hythe, and out into the windy spaces of the[Pg 154] Marsh, with Kipps and all his fortunes on its brow. You figure him there. He sat on the highest seat diametrically above the driver and his head was spinning and spinning with champagne and this stupendous Tomfoolery of Luck and his heart was swelling, swelling indeed at times as though it would burst him, and his face towards the sunlight was transfigured. He said never a word, but ever and again as he thought of this or that, he laughed. He seemed full of chuckles for a time, detached and independent chuckles, chuckles that rose and burst in him like bubbles in a

wine.... He held a banjo sceptre-fashion and restless on his knee. He had always wanted a banjo, and now he had got one at Malchior's while he was waiting for the 'bus.

There sat beside him a young servant who was sucking peppermint and a little boy with a sniff, whose flitting eyes showed him curious to know why ever and again Kipps laughed, and beside the driver were two young men in gaiters talking about "tegs." And there sat Kipps, all unsuspected, twelve hundred a year, as it were, disguised as a common young man. And the young man in gaiters to the left of the driver eyed Kipps and his banjo, and especially his banjo, ever and again as if he found it and him, with his rapt face, an insoluble enigma. And many a King has ridden into a conquered city with a lesser sense of splendour than Kipps.

Their shadows grew long behind them and their faces were transfigured in gold as they rumbled on[Pg 155] towards the splendid West. The sun set before they had passed Dymchurch, and as they came lumbering into New Romney past the windmill the dusk had come.

The driver handed down the banjo and the portmanteau, and Kipps having paid him—"That's aw right," he said to the change, as a gentleman should—turned about and ran the portmanteau smartly into Old Kipps, whom the sound of the stopping of the 'bus had brought to the door of the shop in an aggressive mood and with his mouth full of supper.

"Ullo, Uncle, didn't see you," said Kipps.

"Blunderin' ninny," said Old Kipps. "What's brought *you* here? Ain't early closing, is it? Not Toosday?"

"Got some news for you, Uncle," said Kipps, dropping the portmanteau.

"Ain't lost your situation, 'ave you? What's that you got there? I'm blowed if it ain't a banjo. Goo-lord! Spendin' your money on banjoes! Don't put down your portmanty there—anyhow. Right in the way of everybody. I'm blowed if ever I saw such a boy as you've got lately. Here! Molly! And, look here! What you got a portmanty for? Why! Goo-lord! You ain't *really* lost your place, 'ave you?"

"Somethin's happened," said Kipps slightly dashed. "It's all right, Uncle. I'll tell you in a minute."

Old Kipps took the banjo as his nephew picked up the portmanteau again.

The living room door opened quickly, showing a[Pg 156] table equipped with elaborate simplicity for supper, and Mrs. Kipps appeared.

"If it ain't young Artie," she said. "Why! Whatever's brought *you* 'ome?"

"Ullo, Aunt," said Artie. "I'm coming in. I got somethin' to tell you. I've 'ad a bit of Luck."

He wouldn't tell them all at once. He staggered with the portmanteau round the corner of the counter, set a bundle of children's tin pails into clattering oscillation, and entered the little room. He deposited his luggage in the corner beside the tall clock, and turned to his Aunt and Uncle again. His Aunt regarded him doubtfully, the yellow light from the little lamp on the table escaped above the shade and lit her forehead and the tip of her nose. It would be all right in a minute. He wouldn't tell them all at once. Old Kipps stood in the shop door with the banjo in his hand, breathing noisily. "The fact is, Aunt, I've 'ad a bit of Luck."

"You ain't been backin' gordless 'orses, Artie?" she asked.

"No fear."

"It's a draw he's been in," said Old Kipps, still panting from the impact of the portmanteau; "it's a dratted draw. Jest look here, Molly. He's won this 'ere trashy banjer and thrown up his situation on the strength of it—that's what he's done. Goin' about singing. Dash and plunge! Jest the very fault poor Pheamy always 'ad. Blunder right in and no one mustn't stop 'er!"

[Pg 157]

"You ain't thrown up your place, Artie, 'ave you?" said Mrs. Kipps.

Kipps perceived his opportunity. "I 'ave," he said; "I've throwed it up."

"What for?" said Old Kipps.

"So's to learn the banjo!"

"Goo *Lord*!" said Old Kipps, in horror to find himself verified.

"I'm going about playing!" said Kipps with a giggle. "Goin' to black my face, Aunt, and sing on the beach. I'm going to 'ave a most tremenjous lark and earn any amount of money—you see. Twenty-six fousand pounds I'm going to earn just as easy as nothing!"

"Kipps," said Mrs. Kipps, "he's been drinking!"

They regarded their nephew across the supper table with long faces. Kipps exploded with laughter and broke out again when his Aunt shook her head very sadly at him. Then suddenly he fell grave. He felt he could keep it up no longer. "It's all right, Aunt. Reely. I ain't mad and I ain't been drinking. I been lef' money. I been left twenty-six fousand pounds."

Pause.

"And you thrown up your place?" said Old Kipps.

"Yes," said Kipps. "Rather!"

"And bort this banjer, put on your best noo trousers and come right on 'ere?"

"Well," said Mrs. Kipps, "*I* never did."

[Pg 158]

"These ain't my noo trousers, Aunt," said Kipps regretfully. "My noo trousers wasn't done."

"I shouldn't ha' thought that *even you* could ha' been such a fool as that," said Old Kipps.

Pause.

"It's *all* right," said Kipps a little disconcerted by their distrustful solemnity. "It's all right—reely! Twenny-six fousan' pounds. And a 'ouse——"

Old Kipps pursed his lips and shook his head.

"A 'ouse on the Leas. I could have gone there. Only I didn't. I didn't care to. I didn't know what to say. I wanted to come and tell you."

"How d'yer know the 'ouse——?"

"They told me."

"Well," said Old Kipps, and nodded his head portentously towards his nephew, with the corners of his mouth pulled down in a portentous, discouraging way. "Well, you *are* a young Gaby."

"I didn't *think* it of you, Artie!" said Mrs. Kipps.

"Wadjer mean?" asked Kipps faintly, looking from one to the other with a withered face.

Old Kipps closed the shop door. "They been 'avin' a lark with you," said Old Kipps in a mournful undertone. "That's what I mean, my boy. They jest been seein' what a Gaby like you 'ud do."

"I dessay that young Quodling was in it," said Mrs. Kipps. "'E's jest that sort."

(For Quodling of the green baize bag had grown up to be a fearful dog, the terror of New Romney.)

[Pg 159]

"It's somebody after your place very likely," said Old Kipps.

Kipps looked from one sceptical, reproving face to the other, and round him at the familiar shabby, little room, with his familiar cheap portmanteau on the mended chair, and that banjo amidst the supper things like some irrevocable deed. Could he be rich indeed? Could it be that these things had really happened? Or had some insane fancy whirled him hither?

Still—perhaps a hundred pounds——

"But," he said. "It's all right, reely, Uncle. You don't think——? I 'ad a letter."

"Got up," said Old Kipps.

"But I answered it and went to a norfis."

Old Kipps felt staggered for a moment, but he shook his head and chins sagely from side to side. As the memory of old Bean and Shalford revived, the confidence of Kipps came back to him.

"I saw a nold gent, Uncle—perfect gentleman. And 'e told me all about it. Mos' respectable 'e was. Said 'is name was Watson and Bean—leastways 'e was Bean. Said it was lef' me——" Kipps suddenly dived into his breast pocket. "By my Grandfather——"

The old people started.

Old Kipps uttered an exclamation and wheeled round towards the mantel shelf above which the daguerreotype of his lost younger sister smiled its fading smile upon the world.

[Pg 160]

"Waddy 'is name was," said Kipps, with his hand still deep in his pocket. "It was *'is* son was my father——"

"Waddy!" said Old Kipps.

"Waddy!" said Mrs. Kipps.

"She'd never say," said Old Kipps.

There was a long silence.

Kipps fumbled with a letter, a crumpled advertisement and three bank notes. He hesitated between these items.

"Why! That young chap what was arsting questions——" said Old Kipps, and regarded his wife with an eye of amazement.

"Must 'ave been," said Mrs. Kipps.

"Must 'ave been," said Old Kipps.

"James," said Mrs. Kipps, in an awestricken voice, "after all—perhaps—it's true!"

"*'Ow* much did you say?" asked Old Kipps. "'Ow much did you say 'ed lef' you, me b'y?"

It was thrilling, though not quite in the way Kipps had expected. He answered almost meekly across the meagre supper things, with his documentary evidence in his hand:

"Twelve 'undred pounds. 'Proximately, he said. Twelve 'undred pounds a year. 'E made 'is will, jest before 'e died—not more'n a month ago. When 'e was dying, 'e seemed to change like, Mr. Bean said. 'E'd never forgiven 'is son, never—not till then. 'Is son 'ad died in Australia, years and years ago, and *then* 'e 'adn't forgiven 'im. You know—'is son what[Pg 161] was my father. But jest when 'e was ill and dying 'e seemed to get worried like and longing for someone of 'is own. And 'e told Mr. Bean it was 'im that had prevented them marrying. So 'e thought. That's 'ow it all come about...."

§6

At last Kipps' flaring candle went up the narrow uncarpeted staircase to the little attic that had been his shelter and refuge during all the days of his childhood and youth. His head was whirling. He had been advised, he had been warned, he had been flattered and congratulated, he had been given whiskey and hot water and lemon and sugar, and his health had been drunk in the same. He had also eaten two Welsh Rabbits—an unusual supper. His Uncle was chiefly for his going into

Parliament, his Aunt was consumed with a great anxiety. "I'm afraid he'll go and marry beneath 'im."

"Y'ought to 'ave a bit o' shootin' somewheer," said Old Kipps.

"It's your *duty* to marry into a county family, Artie. Remember that."

"There's lots of young noblemen'll be glad to 'ang on to you," said Old Kipps. "You mark my words. And borry your money. And then, good day to ye."

"I got to be precious Careful," said Kipps. "Mr. Bean said that."

"And you got to be precious careful of this old[Pg 162] Bean," said Old Kipps. "We may be out of the world in Noo Romney, but I've 'eard a bit about s'licitors, for all that. You keep your eye on old Bean, me b'y.

"'Ow do we know what 'e's up to, with your money, even now?" said Old Kipps, pursuing this uncomfortable topic.

"'E *looked* very respectable," said Kipps....

Kipps undressed with great deliberation, and with vast gaps of pensive margin. Twenty-six thousand pounds!

His Aunt's solicitude had brought back certain matters into the foreground that his "Twelve 'Undred a year!" had for a time driven away altogether. His thoughts went back to the wood-carving class. Twelve Hundred a Year. He sat on the edge of the bed in profound meditation and his boots fell "whop" and "whop" upon the floor, with a long interval between each "whop." Twenty-five thousand pounds. "By Gum!" He dropped the remainder of his costume about him on the floor, got into bed, pulled the patchwork quilt over him and put his head on the pillow that had been first to hear of Ann Pornick's accession to his heart. But he did not think of Ann Pornick now.

It was about everything in the world except Ann Pornick that he seemed to be trying to think of—simultaneously. All the vivid happenings of the day came and went in his overtaxed brain; "that old Bean" explaining and explaining, the fat man who[Pg 163] wouldn't believe, an overpowering smell of peppermint, the banjo, Miss Mergle saying he deserved it, Chitterlow's vanishing round a corner, the wisdom and advice and warnings of his Aunt and Uncle. She was afraid he would marry beneath him, *was* she? She didn't know....

His brain made an excursion into the wood-carving class and presented Kipps with the picture of himself amazing that class by a modest yet clearly audible remark, "I been left twenty-six thousand pounds."

Then he told them all quietly but firmly that he had always loved Miss Walshingham, always, and so he had brought all his twenty-six thousand pounds with him to give to her there and then. He wanted nothing in return.... Yes, he wanted nothing in return. He would give it to her all in an envelope and go. Of course he would keep the banjo—and a little present for his Aunt and Uncle—and a new suit perhaps—and one or two other things she would not miss. He went off at a tangent. He might buy a motor car, he might buy one of these here things that will play you a piano—that would make old Buggins sit up! He could pretend he had learnt to play—he might buy a bicycle and a cyclist suit....

A terrific multitude of plans of what he might do and in particular of what he might buy, came crowding into his brain, and he did not so much fall asleep as pass into a disorder of dreams in which he was driving a four-horse Tip-Top coach down Sandgate Hill ("I shall have to be precious careful"), wearing[Pg 164] innumerable suits of clothes, and through some terrible accident wearing them all wrong. Consequently he was being laughed at. The coach vanished in the interest of the costume. He was wearing golfing suits and a silk hat. This passed into a nightmare that he was promenading on the Leas in a Highland costume, with a kilt that kept shrinking, and Shalford was following him with three policemen. "He's my assistant," Shalford kept repeating; "he's escaped. He's an escaped Improver. Keep by him and in a minute you'll have to run him in. I know 'em. We say they wash, but they won't."... He could feel the kilt creeping up his legs. He would have tugged at it to pull it down only his arms were paralysed. He had an impression of giddy crisis. He uttered a shriek of despair. "*Now!*" said Shalford. He woke in horror, his quilt had slipped off the bed.

He had a fancy he had just been called, that he had somehow overslept himself and missed going down for dusting. Then he perceived it was still night and light by reason of the moonlight, and that he was no longer in the Emporium. He wondered where he could be. He had a curious fancy that the world had been swept and rolled up like a carpet and that he was nowhere. It occurred to him that perhaps he was mad. "Buggins!" he said. There was no answer, not even the defensive snore. No room, no Buggins, nothing!

Then he remembered better. He sat on the edge of his bed for some time. Could anyone have seen[Pg 165] his face they would have seen it white and drawn with

staring eyes. Then he groaned weakly. "Twenty-six thousand pounds?" he whispered.

Just then it presented itself in an almost horribly overwhelming mass.

He remade his bed and returned to it. He was still dreadfully wakeful. It was suddenly clear to him that he need never trouble to get up punctually at seven again. That fact shone out upon him like a star through clouds. He was free to lie in bed as long as he liked, get up when he liked, go where he liked, have eggs every morning for breakfast or rashers or bloater paste or.... Also he was going to astonish Miss Walshingham....

Astonish her and astonish her....

* * * * * *

He was awakened by a thrush singing in the fresh dawn. The whole room was flooded with warm, golden sunshine. "I say!" said the thrush. "I say! I say! Twelve 'undred a year! Twelve 'Undred a Year. Twelve 'UNDRED a Year! I say! I say! I say!"

He sat up in bed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes with his knuckles. Then he jumped out of bed and began dressing very eagerly. He did not want to lose any time in beginning the new life.

END OF BOOK I

[Pg 167]

BOOK IIMR. COOTE, THE CHAPERON

[Pg 169]

CHAPTER ITHE NEW CONDITIONS

§1

There comes a gentlemanly figure into these events and for a space takes a leading part therein, a Good Influence, a refined and amiable figure, Mr. Chester Coote. You must figure him as about to enter our story, walking with a curious rectitude of bearing through the evening dusk towards the Public Library, erect,

large-headed—he had a great, big head full of the suggestion of a powerful mind, well under control—with a large, official-looking envelope in his white and knuckly hand. In the other he carries a gold-handled cane. He wears a silken grey jacket suit, buttoned up, and anon he coughs behind the official envelope. He has a prominent nose, slatey grey eyes and a certain heaviness about the mouth. His mouth hangs breathing open, with a slight protrusion of the lower jaw. His straw hat is pulled down a little in front, and he looks each person he passes in the eye, and directly his look is answered looks away.

Thus Mr. Chester Coote, as he was on the evening when he came upon Kipps. He was a local house[Pg 170] agent and a most active and gentlemanly person, a conscious gentleman, equally aware of society and the serious side of life. From amateur theatricals of a nice, refined sort to science classes, few things were able to get along without him. He supplied a fine, full bass, a little flat and quavery perhaps, but very abundant, to the St. Stylites' choir....

He passes on towards the Public Library, lifts the envelope in salutation to a passing curate, smiles and enters....

It was in the Public Library that he came upon Kipps.

By that time Kipps had been rich a week or more, and the change in his circumstances was visible upon his person. He was wearing a new suit of drab flannels, a Panama hat and a red tie for the first time, and he carried a silver-mounted stick with a tortoise shell handle. He felt extraordinarily different, perhaps more different than he really was, from the meek Improver of a week ago. He felt as he felt Dukes must feel, yet at bottom he was still modest. He was leaning on his stick and regarding the indicator with a respect that never palled. He faced round to meet Mr. Coote's overflowing smile.

"What are you doang hea?" said Mr. Chester Coote.

Kipps was momentarily abashed. "Oh," he said slowly, and then, "Mooching round a bit."

That Coote should address him with this easy familiarity was a fresh reminder of his enhanced [Pg 171]social position. "Jes' mooching round," he said. "I been back in Folkestone free days now. At my 'ouse, you know."

"Ah!" said Mr. Coote. "I haven't yet had an opportunity of congratulating you on your good fortune."

Kipps held out his hand. "It was the cleanest surprise that ever was," he said. "When Mr. Bean told me of it—you could have knocked me down with a feather."

"It must mean a tremendous change for you."

"Oo. Rather. Change. Why, I'm like the chap in the song they sing, I don't 'ardly know where I are. *You* know."

"An extraordinary change," said Mr. Coote. "I can quite believe it. Are you stopping in Folkestone?"

"For a bit. I got a 'ouse, you know. What my gran'father 'ad. I'm stopping there. His housekeeper was kep' on. Fancy—being in the same town and everything!"

"Precisely," said Mr. Coote. "That's it!" and coughed like a sheep behind four straight fingers.

"Mr. Bean got me to come back to see to things. Else I was out in New Romney, where my Uncle and Aunt live. But it's a Lark coming back. In a way...."

The conversation hung for a moment.

"Are you getting a book?" asked Coote.

"Well, I 'aven't got a ticket yet. But I shall get[Pg 172] one all right, and have a go in at reading. I've often wanted to. Rather. I was just 'aving a look at this Indicator. First-class idea. Tells you all you want to know."

"It's simple," said Coote, and coughed again, keeping his eyes fixed on Kipps. For a moment they hung, evidently disinclined to part. Then Kipps jumped at an idea he had cherished for a day or more,—not particularly in relation to Coote, but in relation to anyone.

"You doing anything?" he asked.

"Just called with a papah about the classes."

"Because——. Would you care to come up and look at my 'ouse and 'ave a smoke and a chat. Eh?" He made indicative back jerks of the head, and was smitten with a horrible doubt whether possibly this invitation might not be some hideous breach of etiquette. Was it, for example, the correct hour? "I'd be awfully glad if you would," he added.

Mr. Coote begged for a moment while he handed the official-looking envelope to the librarian and then declared himself quite at Kipps' service. They muddled a

moment over precedence at each door they went through and so emerged to the street.

"It feels awful rum to me at first, all this," said Kipps "'Aving a 'ouse of my own and all that. It's strange, you know. 'Aving all day. Reely I don't 'ardly know what to do with my time.

"D'ju smoke?" he said suddenly, proffering a magnificent gold decorated pigskin cigarette case,[Pg 173] which he produced from nothing, almost as though it was some sort of trick. Coote hesitated and declined, and then, with great liberality, "Don't let me hinder you...."

They walked a little way in silence, Kipps being chiefly concerned to affect ease in his new clothes and keeping a wary eye on Coote. "It's rather a big windfall," said Coote presently. "It yields you an income——?"

"Twelve 'undred a year," said Kipps. "Bit over—if anything."

"Do you think of living in Folkestone?"

"Don't know 'ardly yet. I *may*. Then again, I may not. I got a furnished 'ouse, but I may let it."

"Your plans are undecided?"

"That's jest it," said Kipps.

"Very beautiful sunset it was to-night," said Coote, and Kipps said, "Wasn't it?" and they began to talk of the merits of sunsets. Did Kipps paint? Not since he was a boy. He didn't believe he could now. Coote said his sister was a painter and Kipps received this intimation with respect. Coote sometimes wished he could find time to paint himself,—but one couldn't do everything and Kipps said that was "jest it."

They came out presently upon the end of the Leas and looked down to where the squat dark masses of the Harbour and Harbour Station, gemmed with pinpoint lights, crouched against the twilit grey of the sea. "If one could do *that*," said Coote, and Kipps was inspired to throw his head back, cock it on one[Pg 174] side, regard the Harbour with one eye shut and say that it would take some doing. Then Coote said something about "Abend," which Kipps judged to be in a foreign language and got over by lighting another cigarette from his by no means completed first one. "You're right, *puff*, *puff*."

He felt that so far he had held up his end of the conversation in a very creditable manner, but that extreme discretion was advisable.

They turned away and Coote remarked that the sea was good for crossing, and asked Kipps if he had been over the water very much. Kipps said he hadn't been—"much," but he thought very likely he'd have a run over to Boulogne soon, and Coote proceeded to talk of the charms of foreign travel, mentioning quite a number of unheard-of places by name. He had been to them! Kipps remained on the defensive, but behind his defences his heart sank. It was all very well to pretend, but presently it was bound to come out. *He* didn't know anything of all this....

So they drew near the house. At his own gate Kipps became extremely nervous. It was a fine, impressive door. He knocked neither a single knock nor a double, but about one and a half—an apologetic half. They were admitted by an irreproachable housemaid, with a steady eye, before which Kipps cringed dreadfully. He hung up his hat and fell about over hall chairs and things. "There's a fire in the study, Mary?" he had the audacity to ask, though evidently he knew, and led the way upstairs panting.[Pg 175] He tried to shut the door and discovered the housemaid behind him coming to light his lamp. This enfeebled him further. He said nothing until the door closed behind her. Meanwhile to show his *sang froid* he hummed and flitted towards the window, and here and there.

Coote went to the big hearthrug and turned and surveyed his host. His hand went to the back of his head and patted his occiput—a gesture frequent with him.

"'Ere we are," said Kipps, hands in his pockets and glancing round him.

It was a gaunt Victorian room, with a heavy, dirty cornice, and the ceiling enriched by the radiant plaster ornament of an obliterated gas chandelier. It held two large glass fronted bookcases, one of which was surmounted by a stuffed terrier encased in glass. There was a mirror over the mantel and hangings and curtains of magnificent crimson patternings. On the mantel were a huge black clock of classical design, vases in the Burslem Etruscan style, spills and toothpicks in large receptacles of carved rock, large lava ash trays and an exceptionally big box of matches. The fender was very great and brassy. In a favourable position, under the window, was a spacious rosewood writing desk, and all the chairs and other furniture were of rosewood and well stuffed.

"This," said Kipps, in something near an undertone, "was the o' gentleman's study—my grandfather that was. 'E used to sit at that desk and write."

[Pg 176]

"Books?"

"No. Letters to the *Times*, and things like that. 'E's got 'em all cut out—stuck in a book.... Leastways, he *'ad*. It's in that bookcase.... Won't you sit down?"

Coote did, bowing very slightly, and Kipps secured his vacated position on the extensive black skin rug. He spread out his legs compass-fashion and tried to appear at his ease. The rug, the fender, the mantel and mirror conspired with great success to make him look a trivial and intrusive little creature amidst their commonplace hauteur, and his own shadow on the opposite wall seemed to think everything a great lark and mocked and made tremendous fun of him....

§2

For a space Kipps played a defensive game and Coote drew the lines of the conversation. They kept away from the theme of Kipps' change of fortune, and Coote made remarks upon local and social affairs. "You must take an interest in these things now," was as much as he said in the way of personalities. But it speedily became evident that he was a person of wide and commanding social relationships. He spoke of "society" being mixed in the neighbourhood and of the difficulty of getting people to work together, and "do" things; they were cliquish. Incidentally he alluded quite familiarly to men with military titles, and once even to someone with a title, a Lady [Pg 177]Punnet. Not snobbishly, you understand, nor deliberately, but quite in passing. He had, it appeared, talked to Lady Punnet about private theatricals! In connection with the Hospitals. She had been unreasonable and he had put her right, gently of course, but firmly. "If you stand up to these people," said Coote, "they like you all the better." It was also very evident he was at his ease with the clergy; "My friend, Mr. Densemore—a curate, you know, and rather curious, the Reverend *and* Honourable." Coote grew visibly in Kipps' eyes as he said these things; he became, not only the exponent of "Vagner or Vargner," the man whose sister had painted a picture to be exhibited at the Royal Academy, the type of the hidden thing called culture, but a delegate, as it were, or at least an intermediary from that great world "up there," where there were men servants, where there were titles, where people dressed for dinner, drank wine at meals, wine costing very often as much as three and sixpence the bottle, and followed through a maze of etiquette, the most stupendous practices....

Coote sat back in the armchair smoking luxuriously and expanding pleasantly, with the delightful sense of Savoir Faire; Kipps sat forward, his elbows on his chair arm alert, and his head a little on one side. You figure him as looking little and cheap and feeling smaller and cheaper amidst his new surroundings. But it was a most stimulating and interesting conversation. And soon it became less general and more serious and intimate. Coote spoke of people who had[Pg 178] got on, and of people who hadn't, of people who seemed to be *in* everything and people who seemed to be *out* of everything, and then he came round to Kipps.

"You'll have a good time," he said abruptly, with a smile that would have interested a dentist.

"I dunno," said Kipps.

"There's mistakes, of course."

"That's jest it."

Coote lit a new cigarette. "One can't help being interested in what you will do," he remarked. "Of course—for a young man of spirit, come suddenly into wealth—there's temptations."

"I got to go careful," said Kipps. "O' Bean told me that at the very first."

Coote went on to speak of pitfalls, of Betting, of Bad Companions. "I know," said Kipps, "I know." "There's Doubt again," said Coote. "I know a young fellow—a solicitor—handsome, gifted. And yet, you know—utterly sceptical. Practically altogether a Sceptic."

"Lor'!" said Kipps, "not a Natheist?"

"I fear so," said Coote. "Really, you know, an awfully fine young fellow—Gifted! But full of this dreadful Modern Spirit—Cynical! All this Overman stuff. Nietzsche and all that.... I wish I could do something for him."

"Ah!" said Kipps and knocked the ash off his cigarette. "I know a chap—one of our apprentices he was—once. Always scoffing.... He lef'!"

[Pg 179]

He paused. "Never wrote for his refs," he said, in the deep tone proper to a moral tragedy, and then, after a pause—"Enlisted!"

"Ah!" said Coote.

"And often," he said, after a pause, "it's just the most spirited chaps, just the chaps one likes best, who Go Wrong."

"It's temptation," Kipps remarked.

He glanced at Coote, leant forward, knocked the ash from his cigarette into the mighty fender. "That's jest it," he said; "you get tempted. Before you know where you are."

"Modern life," said Coote, "is so—complex. It isn't everyone is Strong. Half the young fellows who go wrong, aren't really bad."

"That's jest it," said Kipps.

"One gets a tone from one's surroundings——"

"That's exactly it," said Kipps.

He meditated. "*I* picked up with a chap," he said. "A Nacter. Leastways he writes plays. Clever fellow. But——"

He implied extensive moral obloquy by a movement of his head. "Of course it's seeing life," he added.

Coote pretended to understand the full implications of Kipps' remark. "Is it *worth* it?" he asked.

"That's jest it," said Kipps.

He decided to give some more. "One gets talking," he said. "Then it's ''ave a drink!' Old Methusaleh four stars—and where *are* you? *I* been[Pg 180] drunk," he said in a tone of profound humility, and added, "lots of times."

"Tt. Tt.," said Coote.

"Dozens of times," said Kipps, smiling sadly, and added, "lately."

His imagination became active and seductive. "One thing leads to another. Cards, p'raps. Girls——"

"I know," said Coote; "I know."

Kipps regarded the fire and flushed slightly. He borrowed a sentence that Chitterlow had recently used. "One can't tell tales out of school," he said.

"I can imagine it," said Coote.

Kipps looked with a confidential expression into Coote's face. "It was bad enough when money was limited," he remarked. "But now——" He spoke with raised eyebrows, "I got to steady down."

"You *must*," said Coote, protruding his lips into a sort of whistling concern for a moment.

"I must," said Kipps, nodding his head slowly with raised eyebrows. He looked at his cigarette end and threw it into the fender. He was beginning to think he was holding his own in this conversation rather well, after all.

Kipps was never a good liar. He was the first to break silence. "I don't mean to say I been reely bad or reely bad drunk. A 'eadache perhaps—three or four times, say. But there it is!"

"I have never tasted alcohol in my life," said Coote, with an immense frankness, "never!"

"No?"

[Pg 181]

"Never. I don't feel *I* should be likely to get drunk at all—it isn't that. And I don't go so far as to say even that in small quantities—at meals—it does one harm. But if I take it, someone else who doesn't know where to stop—you see?"

"That's jest it," said Kipps, with admiring eyes.

"I smoke," admitted Coote. "One doesn't want to be a Pharisee."

It struck Kipps what a tremendously Good chap this Coote was, not only tremendously clever and educated and a gentleman and one knowing Lady Punnet, but Good. He seemed to be giving all his time and thought to doing good things to other people. A great desire to confide certain things to him arose. At first Kipps hesitated whether he should confide an equal desire for Benevolent activities or for further Depravity—either was in his mind. He rather affected the pose of the Good Intentioned Dog. Then suddenly his impulses took quite a different turn, fell indeed into what was a far more serious rut in his mind. It seemed to him Coote might be able to do for him something he very much wanted done.

"Companionship accounts for so much," said Coote.

"That's jest it," said Kipps. "Of course, you know, in my new position——. That's just the difficulty."

He plunged boldly at his most secret trouble. He knew that he wanted refinement—culture. It was all very well—but he knew. But how was one to get it?[Pg 182] He knew no one, knew no people——. He rested on the broken sentence. The shop chaps were all very well, very good chaps and all that, but not what one wanted. "I feel be'ind," said Kipps. "I feel out of it. And consequently I feel it's no good. And then if temptation comes along——"

"Exactly," said Coote.

Kipps spoke of his respect for Miss Walshingham and her freckled friend. He contrived not to look too self-conscious. "You know, I'd like to talk to people like that, but I can't. A chap's afraid of giving himself away."

"Of course," said Coote, "of course."

"I went to a middle-class school, you know. You mustn't fancy I'm one of these here board-school chaps, but you know it reely wasn't a first-class affair. Leastways he didn't take pains with us. If you didn't want to learn you needn't—I don't believe it was *much* better than one of these here national schools. We wore mortarboards, o' course. But what's *that*?

"I'm a regular fish out of water with this money. When I got it—it's a week ago—reely I thought I'd got everything I wanted. But I dunno what to *do*."

His voice went up into a squeak. "Practically," he said, "it's no good shuttin' my eyes to things—I'm a gentleman."

Coote indicated a serious assent.

"And there's the responsibilities of a gentleman," he remarked.

"That's jest it," said Kipps.

[Pg 183]

"There's calling on people," said Kipps. "If you want to go on knowing Someone you knew before like. People that's refined." He laughed nervously. "I'm a regular fish out of water," he said, with expectant eyes on Coote.

But Coote only nodded for him to go on.

"This actor chap," he meditated, "is a good sort of chap. But 'e isn't what *I* call a gentleman. I got to 'old myself in with 'im. 'E'd make me go it wild in no time. 'E's pretty near the on'y chap I know. Except the shop chaps. They've come round to 'ave supper once already and a bit of a sing song afterwards. I sang. I got a banjo, you know, and I vamp a bit. Vamping—you know. Haven't got far in the book—'Ow to Vamp—but still I'm getting on. Jolly, of course, in a way, but what does it lead to?... Besides that, there's my Aunt and Uncle. *They're* very good old people—very—jest a bit interfering p'r'aps and thinking one isn't grown up, but Right enough. Only——. It isn't what I *want*. I feel I've got be'ind with everything. I want to make it up again. I want to get with educated people who know 'ow to do things—in the regular, proper way."

His beautiful modesty awakened nothing but benevolence in the mind of Chester Coote.

"If I had someone like you," said Kipps, "that I knew regular like——"

From that point their course ran swift and easy. "If I *could* be of any use to you," said Coote....

"But you're so busy and all that."

[Pg 184]

"Not *too* busy. You know, your case is a very interesting one. It was partly that made me speak to you and draw you out. Here you are with all this money and no experience, a spirited young chap——"

"That's jest it," said Kipps.

"I thought I'd see what you were made of, and I must confess I've rarely talked to anyone that I've found quite so interesting as you have been——"

"I seem able to say things to you like somehow," said Kipps.

"I'm glad. I'm tremendously glad."

"I want a Friend. That's it—straight."

"My dear chap, if I——"

"Yes, but——"

"*I* want a Friend, too."

"Reely?"

"Yes. You know, my dear Kipps—if I may call you that."

"Go on," said Kipps.

"I'm rather a lonely dog myself. *This* to-night——. I've not had anyone I've spoken to so freely of my Work for months."

"No?"

"You. And, my dear chap, if I can do anything to guide or help you——"

Coote displayed all his teeth in a kindly tremulous smile and his eyes were shiny. "Shake 'ands," said Kipps, deeply moved, and he and Coote rose and clasped with mutual emotion.

"It's reely too good of you," said Kipps.

[Pg 185]

"Whatever I can do I will," said Coote.

And so their compact was made. From that moment they were Friends, intimate, confidential, high-thinking, *sotto voce* friends. All the rest of their talk (and it inclined to be interminable) was an expansion of that. For that night Kipps wallowed in self-abandonment and Coote behaved as one who had received a great trust. That sinister passion for pedagoguery to which the Good Intentioned are so fatally liable, that passion of infinite presumption that permits one weak human being to arrogate the direction of another weak human being's affairs, had Coote in its grip. He was to be a sort of lay confessor and director of Kipps, he was to help Kipps in a thousand ways, he was in fact to chaperon Kipps into the higher and better sort of English life. He was to tell him his faults, advise him about the right thing to do——

"It's all these things I don't know," said Kipps. "I don't know, for instance, what's the right sort of dress to wear—I don't even know if I'm dressed right now——"

"All these things"—Coote stuck out his lips and nodded rapidly to show he understood—"Trust me for that," he said, "trust me."

As the evening wore on Coote's manner changed, became more and more the manner of a proprietor. He began to take up his rôle, to survey Kipps with a new, with a critical affection. It was evident the thing fell in with his ideas. "It will be awfully [Pg 186]interesting," he said. "You know, Kipps, you're really good stuff."

(Every sentence now he said "Kipps" or "my dear Kipps" with a curiously authoritative intonation.)

"I know," said Kipps, "only there's such a lot of things I don't seem to be up to some'ow. That's where the trouble comes in."

They talked and talked, and now Kipps was talking freely. They rambled over all sorts of things. Among others Kipps' character was dealt with at length. Kipps gave valuable lights on it. "When I'm reely excited," he said, "I don't seem to care *what* I do. I'm like that." And again, "I don't like to do anything under'and. I *must* speak out...."

He picked a piece of cotton from his knee, the fire grimaced behind his back, and his shadow on the wall and ceiling was disrespectfully convulsed.

§3

Kipps went to bed at last with an impression of important things settled, and he lay awake for quite a long time. He felt he was lucky. He had known—in fact Buggins and Carshot and Pierce had made it very clear indeed—that his status in life had changed and that stupendous adaptations had to be achieved, but how they were to be effected had driven that adaptation into the incredible. Here in the simplest, easiest way was the adapter. The thing had become possible. Not of course easy, but possible.

[Pg 187]

There was much to learn, sheer intellectual toil, methods of address, bowing, an enormous complexity of laws. One broken, you are an outcast. How, for example, would one encounter Lady Punnet? It was quite possible some day he might really have to do that. Coote might introduce him. "Lord!" he said aloud to the darkness between grinning and dismay. He figured himself going into the Emporium to buy a tie, for example, and there in the face of Buggins, Carshot, Pierce and the rest of them, meeting "my friend, Lady Punnet!" It might not end with Lady Punnet! His imagination plunged and bolted with him, galloped, took wings and soared to romantic, to poetical altitudes....

Suppose some day one met Royalty. By accident, say! He soared to that! After all,—twelve hundred a year is a lift, a tremendous lift. How did one address Royalty? "Your Majesty's Goodness," it will be, no doubt—something like that—and on the knees. He became impersonal. Over a thousand a year made him an Esquire, didn't it? He thought that was it. In which case, wouldn't he have to be

presented at Court? Velvet cycling breeches like you wear cycling, and a sword! What a curious place a court must be! Kneeling and bowing, and what was it Miss Mergle used to talk about? Of course!—ladies with long trains walking about backward. Everybody walked about backward at court, he knew, when not actually on their knees. Perhaps, though, some people regular stood up to the King! Talked[Pg 188] to him, just as one might talk to Buggins, say. Cheek of course! Dukes, it might be, did that—by permission? Millionnaires?...

From such thoughts this free citizen of our Crowned Republic passed insensibly into dreams, turgid dreams of that vast ascent which constitutes the true-born Briton's social scheme, which terminates with retrogressive progression and a bending back.

§4

The next morning he came down to breakfast looking grave—a man with much before him in the world....

Kipps made a very special thing of his breakfast. Daily once hopeless dreams came true then. It had been customary in the Emporium to supplement Shalford's generous, indeed unlimited, supply of bread and butter-substitute, by private purchases, and this had given Kipps very broad, artistic conceptions of what the meal might be. Now there would be a cutlet or so or a mutton chop—this splendour Buggins had reported from the great London clubs—haddock, kipper, whiting or fish-balls, eggs, boiled or scrambled, or eggs and bacon, kidney also frequently and sometimes liver. Amidst a garland of such themes, sausages, black and white puddings, bubble-and-squeak, fried cabbage and scallops came and went. Always as camp followers came potted meat in all varieties, cold bacon, German sausage, brawn,[Pg 189] marmalade and two sorts of jam, and when he had finished these he would sit among his plates and smoke a cigarette and look at all these dishes crowded round him with a beatific approval. It was his principal meal. He was sitting with his cigarette regarding his apartment with that complacency begotten of a generous plan of feeding successfully realized, when newspapers and post arrived.

There were several things by the post, tradesmen's circulars and cards and two pathetic begging letters—his luck had got into the papers—and there was a letter from a literary man and a book to enforce his request for 10/—to put down Socialism. The book made it very clear that prompt action on the part of property owners was becoming urgent, if property was to last out the year. Kipps dipped in it and was seriously perturbed. And there was a letter from old Kipps saying it was

difficult to leave the shop and come over and see him again just yet, but that he had been to a sale at Lydd the previous day and bought a few good old books and things it would be difficult to find the equal of in Folkestone. "They don't know the value of these things out here," wrote old Kipps, "but you may depend upon it they are valuable," and a brief financial statement followed. "There is an engraving someone might come along and offer you a lot of money for one of these days. Depend upon it, these old things are about the best investment you could make...."

Old Kipps had long been addicted to sales, and his[Pg 190] nephew's good fortune had converted what had once been but a looking and a craving—he had rarely even bid for anything in the old days except the garden tools or the kitchen gallipots or things like that, things one gets for sixpence and finds a use for—into a very active pleasure. Sage and penetrating inspection, a certain mystery of bearing, tactical bids and Purchase!—Purchase!—the old man had had a good time.

While Kipps was rereading the begging letters and wishing he had the sound, clear common sense of Buggins to help him a little, the Parcels Post brought along the box from his uncle. It was a large, insecure looking case held together by a few still loyal nails, and by what the British War Office would have recognised at once as an Army Corps of string, rags and odds and ends tied together. Kipps unpacked it with a table knife, assisted at a critical point by the poker, and found a number of books and other objects of an antique type.

There were three bound volumes of early issues of Chambers' Journal, a copy of Punch's Pocket Book for 1875, Sturm's Reflections, an early version of Gill's Geography (slightly torn), an illustrated work on Spinal Curvature, an early edition of Kirke's Human Physiology, The Scottish Chiefs and a little volume on the Language of Flowers. There was a fine steel engraving, oak-framed and with some rusty spots, done in the Colossal style and representing the Handwriting on the Wall. There were also a copper[Pg 191] kettle, a pair of candle snuffers, a brass shoehorn, a tea caddy to lock, two decanters (one stoppered) and what was probably a portion of an eighteenth century child's rattle.

Kipps examined these objects one by one and wished he knew more about them. Turning over the pages of the Physiology again he came upon a striking plate in which a youth of agreeable profile displayed his interior in an unstinted manner to the startled eye. It was a new view of humanity altogether for Kipps, and it arrested his mind.

This anatomised figure made him forget for a space that he was "practically a gentleman" altogether, and he was still surveying its extraordinary complications when another reminder of a world quite outside those spheres of ordered gentility into which his dreams had carried him overnight, arrived (following the servant) in the person of Chitterlow.

§5

"Ul-*lo*!" said Kipps, rising.

"Not busy?" said Chitterlow, enveloping Kipps' hand for a moment in one of his own and tossing the yachting cap upon the monumental carved oak sideboard.

"Only a bit of reading," said Kipps.

"Reading, eh?" Chitterlow cocked the red eye at the books and other properties for a moment and then, "I've been expecting you 'round again one night."

[Pg 192]

"I been coming 'round," said Kipps. "On'y there's a chap 'ere——. I was coming 'round last night on'y I met 'im."

He walked to the hearthrug. Chitterlow drifted around the room for a time, glancing at things as he talked. "I've altered that play tremendously since I saw you," he said. "Pulled it all to pieces."

"What play's that, Chit'low?"

"The one we were talking about. You know. You said something—I don't know if you meant it—about buying half of it. Not the tragedy. I wouldn't sell my twin brother a share in that. That's my investment. That's my Serious Work. No! I mean that new farce I've been on to. Thing with the business about a beetle."

"Oo yes," said Kipps. "*I* remember."

"I thought you would. Said you'd take a fourth share for a hundred pounds. *You* know."

"I seem to remember something——"

"Well, it's all different. Every bit of it. I'll tell you. You remember what you said about a butterfly? You got confused, you know—Old Meth. Kept calling the beetle a butterfly and that set me off. I've made it quite different. Quite different. Instead of Popplewaddle—thundering good farce name that, you know; for all that it came

from a Visitors' List—instead of Popplewaddle getting a beetle down his neck and rushing about, I've made him a collector—collects butterflies, and this one you know's a rare one. Comes in at window, centre." Chitterlow began to[Pg 193] illustrate with appropriate gestures. "Pop rushes about after it. Forgets he mustn't let on he's in the house. After that——. Tells 'em. Rare butterfly, worth lots of money. Some are, you know. Everyone's on to it after that. Butterfly can't get out of room, every time it comes out to have a try, rush and scurry. Well, I've worked on that. Only——"

He came very close to Kipps. He held up one hand horizontally and tapped it in a striking and confidential manner with the fingers of the other. "Something else," he said. "That's given me a Real Ibsenish Touch—like the Wild Duck. You know that woman—I've made her lighter—and she sees it. When they're chasing the butterfly the third time, she's on! She looks. 'That's me!' she says. Bif! Pestered Butterfly. *She's* the Pestered Butterfly. It's legitimate. Much more legitimate than the Wild Duck—where there isn't a duck!

"Knock 'em! The very title ought to knock 'em. I've been working like a horse at it.... You'll have a gold mine in that quarter share, Kipps.... *I* don't mind. It's suited me to sell it, and suited you to buy. Bif!"

Chitterlow interrupted his discourse to ask, "You haven't any brandy in the house, have you? Not to drink, you know. But I want just an eggcupful to pull me steady. My liver's a bit queer.... It doesn't matter, if you haven't. Not a bit. I'm like that. Yes, whiskey'll do. Better!"

Kipps hesitated for a moment, then turned and[Pg 194] fumbled in the cupboard of his sideboard. Presently he disinterred a bottle of whiskey and placed it on the table. Then he put out first one bottle of soda water and after the hesitation of a moment another. Chitterlow picked up the bottle and read the label. "Good old Methusaleh," he said. Kipps handed him the corkscrew and then his hand fluttered up to his mouth. "I'll have to ring now," he said, "to get glasses." He hesitated for a moment before doing so, leaning doubtfully as it were towards the bell.

When the housemaid appeared he was standing on the hearthrug with his legs wide apart, with the bearing of a desperate fellow. And after they had both had whiskeys—"You know a decent whiskey," Chitterlow remarked and took another "just to drink."—Kipps produced cigarettes and the conversation flowed again.

Chitterlow paced the room. He was, he explained, taking a day off; that was why he had come around to see Kipps. Whenever he thought of any extensive change in a play he was writing he always took a day off. In the end it saved time to do so. It prevented his starting rashly upon work that might have to be rewritten. There was no good in doing work when you might have to do it over again, none whatever.

Presently they were descending the steps by the Parade *en route* for the Warren, with Chitterlow doing the talking and going with a dancing drop from step to step....

They had a great walk, not a long one, but a great[Pg 195] one. They went up by the Sanatorium, and over the East Cliff and into that queer little wilderness of slippery and tumbling clay and rock under the chalk cliffs, a wilderness of thorn and bramble, wild rose and wayfaring tree, that adds so greatly to Folkestone's charm. They traversed its intricacies and clambered up to the crest of the cliffs at last by a precipitous path that Chitterlow endowed in some mysterious way with suggestions of Alpine adventure. Every now and then he would glance aside at sea and cliffs with a fresh boyishness of imagination that brought back New Romney and the stranded wrecks to Kipps' memory; but mostly he bored on with his great obsession of plays and playwriting, and that empty absurdity that is so serious to his kind, his Art. That was a thing that needed a monstrous lot of explaining. Along they went, sometimes abreast, sometimes in single file, up the little paths, and down the little paths, and in among the bushes and out along the edge above the beach, and Kipps went along trying ever and again to get an insignificant word in edgeways, and the gestures of Chitterlow flew wide and far and his great voice rose and fell, and he said this and he said that and he biffed and banged into the circumambient Inane.

It was assumed that they were embarked upon no more trivial enterprise than the Reform of the British Stage, and Kipps found himself classed with many opulent and even royal and noble amateurs—the Honourable Thomas Norgate came in here—who[Pg 196] had interested themselves in the practical realisation of high ideals about the Drama. Only he had a finer understanding of these things, and instead of being preyed upon by the common professional—"and they *are* a lot," said Chitterlow; "I haven't toured for nothing"—he would have Chitterlow. Kipps gathered few details. It was clear he had bought the quarter of a farcical comedy—practically a gold mine—and it would appear it would be a good thing to buy the half. A suggestion, or the suggestion of a suggestion, floated out that he should buy the whole play and produce it forthwith. It seemed he was to produce

the play upon a royalty system of a new sort, whatever a royalty system of any sort might be. Then there was some doubt, after all, whether that farcical comedy was in itself sufficient to revolutionise the present lamentable state of the British Drama. Better perhaps for such a purpose was that tragedy—as yet unfinished—which was to display all that Chitterlow knew about women, and which was to centre about a Russian nobleman embodying the fundamental Chitterlow personality. Then it became clearer that Kipps was to produce several plays. Kipps was to produce a great number of plays. Kipps was to found a National Theatre.

It is probable that Kipps would have expressed some sort of disavowal, if he had known how to express it. Occasionally his face assumed an expression of whistling meditation, but that was as far as he got towards protest.

[Pg 197]

In the clutch of Chitterlow and the Incalculable, Kipps came round to the house in Fenchurch Street and was there made to participate in the midday meal. He came to the house, forgetting certain confidences, and was reminded of the existence of a Mrs. Chitterlow (with the finest completely untrained Contralto voice in England) by her appearance. She had an air of being older than Chitterlow, although probably she wasn't, and her hair was a reddish brown, streaked with gold. She was dressed in one of those complaisant garments that are dressing gowns or tea gowns or bathing wraps or rather original evening robes according to the exigencies of the moment—from the first Kipps was aware that she possessed a warm and rounded neck, and her well-moulded arms came and vanished from the sleeves—and she had large, expressive brown eyes that he discovered ever and again fixed in an enigmatical manner upon his own.

A simple but sufficient meal had been distributed with careless spontaneity over the little round table in the room with the photographs and looking glass, and when a plate had by Chitterlow's direction been taken from under the marmalade in the cupboard and the kitchen fork and a knife that was not loose in its handle had been found for Kipps they began and she had evidently heard of Kipps before, and he made a tumultuous repast. Chitterlow ate with quiet enormity, but it did not interfere with the flow of his talk. He introduced Kipps to his wife very briefly;[Pg 198] made it vaguely evident that the production of the comedy was the thing chiefly settled. His reach extended over the table, and he troubled nobody. When Mrs. Chitterlow, who for a little while seemed socially self-conscious, reproved him for taking a potato with a jab of his fork, he answered,

"Well, you shouldn't have married a man of Genius," and from a subsequent remark it was perfectly clear that Chitterlow's standing in this respect was made no secret of in his household.

They drank old Methusaleh and syphon soda, and there was no clearing away, they just sat among the plates and things, and Mrs. Chitterlow took her husband's tobacco pouch and made a cigarette and smoked and blew smoke and looked at Kipps with her large, brown eyes. Kipps had seen cigarettes smoked by ladies before, "for fun," but this was real smoking. It frightened him rather. He felt he must not encourage this lady—at any rate in Chitterlow's presence.

They became very cheerful after the repast, and as there was now no waste to deplore, such as one experiences in the windy, open air, Chitterlow gave his voice full vent. He fell to praising Kipps very highly and loudly. He said he had known Kipps was the right sort, he had seen it from the first, almost before he got up out of the mud on that memorable night. "You can," he said, "sometimes. That was why——" he stopped, but he seemed on the verge of explaining that it was his certainty of Kipps being the[Pg 199] right sort had led him to confer this great Fortune upon him. He left that impression. He threw out a number of long sentences and material for sentences of a highly philosophical and incoherent character about Coincidences. It became evident he considered dramatic criticism in a perilously low condition....

About four Kipps found himself stranded, as it were, by a receding Chitterlow on a seat upon the Leas.

He was chiefly aware that Chitterlow was an overwhelming personality. He puffed his cheeks and blew.

No doubt this was seeing life, but had he particularly wanted to see life that day? In a way Chitterlow had interrupted him. The day he had designed for himself was altogether different from this. He had been going to read through a precious little volume called "Don't" that Coote had sent round for him, a book of invaluable hints, a summary of British deportment that had only the one defect of being at points a little out of date.

That reminded him he had intended to perform a difficult exercise called an Afternoon Call upon the Cootes, as a preliminary to doing it in deadly earnest upon the Walshinghams. It was no good to-day, anyhow, now.

He came back to Chitterlow. He would have to explain to Chitterlow he was taking too much for granted, he would have to do that. It was so difficult[Pg 200] to do in

Chitterlow's presence though; in his absence it was easy enough. This half share, and taking a theatre and all of it, was going too far.

The quarter share was right enough, he supposed, but even that——! A hundred pounds! What wealth is there left in the world after one has paid out a hundred pounds from it?

He had to recall that in a sense Chitterlow had indeed brought him his fortune before he could face even that.

You must not think too hardly of him. To Kipps you see there was as yet no such thing as proportion in these matters. A hundred pounds went to his horizon. A hundred pounds seemed to him just exactly as big as any other large sum of money.

[Pg 201]

CHAPTER IITHE WALSHINGHAMS

§1

The Cootes live in a little house in Bouverie Square with a tangle of Virginia creeper up the verandah.

Kipps had been troubled in his mind about knocking double or single—it is these things show what a man is made of—but happily there was a bell.

A queer little maid, with a big cap, admitted Kipps and took him through a bead curtain and a door into a little drawing-room, with a black and gold piano, a glazed bookcase, a Moorish cosy corner and a draped looking glass over-mantel bright with Regent Street ornaments and photographs of various intellectual lights. A number of cards of invitation to meetings and the match list of a Band of Hope cricket club were stuck into the looking glass frame with Coote's name as a Vice-President. There was a bust of Beethoven over the bookcase and the walls were thick with conscientiously executed but carelessly selected "views" in oil and water colours and gilt frames. At the end of the room facing the light was a portrait[Pg 202] that struck Kipps at first as being Coote in spectacles and feminine costume and that he afterwards decided must be Coote's mother. Then the original appeared and he discovered that it was Coote's elder and only sister who kept house for him. She wore her hair in a knob behind, and the sight of the knob suggested to Kipps an explanation for a frequent gesture of Coote's, a

patting exploratory movement to the back of his head. And then it occurred to him that this was quite an absurd idea altogether.

She said "Mr. Kipps, I believe," and Kipps laughed pleasantly and said, "That's it!" and then she told him that "Chester" had gone down to the art school to see about sending off some drawings or other and that he would be back soon. Then she asked Kipps if he painted, and showed him the pictures on the wall. Kipps asked her where each one was "of," and when she showed him some of the Leas slopes he said he never would have recognised them. He said it was funny how things looked in a picture very often. "But they're awfully *good*," he said. "Did you do them?" He would look at them with his neck arched like a swan's, his head back and on one side and then suddenly peer closely into them. "They *are* good. I wish I could paint." "That's what Chester says," she answered. "I tell him he has better things to do." Kipps seemed to get on very well with her.

Then Coote came in and they left her and went upstairs together and had a good talk about reading and the Rules of Life. Or rather Coote talked, and[Pg 203] the praises of thought and reading were in his mouth....

You must figure Coote's study, a little bedroom put to studious uses, and over the mantel an array of things he had been led to believe indicative of culture and refinement, an autotype of Rossetti's "Annunciation," an autotype of Watt's "Minotaur," a Swiss carved pipe with many joints and a photograph of Amiens Cathedral (these two the spoils of travel), a phrenological bust and some broken fossils from the Warren. A rotating bookshelf carried the Encyclopædia Britannica (tenth edition), and on the top of it a large official looking, age grubby, envelope bearing the mystic words, "On His Majesty's Service," a number or so of the "Bookman," and a box of cigarettes were lying. A table under the window bore a little microscope, some dust in a saucer, some grimy glass slips and broken cover glasses, for Coote had "gone in for" biology a little. The longer side of the room was given over to bookshelves, neatly edged with pinked American cloth, and with an array of books—no worse an array of books than you find in any public library; an almost haphazard accumulation of obsolete classics, contemporary successes, the Hundred Best Books (including Samuel Warren's "Ten Thousand a Year") old school books, directories, the Times Atlas, Ruskin in bulk, Tennyson complete in one volume, Longfellow, Charles Kingsley, Smiles and Mrs. Humphry Ward, a guide book or so, several medical pamphlets, odd magazine [Pg 204]numbers, and much indescribable rubbish—in fact a compendium of the contemporary British mind. And in front of this array stood Kipps, ill-taught and untrained, respectful, awestricken and, for a moment at any rate, willing to learn,

while Coote, the exemplary Coote, talked to him like a bishop of reading and the virtue in books.

"Nothing enlarges the mind," said Coote, "like Travel and Books.... And they're both so easy nowadays, and so cheap!"

"I've often wanted to 'ave a good go in at reading," Kipps replied.

"You'd hardly believe," Coote said, "how much you can get out of books. Provided you avoid trashy reading, that is. You ought to make a rule, Kipps, and read one Serious Book a week. Of course, we can Learn even from Novels, Nace Novels that is, but it isn't the same thing as serious reading. I made a rule, One Serious Book and One Novel—no more. There's some of the serious books I've been reading lately—on that table; Sartor Resartus—Mrs. Twaddletome's Pond Life, the Scottish Chiefs, Life and Letters of Dean Farrar...."

§2

There came at last the sound of a gong and Kipps descended to tea in that state of nervous apprehension at the difficulties of eating and drinking that his Aunt's knuckle rappings had implanted in him [Pg 205]forever. Over Coote's shoulder he became aware of a fourth person in the Moorish cosy corner, and he turned, leaving incomplete something incoherent he was saying to Miss Coote about his modest respect and desire for literature to discover this fourth person was Miss Helen Walshingham, hatless and looking very much at home.

She rose at once with an extended hand to meet his hesitation.

"You're stopping in Folkestone, Mr. Kipps?"

"'Ere on a bit of business," said Kipps. "I thought you was away in Bruges."

"That's later," said Miss Walshingham. "We're stopping until my brother's holiday begins and we're trying to let our house. Where are you staying in Folkestone?"

"I got a 'ouse of mine—on the Leas."

"I've heard all about your good fortune—this afternoon."

"Isn't it a Go!" said Kips. "I 'aven't nearly got to believe its reely 'appened yet. When that Mr. Bean told me of it you could 'ave knocked me down with a feather.... It's a tremenjous change for me."

He discovered Miss Coote was asking him whether he took milk and sugar.
"*I* don't mind," said Kipps. "Just as you like."

Coote became active handing tea and bread and butter. It was thinly cut, and the bread was rather new, and the half of the slice that Kipps took fell[Pg 206] upon the floor. He had been holding it by the edge, for he was not used to this migratory method of taking tea without plates or table. This little incident ruled him out of the conversation for a time, and when he came to attend to it again they were talking about something or other prodigious—a performer of some sort—that was coming, called, it seemed, "Padrooski." So Kipps, who had quietly dropped into a chair, ate his bread and butter, said "No, thenk you" to any more, and by this discreet restraint got more freedom with his cup and saucer.

Apart from the confusion natural to tea, he was in a state of tremulous excitement on account of the presence of Miss Walshingham. He glanced from Miss Coote to her brother and then at Helen. He regarded her over the top of his cup as he drank. Here she was, solid and real. It was wonderful. He remarked, as he had done at times before, the easy flow of the dark hair back from her brow over her ears, the shapeliness of the white hands that came out from her simple white cuffs, the delicate pencilling of her brow.

Presently she turned her face to him almost suddenly, and smiled with the easiest assurance of friendship.

"You will go, I suppose," she said, and added, "to the Recital."

"If I'm in Folkestone I shall," said Kipps, clearing away a little hoarseness. "I don't *know* much about music, but what I do know I like."

[Pg 207]

"I'm sure you'll like Paderewski," she said.

"If you do," he said, "I dessay I shall."

He found Coote very kindly taking his cup.

"Do you think of living in Folkestone?" asked Miss Coote, in a tone of proprietorship, from the hearthrug.

"No," said Kipps, "that's jest it—I hardly know." He also said that he wanted to look around a bit before doing anything. "There's so much to consider," said Coote, smoothing the back of his head.

"I may go back to New Romney for a bit," said Kipps. "I got an Uncle and Aunt there. I reely don't know."

Helen regarded him thoughtfully for a moment.

"You must come and see us," she said, "before we go to Bruges."

"Oo, rather!" said Kipps. "If I may."

"Yes, do," she said, and suddenly stood up before Kipps could formulate an enquiry when he should call.

"You're sure you can spare that drawing board?" she said to Miss Coote, and the conversation passed out of range.

And when he had said "Good-bye" to Miss Walshingham and she had repeated her invitation to call, he went upstairs again with Coote to look out certain initiatory books they had had under discussion. And then Kipps, blowing very resolutely, went back to his own place, bearing in his arm (1) Sesame and Lilies, (2) Sir George Tressady, (3) an [Pg 208]anonymous book on "Vitality" that Coote particularly esteemed. And, having got to his own sitting-room, he opened Sesame and Lilies and read it with ruthless determination for some time.

§3

Presently he leant back and gave himself up to the business of trying to imagine just exactly what Miss Walshingham could have thought of him when she saw him. Doubts about the precise effect of the grey flannel suit began to trouble him. He turned to the mirror over the mantel, and then got into a chair to study the hang of the trousers. It looked all right. Luckily, she had not seen the Panama hat. He knew that he had the brim turned up wrong, but he could not find out which way the brim was right. However, that she had not seen. He might perhaps ask at the shop where he bought it.

He meditated for awhile on his reflected face—doubtful whether he liked it or not—and then got down again and flitted across to the sideboard where there lay two little books, one in a cheap, magnificent cover of red and gold, and the other in green canvas. The former was called, as its cover witnessed, "Manners and Rules of Good Society, by a Member of the Aristocracy," and after the cover had indulged in a band of gilded decoration, light-hearted but natural under the circumstances, it added "TWENTY-FIRST EDITION." The second was that [Pg 209]admirable classic, "The Art of Conversing." Kipps returned with these to his seat, placed the two before him, opened the latter with a sigh and flattened it under his hand.

Then with knitted brows he began to read onward from a mark, his lips moving.

"Having thus acquired possession of an idea, the little ship should not be abruptly launched into deep waters, but should be first permitted to glide gently and smoothly into the shallows, that is to say, the conversation should not be commenced by broadly and roundly stating a fact, or didactically expressing an opinion, as the subject would be thus virtually or summarily disposed of, or perhaps be met with a 'Really' or 'Indeed,' or some equally brief monosyllabic reply. If an opposite opinion were held by the person to whom the remark were addressed, he might not, if a stranger, care to express it in the form of a direct contradiction, or actual dissent. To glide imperceptibly into conversation is the object to be attained."

At this point Mr. Kipps rubbed his fingers through his hair with an expression of some perplexity and went back to the beginning.

§4

When Kipps made his call on the Walshinghams, it all happened so differently from the "Manners and Rules" prescription ("Paying Calls") that he was quite lost from the very outset. Instead of the footman or maidservant proper in these cases, Miss[Pg 210] Walshingham opened the door to him herself. "I'm so glad you've come," she said, with one of her rare smiles.

She stood aside for him to enter the rather narrow passage.

"I thought I'd call," he said, retaining his hat and stick.

She closed the door and led the way to a little drawing-room, which impressed Kipps as being smaller and less emphatically coloured than that of the Cootes, and in which at first only a copper bowl of white poppies upon the brown tablecloth caught his particular attention.

"You won't think it unconventional to come in, Mr. Kipps, will you?" she remarked. "Mother is out."

"I don't mind," he said, smiling amiably, "if you don't."

She walked around the table and stood regarding him across it, with that same look between speculative curiosity and appreciation that he remembered from the last of the art class meetings.

"I wondered whether you would call or whether you wouldn't before you left Folkestone."

"I'm not leaving Folkestone for a bit, and any'ow, I should have called on you."

"Mother will be sorry she was out. I've told her about you, and she wants, I know, to meet you."

"I saw 'er—if that was 'er—in the shop," said Kipps.

[Pg 211]

"Yes—you did, didn't you!... She has gone out to make some duty calls, and I didn't go. I had something to write. I write a little, you know."

"Reely!" said Kipps.

"It's nothing much," she said, "and it comes to nothing." She glanced at a little desk near the window, on which there lay some paper. "One must do something." She broke off abruptly. "Have you seen our outlook?" she asked and walked to the window, and Kipps came and stood beside her. "We look on the Square. It might be worse, you know. That outporter's truck there is horrid—and the railings, but it's better than staring one's social replica in the face, isn't it? It's pleasant in early spring—bright green, laid on with a dry brush—and it's pleasant in autumn."

"I like it," said Kipps. "That laylock there is pretty, isn't it?"

"Children come and pick it at times," she remarked.

"I dessay they do," said Kipps.

He rested on his hat and stick and looked appreciatively out of the window, and she glanced at him for one swift moment. A suggestion that might have come from the Art of Conversing came into his head. "Have you a garden?" he said.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Only a little one," she said, and then, "perhaps you would like to see it."

"I like gardenin'," said Kipps, with memories of a[Pg 212] pennyworth of nasturtiums he had once trained over his uncle's dustbin.

She led the way with a certain relief.

They emerged through a four seasons coloured glass door to a little iron verandah that led by iron steps to a minute walled garden. There was just room for a patch of turf and a flower-bed; one sturdy variegated Euonymus grew in the corner. But the early June flowers, the big narcissus, snow upon the mountains, and a fine show of yellow wallflowers shone gay.

"That's our garden," said Helen. "It's not a very big one, is it?"

"I like it," said Kipps.

"It's small," she said, "but this is the day of small things."

Kipps didn't follow that.

"If you were writing when I came," he remarked, "I'm interrupting you."

She turned round with her back to the railing and rested, leaning on her hands. "I had finished," she said. "I couldn't get on."

"Were you making up something?" asked Kipps.

There was a little interval before she smiled. "I try—quite vainly—to write stories," she said. "One must do something. I don't know whether I shall ever do any good—at that—anyhow. It seems so hopeless. And, of course, one must study the popular taste. But, now my brother has gone to London, I get a lot of leisure."

[Pg 213]

"I seen your brother, 'aven't I?"

"He came to the class once or twice. Very probably you have. He's gone to London to pass his examinations and become a solicitor. And then, I suppose, he'll have a chance. Not much, perhaps, even then. But he's luckier than I am."

"You got your classes and things."

"They ought to satisfy me. But they don't. I suppose I'm ambitious. We both are. And we hadn't much of a springboard." She glanced over his shoulder at the cramped little garden with an air of reference in her gesture.

"I should think you could do anything if you wanted to," said Kipps.

"As a matter of fact I can't do anything I want to."

"You done a good deal."

"What?"

"Well, didn't you pass one of these here University things?"

"Oh! I matriculated!"

"I should think I was no end of a swell if *I* did, I know that."

"Mr. Kipps, do you know how many people matriculate into London University every year?"

"How many then?"

"Between two and three thousand."

"Well, just think how many don't!"

Her smile came again, and broke into a laugh. "Oh, *they* don't count," she said, and then, realising[Pg 214] that might penetrate Kipps if he was left with it, she hurried on to, "The fact is, I'm a discontented person, Mr. Kipps. Folkestone, you know, is a Sea Front, and it values people by sheer vulgar prosperity. We're not prosperous, and we live in a back street. We have to live here because this is our house. It's a mercy we haven't to 'let.' One feels one hasn't opportunities. If one had, I suppose one wouldn't use them. Still——"

Kipps felt he was being taken tremendously into her confidence. "That's jest it," he said, very sagely.

He leant forward on his stick and said, very earnestly, "I believe you could do anything you wanted to, if you tried."

She threw out her hands in disavowal.

"I know," said he, very sagely and nodding his head. "I watched you once or twice when you were teaching that wood-carving class."

For some reason this made her laugh—a rather pleasant laugh, and that made Kipps feel a very witty and successful person. "It's very evident," she said, "that you're one of those rare people who believe in me, Mr. Kipps," to which he answered, "Oo, I *do*!" and then suddenly they became aware of Mrs. Walshingham coming along the passage. In another moment she appeared through the four seasons door, bonneted and ladylike, and a little faded, exactly as Kipps had seen her in the shop. Kipps felt a certain apprehension at her appearance, in spite of the reassurances he had had from Coote.

[Pg 215]

"Mr. Kipps has called on us," said Helen, and Mrs. Walshingham said it was very kind of him, and added that new people didn't call on them very much nowadays. There was nothing of the scandalised surprise Kipps had seen in the shop; she had heard, perhaps, he was a gentleman now. In the shop he had thought her rather jaded and haughty, but he had scarcely taken her hand, which responded to his touch with a friendly pressure, before he knew how mistaken he had been. She then told her daughter that someone called Mrs. Wace had been out, and

turned to Kipps again to ask him if he had had tea. Kipps said he had not, and Helen moved towards some mysterious interior. "But *I* say," said Kipps; "don't you on my account——!"

Helen vanished, and he found himself alone with Mrs. Walshingham, which, of course, made him breathless and Boreas-looking for a moment.

"You were one of Helen's pupils in the wood-carving class?" asked Mrs. Walshingham, regarding him with the quiet watchfulness proper to her position.

"Yes," said Kipps, "that's 'ow I 'ad the pleasure——"

"She took a great interest in her wood-carving class. She is so energetic, you know, and it gives her an Outlet."

"I thought she taught something splendid."

"Everyone says she did very well. Helen, I think, would do anything well that she undertook to do.[Pg 216] She's so very clever. And she throws herself into things so."

She untied her bonnet strings with a pleasant informality.

"She has told me all about her class. She used to be full of it. And about your cut hand."

"Lor'!" said Kipps; "fancy, telling that!"

"Oh, yes! And how brave you were."

(Though, indeed, Helen's chief detail had been his remarkable expedient for checking bloodshed.)

Kipps became bright pink. "She said you didn't seem to feel it a bit."

Kipps felt he would have to spend weeks over "The Art of Conversing."

While he still hung fire Helen returned with the apparatus for afternoon tea upon a tray.

"Do you mind pulling out the table?" asked Mrs. Walshingham.

That, again, was very homelike. Kipps put down his hat and stick in the corner and, amidst an iron thunder, pulled out a little, rusty, green-painted table, and then in the easiest manner followed Helen in to get chairs.

So soon as he had got rid of his teacup—he refused all food, of course, and they were merciful—he became wonderfully at his ease. Presently he was talking. He talked quite modestly and simply about his changed condition and his difficulties and plans. He spread what indeed had an air of being all his simple little soul before his eyes. In a little while his clipped,[Pg 217] defective accent had become less perceptible to their ears, and they began to realise, as the girl with the freckles had long since realised, that there were passable aspects of Kipps. He confided, he submitted, and for both of them he had the realest, the most seductively flattering undertone of awe and reverence.

He stopped about two hours, having forgotten how terribly incorrect it is to stay at such a length. They did not mind at all.

[Pg 218]

CHAPTER IIIENGAGED

§1

Within two months, within a matter of three and fifty days, Kipps had clambered to the battlements of Heart's Desire.

It all became possible by the Walshinghams—it would seem at Coote's instigation—deciding, after all, not to spend the holidays at Bruges. Instead, they remained in Folkestone, and this happy chance gave Kipps just all these opportunities of which he stood in need.

His crowning day was at Lympne, and long before the summer warmth began to break, while indeed August still flamed on high. They had organized—no one seemed to know who suggested it first—a water party on the still reaches of the old military canal at Hythe, the canal that was to have stopped Napoleon if the sea failed us, and they were to picnic by the brick bridge, and afterwards to clamber to Lympne Castle. The host of the gathering, it was understood very clearly, was Kipps.

They went, a merry party. The canal was weedy, with only a few inches of water at the shallows, and[Pg 219] so they went in three Canadian canoes. Kipps had learned to paddle—it had been his first athletic accomplishment, and his second—with the last three or four of ten private lessons still to come—was to be cycling. But Kipps did not paddle at all badly; muscles hardened by lifting pieces of cretonne could cut a respectable figure by the side of Coote's executions, and

the girl with the freckles, the girl who understood him, came in his canoe. They raced the Walshinghams, brother and sister; and Coote, in a liquefying state and blowing mightily, but still persistent and always quite polite and considerate, toiled behind with Mrs. Walshingham. She could not be expected to paddle (though, of course, she "offered") and she reclined upon specially adjusted cushions under a black and white sunshade and watched Kipps and her daughter, and feared at intervals that Coote was getting hot.

They were all more or less in holiday costume, the eyes of the girls looked out under the shade of wide-brimmed hats; even the freckled girl was unexpectedly pretty, and Helen, swinging sunlit to her paddle, gave Kipps, almost for the first time, the suggestion of a graceful body. Kipps was arrayed in the completest boating costume, and when his fashionable Panama was discarded and his hair blown into disorder he became, in his white flannels, as sightly as most young men. His complexion was a notable asset.

Things favoured him, the day favoured him, everyone favoured him. Young Walshingham, the girl[Pg 220] with the freckles, Coote and Mrs. Walshingham, were playing up to him in the most benevolent way, and between the landing place and Lympne, Fortune, to crown their efforts, had placed a small, convenient field entirely at the disposal of an adolescent bull. Not a big, real, resolute bull, but, on the other hand, no calf; a young bull, in the same stage of emotional development as Kipps, "standing where the two rivers meet." Detachedly our party drifted towards him.

When they landed young Walshingham, with the simple directness of a brother, abandoned his sister to Kipps and secured the freckled girl, leaving Coote to carry Mrs. Walshingham's light wool wrap. He started at once, in order to put an effectual distance between himself and his companion, on the one hand, and a certain persuasive chaperonage that went with Coote, on the other. Young Walshingham, I think I have said, was dark, with a Napoleonic profile, and it was natural for him, therefore, to be a bold thinker and an epigrammatic speaker, and he had long ago discovered great possibilities of appreciation in the freckled girl. He was in a very happy frame that day because he had just been entrusted with the management of Kipps' affairs (old Bean inexplicably dismissed), and that was not a bad beginning for a solicitor of only a few months' standing, and, moreover, he had been reading Nietzsche, and he thought that in all probability he was the Non-Moral Overman referred to by that writer. He wore fairly [Pg 221]large-sized hats. He wanted to expand the theme of the Non-Moral Overman in the ear of the freckled girl, to say it over, so to speak, and in order to seclude his exposition they

went aside from the direct path and trespassed through a coppice, avoiding the youthful bull. They escaped to these higher themes but narrowly, for Coote and Mrs. Walshingham, subtle chaperones both, and each indisposed for excellent reasons to encumber Kipps and Helen, were hot upon their heels. These two kept direct route to the stile of the bull's field, and the sight of the animal at once awakened Coote's innate aversion to brutality in any shape or form. He said the stiles were too high, and that they could do better by going around by the hedge, and Mrs. Walshingham, nothing loath, agreed.

This left the way clear for Kipps and Helen, and they encountered the bull. Helen did not observe the bull, but Kipps did; but, that afternoon at any rate, he was equal to facing a lion. And the bull really came at them. It was not an affair of the bull-ring exactly, no desperate rushes and gorings; but he came; he regarded them with a large, wicked, bluish eye, opened a mouth below his moistly glistening nose and booed, at any rate, if he did not exactly bellow, and he shook his head wickedly and showed that tossing was in his mind. Helen was frightened, without any loss of dignity, and Kipps went extremely white. But he was perfectly calm, and he seemed to her to have lost the last vestiges of his accent and his social shakiness. He directed her to walk quietly towards[Pg 222] the stile, and made an oblique advance towards the bull.

"You be orf!" he said....

When Helen was well over the stile Kipps withdrew in good order. He got over the stile under cover of a feint, and the thing was done—a small thing, no doubt, but just enough to remove from Helen's mind an incorrect deduction that a man who was so terribly afraid of a teacup as Kipps must necessarily be abjectly afraid of everything else in the world. In her moment of reaction she went perhaps too far in the opposite direction. Hitherto Kipps had always had a certain flimsiness of effect for her. Now suddenly he was discovered solid. He was discovered possible in many new ways. Here, after all, was the sort of back a woman can get behind!...

As so these heirs of the immemorial ages went past the turf-crowned mass of Portus Lemanus up the steep slopes towards the mediæval castle on the crest the thing was also manifest in her eyes.

§2

Everyone who stays in Folkestone gets, sooner or later, to Lympne. The castle became a farmhouse long ago, and the farmhouse, itself now ripe and venerable,

wears the walls of the castle as a little man wears a big man's coat. The kindliest of farm ladies entertains a perpetual stream of visitors and shows her vast mangle, and her big kitchen, and takes you[Pg 223] out upon the sunniest little terrace garden in all the world, and you look down the sheep-dotted slopes to where, beside the canal and under the trees, the crumpled memories of Rome sleep forever. For hither to this lonely spot the galleys once came, the legions, the emperors, masters of the world. The castle is but a thing of yesterday, King Stephen's time or thereabout, in that retrospect. One climbs the pitch of perforation, and there one is lifted to the centre of far more than a hemisphere of view. Away below one's feet, almost at the bottom of the hill, the Marsh begins, and spreads and spreads in a mighty crescent that sweeps about the sea, the Marsh dotted with the church towers of forgotten mediæval towns and breaking at last into the low, blue hills of Winchelsea and Hastings; east hangs France, between the sea and the sky, and round the north, bounding the wide prospectives of farms and houses and woods, the Downs, with their hangers and chalk pits, sustain the passing shadows of the sailing clouds.

And here it was, high out of the world of everyday, and in the presence of spacious beauty, that Kipps and Helen found themselves agreeably alone. All six, it had seemed, had been coming for the Keep, but Mrs. Walshingham had hesitated at the horrid little stairs, and then suddenly felt faint, and so she and the freckled girl had remained below, walking up and down in the shadow of the house, and Coote had remembered they were all out of cigarettes, and had taken off young Walshingham into the village.[Pg 224] There had been shouting to explain between ground and parapet, and then Helen and Kipps turned again to the view, and commended it and fell silent.

Helen sat fearlessly in an embrasure, and Kipps stood beside her.

"I've always been fond of scenery," Kipps repeated, after an interval.

Then he went off at a tangent. "D'you reely think that was right what Coote was saying?"

She looked interrogation.

"About my name?"

"Being really C-U-Y-P-S? I have my doubts. I thought at first——. What makes Mr. Coote add an S to Cuyp?"

"I dunno," said Kipps, foiled. "I was jest thinking——"

She shot one wary glance at him and then turned her eyes to the sea.

Kipps was out for a space. He had intended to lead from this question to the general question of surnames and change of names; it had seemed a light and witty way of saying something he had in mind, and suddenly he perceived that this was an unutterably vulgar and silly project. The hitch about that "s" had saved him. He regarded her profile for a moment, framed in weather-beaten stone, and backed by the blue elements.

He dropped the question of his name out of existence and spoke again of the view. "When I see[Pg 225] scenery, and things that are beautiful, it makes me feel——"

She looked at him suddenly, and saw him fumbling for his words.

"Silly like," he said.

She took him in with her glance, the old look of proprietorship it was, touched with a certain warmth. She spoke in a voice as unambiguous as her eyes. "You needn't," she said. "You know, Mr. Kipps, you hold yourself too cheap."

Her eyes and words smote him with amazement. He stared at her like a man who awakens. She looked down.

"You mean——" he said; and then, "don't you hold me cheap?"

She glanced up again and shook her head.

"But—for instance—you don't think of me—as an equal like."

"Why not?"

"Oo! But reely——"

His heart beat very fast.

"If I thought," he said, and then, "you know so much."

"That's nothing," she said.

Then, for a long time, as it seemed to them, both kept silence, a silence that said and accomplished many things.

"I know what I am," he said, at length.... "If I thought it was possible.... If I thought *you*.... I believe I could do anything——"

[Pg 226]

He stopped, and she sat downcast and strikingly still.

"Miss Walshingham," he said, "is it possible that you ... could care for me enough to—to 'elp me? Miss Walshingham, do you care for me at all?"

It seemed she was never going to answer. She looked up at him. "I think," she said, "you are the most generous—look at what you have done for my brother—the most generous and the most modest of men. And this afternoon—I thought you were the bravest."

She turned her head, glanced down, waved her hand to someone on the terrace below, and stood up.

"Mother is signalling," she said. "We must go down."

Kipps became polite and deferential by habit, but his mind was a tumult that had nothing to do with that.

He moved before her towards the little door that opened on the winding stairs—"always precede a lady down or up stairs"—and then on the second step he turned resolutely. "But," he said, looking up out of the shadow, flannel-clad and singularly like a man.

She looked down on him, with her hand upon the stone lintel.

He held out his hand as if to help her. "Can you tell me?" he said. "You must know——"

"What?"

"If you care for me?"

[Pg 227]

She did not answer for a long time. It was as if everything in the world had drawn to the breaking point, and in a minute must certainly break.

"Yes," she said, at last, "I know."

Abruptly, by some impalpable sign, he knew what the answer would be, and he remained still.

She bent down over him and softened to her wonderful smile.

"Promise me," she insisted.

He promised with his still face.

"If *I* do not hold you cheap, you will never hold yourself cheap——"

"If you do not hold me cheap, you mean?"

She bent down quite close beside him. "I hold you," she said, and then whispered, "*dear*."

"Me?"

She laughed aloud.

He was astonished beyond measure. He stipulated, lest there might be some misconception, "You will marry me?"

She was laughing, inundated by the sense of bountiful power, of possession and success. He looked quite a nice little man to have. "Yes," she laughed. "What else could I mean?" and, "Yes."

He felt as a praying hermit might have felt, snatched from the midst of his quiet devotions, his modest sackcloth and ashes, and hurled neck and crop over the glittering gates of Paradise, smack among the iridescent wings, the bright-eyed Cherubim. He[Pg 228] felt like some lowly and righteous man dynamited into Bliss....

His hand tightened upon the rope that steadies one upon the stairs of stone. He was for kissing her hand and did not.

He said not a word more. He turned about, and with something very like a scared expression on his face led the way into the obscurity of their descent.

§3

Everyone seemed to understand. Nothing was said, nothing was explained, the merest touch of the eyes sufficed. As they clustered in the castle gateway Coote, Kipps remembered afterwards, laid hold of his arm as if by chance and pressed it. It was quite evident he knew. His eyes, his nose, shone with benevolent congratulations, shone, too, with the sense of a good thing conducted to its climax. Mrs. Walshingham, who had seemed a little fatigued by the hill, recovered, and was even obviously stirred by affection for her daughter. There was, in passing, a motherly caress. She asked Kipps to give her his arm in walking down the steep. Kipps in a sort of dream obeyed. He found himself trying to attend to her, and soon he was attending.

She and Kipps talked like sober, responsible people and went slowly, while the others drifted down the hill together, a loose little group of four. He wondered momentarily what they would talk about and then sank into his conversation with Mrs. [Pg 229]Walshingham. He conversed, as it were, out of his superficial personality, and his inner self lay stunned in unsuspected depths within. It had an air of being an interesting and friendly talk, almost their first long talk together. Hitherto he had had a sort of fear of Mrs. Walshingham, as of a person possibly satirical, but she proved a soul of sense and sentiment, and Kipps, for all of his abstraction, got on with her unexpectedly well. They talked a little upon scenery and the inevitable melancholy attaching to the old ruins and the thought of vanished generations.

"Perhaps they jousted here," said Mrs. Walshingham.

"They was up to all sorts of things," said Kipps, and then the two came round to Helen. She spoke of her daughter's literary ambitions. "She will do something, I feel sure. You know, Mr. Kipps, it's a great responsibility to a mother to feel her daughter is—exceptionally clever."

"I dessay it is," said Kipps. "There's no mistake about that."

She spoke, too, of her son—almost like Helen's twin—alike, yet different. She made Kipps feel quite fatherly. "They are so quick, so artistic," she said, "so full of ideas. Almost they frighten me. One feels they need opportunities—as other people need air."

She spoke of Helen's writing. "Even when she was quite a little dot she wrote verse."

(Kipps, sensation.)

[Pg 230]

"Her father had just the same tastes——" Mrs. Walshingham turned a little beam of half-pathetic reminiscence on the past. "He was more artist than business man. That was the trouble.... He was misled by his partner, and when the crash came everyone blamed him.... Well, it doesn't do to dwell on horrid things—especially to-day. There are bright days, Mr. Kipps, and dark days. And mine have not always been bright."

Kipps presented a face of Coote-like sympathy.

She diverged to talk of flowers, and Kipps' mind was filled with the picture of Helen bending down towards him in the Keep....

They spread the tea under the trees before the little inn, and at a certain moment Kipps became aware that everyone in the party was simultaneously and furtively glancing at him. There might have been a certain tension had it not been first of all for Coote and his tact, and afterwards for a number of wasps. Coote was resolved to make this memorable day pass off well, and displayed an almost boisterous sense of fun. Then young Walshingham began talking of the Roman remains below Lympne, intending to lead up to the Overman. "These old Roman chaps," he said, and then the wasps arrived. They killed three in the jam alone.

Kipps killed wasps, as if it were in a dream, and handed things to the wrong people, and maintained a thin surface of ordinary intelligence with the utmost difficulty. At times he became aware, aware with an[Pg 231] extraordinary vividness, of Helen. Helen was carefully not looking at him and behaving with amazing coolness and ease. But just for that one time there was the faintest suggestion of pink beneath the ivory of her cheeks....

Tacitly the others conceded to Kipps the right to paddle back with Helen; he helped her into the canoe and took his paddle, and, paddling slowly, dropped behind the others. And now his inner self stirred again. He said nothing to her. How could he ever say anything to her again? She spoke to him at rare intervals about reflections and the flowers and the trees, and he nodded in reply. But his mind moved very slowly forward now from the point at which it had fallen stunned in the Lympne Keep, moving forward to the beginnings of realisation. As yet he did not say even in the recesses of his heart that she was his. But he perceived that the goddess had come from her altar amazingly, and had taken him by the hand!

The sky was a vast splendour, and then close to them were the dark, protecting trees and the shining, smooth, still water. He was an erect, black outline to her; he plied his paddle with no unskilful gesture, the water broke to snaky silver and glittered far behind his strokes. Indeed, he did not seem bad to her. Youth calls to youth the wide world through, and her soul rose in triumph over his subjection. And behind him was money and opportunity, freedom and London, a great background of seductively indistinct[Pg 232] hopes. To him her face was a warm dimness. In truth, he could not see her eyes, but it seemed to his love-witched brain he did and that they shone out at him like dusky stars.

All the world that evening was no more than a shadowy frame of darkling sky and water and dripping bows about Helen. He seemed to see through things with an extraordinary clearness; she was revealed to him certainly, as the cause and essence of it all.

He was indeed at his Heart's Desire. It was one of those times when there seems to be no future, when Time has stopped and we are at an end. Kipps, that evening, could not have imagined a to-morrow, all that his imagination had pointed towards was attained. His mind stood still and took the moments as they came.