§4

About nine that night Coote came around to Kipps' new apartment in the Upper Sandgate Road—the house on the Leas had been let furnished—and Kipps made an effort toward realisation. He was discovered sitting at the open window and without a lamp, quite still. Coote was deeply moved, and he pressed Kipps' palm and laid a knobby, white hand on his shoulder and displayed the sort of tenderness becoming in a crisis. Kipps was too moved that night, and treated Coote like a very dear brother.

"She's splendid," said Coote, coming to it abruptly.

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"Isn't she?" said Kipps.

"I couldn't help noticing her face," said Coote.... "You know, my dear Kipps, that this is better than a legacy."

"I don't deserve it," said Kipps.

"You can't say that."

"I don't. I can't 'ardly believe it. I can't believe it at all. No!"

There followed an expressive stillness.

"It's wonderful," said Kipps. "It takes me like that."

Coote made a faint blowing noise, and so again they came for a time of silence.

"And it began—before your money?"

"When I was in 'er class," said Kipps, solemnly.

Coote, speaking out of a darkness which he was illuminating strangely with efforts to strike a match, said that it was beautiful. He could not have *wished* Kipps a better fortune....

He lit a cigarette, and Kipps was moved to do the same, with a sacramental expression. Presently speech flowed more freely.

Coote began to praise Helen and her mother and brother. He talked of when "it" might be, he presented the thing as concrete and credible. "It's a county family, you know," he said. "She is connected, you know, with the Beaupres family—you know Lord Beaupres."

"No!" said Kipps, "reely!"

"Distantly, of course," said Coote. "Still——"

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He smiled a smile that glimmered in the twilight.

"It's too much," said Kipps, overcome. "It's so all like that."

Coote exhaled. For a time Kipps listened to Helen's praises and matured a point of view.

"I say, Coote," he said. "What ought I to do now?"

"What do you mean?" said Coote.

"I mean about calling on 'er and all that."

He reflected. "Naturally, I want to do it all right."

"Of course," said Coote.

"It would be awful to go and do something—now—all wrong."

Coote's cigarette glowed as he meditated. "You must call, of course," he decided. "You'll have to speak to Mrs. Walshingham."

"'Ow?" said Kipps.

"Tell her you mean to marry her daughter."

"I dessay she knows," said Kipps, with defensive penetration.

Coote's head was visible, shaking itself judiciously.

"Then there's the ring," said Kipps. "What 'ave I to do about that?"

"What ring do you mean?"

"'Ngagement Ring. There isn't anything at all about that in 'Manners and Rules of Good Society'—not a word."

"Of course you must get something—tasteful. Yes."

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"What sort of a ring?"

"Something nace. They'll show you in the shop."

"Of course. I 'spose I got to take it to 'er, eh? Put it on her finger."

"Oh, no! Send it. Much better."

"Ah!" said Kipps, for the first time, with a note of relief.

"Then, 'ow about this call—on Mrs. Walshingham, I mean. 'Ow ought one to go?"

"Rather a ceremonial occasion," reflected Coote.

"Wadyer mean? Frock coat?"

"I *think* so," said Coote, with discrimination.

"Light trousers and all that?"

"Yes."

"Rose?"

"I think it might run to a buttonhole."

The curtain that hung over the future became less opaque to the eyes of Kipps. To-morrow, and then other days, became perceptible at least as existing. Frock coat, silk hat and a rose! With a certain solemnity he contemplated himself in the process of slow transformation into an English gentleman, Arthur Cuyps, frock-coated on occasions of ceremony, the familiar acquaintance of Lady Punnet, the recognised wooer of a distant connection of the Earl of Beaupres.

Something like awe at the magnitude of his own fortune came upon him. He felt the world was opening out like a magic flower in a transformation scene at the touch of this wand of gold. And Helen,[Pg 236] nestling beautiful in the red heart of the flower. Only ten weeks ago he had been no more than the shabbiest of improvers and shamefully dismissed for dissipation, the mere soil-burned seed, as it were, of these glories. He resolved the engagement ring should be of expressively excessive quality and appearance, in fact, the very best they had.

"Ought I to send 'er flowers?" he speculated.

"Not necessarily," said Coote. "Though, of course, it's an attention."...

Kipps meditated on flowers.

"When you see her," said Coote, "you'll have to ask her to name the day."

Kipps started. "That won't be just yet a bit, will it?"

"Don't know any reason for delay."

"Oo, but—a year, say."

"Rather a long time," said Coote.

"Is it?" said Kipps, turning his head sharply. "But——"

There was quite a long pause.

"I say," he said, at last, and in an unaltered voice, "you'll 'ave to 'elp me about the wedding."

"Only too happy," said Coote.

"Of course," said Kipps, "I didn't think——" He changed his line of thought. "Coote," he asked, "wot's a 'state-eh-tate'?"

"A 'tate-ah-tay'!" said Coote, improvingly, "is a conversation alone together."

"Lor'!" said Kipps, "but I thought——. It says[Pg 237] *strictly* we oughtn't to enjoy a tater-tay, not sit together, walk together, ride together or meet during any part of the day. That don't leave much time for meeting, does it?"

"The books says that?" asked Coote.

"I jest learnt it by 'eart before you came. I thought that was a bit rum, but I s'pose it's all right."

"You won't find Miss Walshingham so strict as all that," said Coote. "I think that's a bit extreme. They'd only do that now in very strict old aristocratic families. Besides, the Walshinghams are so modern—advanced, you might say. I expect you'll get plenty of chances of talking together."

"There's a tremendous lot to think about," said Kipps, blowing a profound sigh. "D'you mean—p'raps we might be married in a few months or so."

"You'll *have* to be," said Coote. "Why not?"...

Midnight found Kipps alone, looking a little tired and turning over the leaves of the red-covered textbook with a studious expression. He paused for a moment on page 233, his eye caught by the words:

"FOR AN UNCLE OR AUNT BY MARRIAGE the period is six weeks black, with jet trimmings."

"No," said Kipps, after a vigorous mental effort. "That's not it." The pages rustled again. He stopped and flattened out the little book decisively at the beginning of the chapter on "Weddings."

He became pensive. He stared at the lamp wick.[Pg 238] "I suppose I ought to go over and tell them," he said, at last.

§5

Kipps called on Mrs. Walshingham, attired in the proper costume for ceremonial Occasions in the Day. He carried a silk hat, and he wore a deep-skirted frock coat, his boots were patent leather and his trousers dark grey. He had generous white cuffs with gold links, and his grey gloves, one thumb in which had burst when he put them on, he held loosely in his hand. He carried a small umbrella rolled to an exquisite tightness. A sense of singular correctness pervaded his being and warred with the enormity of the occasion for possession of his soul. Anon he touched his silk cravat. The world smelt of his rosebud.

He seated himself on a new re-covered chintz armchair and stuck out the elbow of the arm that held his hat.

"I know," said Mrs. Walshingham, "I know everything," and helped him out most amazingly. She deepened the impression he had already received of her sense and refinement. She displayed an amount of tenderness that touched him.

"This is a great thing," she said, "to a mother," and her hand rested for a moment on his impeccable coat sleeve.

"A daughter, Arthur," she explained, "is so much more than a son."

Marriage, she said, was a lottery, and without love[Pg 239] and toleration there was much unhappiness. Her life had not always been bright—there had been dark days and bright days. She smiled rather sweetly. "This is a bright one," she said.

She said very kind and flattering things to Kipps, and she thanked him for his goodness to her son. ("That wasn't anything," said Kipps.) And then she expanded upon the theme of her two children. "Both so accomplished," she said, "so clever. I call them my Twin Jewels."

She was repeating a remark that she had made at Lympne, that she always said her children needed opportunities, as other people needed air, when she was abruptly arrested by the entry of Helen. They hung on a pause, Helen perhaps

surprised by Kipps' weekday magnificence. Then she advanced with outstretched hand.

Both the young people were shy. "I jest called 'round," began Kipps, and became uncertain how to end.

"Won't you have some tea?" asked Helen.

She walked to the window, looked out at the familiar outporter's barrow, turned, surveyed Kipps for a moment ambiguously, said "I will get some tea," and so departed again.

Mrs. Walshingham and Kipps looked at one another and the lady smiled indulgently. "You two young people mustn't be shy of each other," said Mrs. Walshingham, which damaged Kipps considerably.

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She was explaining how sensitive Helen always had been, even about quite little things, when the servant appeared with the tea things, and then Helen followed, and taking up a secure position behind the little banboo tea table, broke the ice with officious teacup clattering. Then she introduced the topic of a forthcoming open-air performance of "As You Like It," and steered past the worst of the awkwardness. They discussed stage illusion. "I mus' say," said Kipps, "I don't quite like a play in a theayter. It seems sort of unreal, some'ow."

"But most plays are written for the stage," said Helen, looking at the sugar.

"I know," admitted Kipps.

They finished tea. "Well," said Kipps, and rose.

"You mustn't go yet," said Mrs. Walshingham, rising and taking his hand. "I'm sure you two must have heaps to say to each other," and so she escaped towards the door.

§6

Among other projects that seemed almost equally correct to Kipps at that exalted moment was one of embracing Helen with ardour as soon as the door closed behind her mother and one of headlong flight through the open window. Then he remembered he ought to hold the door open for Mrs. Walshingham, and turned from that duty to find Helen still standing, beautifully inaccessible, behind the tea things. He closed the door and advanced toward her with his arms akimbo

and his hands upon his coat skirts.[Pg 241] Then, feeling angular, he moved his right hand to his moustache. Anyhow, he was dressed all right. Somewhere at the back of his mind, dim and mingled with doubt and surprise, appeared the perception that he felt now quite differently towards her, that something between them had been blown from Lympne Keep to the four winds of heaven....

She regarded him with an eye of critical proprietorship.

"Mother has been making up to you," she said, smiling slightly.

She added, "It was nice of you to come around to see her."

They stood through a brief pause, as though each had expected something different in the other and was a little perplexed at its not being there. Kipps found he was at the corner of the brown covered table, and he picked up a little flexible book that lay upon it to occupy his mind.

"I bought you a ring to-day," he said, bending the book and speaking for the sake of saying something, and then he was moved to genuine speech. "You know," he said, "I can't 'ardly believe it."

Her face relaxed slightly again. "No?" she said, and may have breathed, "Nor I."

"No," he went on. "It's as though everything 'ad changed. More even than when I got my money. 'Ere we are going to marry. It's like being someone else. What I feel is——"

He turned a flushed and earnest face to her. He[Pg 242] seemed to come alive to her with one natural gesture. "I don't *know* things. I'm not good enough. I'm not refined. The more you'll see of me the more you'll find me out."

"But I'm going to help you."

"You'll 'ave to 'elp me a fearful lot."

She walked to the window, glanced out of it, made up her mind, turned and came towards him, with her hands clasped behind her back.

"All these things that trouble you are very little things. If you don't mind—if you will let me tell you things——"

"I wish you would."

"Then I will."

"They're little things to you, but they aren't to me."

"It all depends, if you don't mind being told."

"By you?"

"I don't expect you to be told by strangers."

"Oo!" said Kipps, expressing much.

"You know, there are just a few little things. For instance, you know, you are careless with your pronunciation.... You don't mind my telling you?"

"I like it," said Kipps.

"There's aitches."

"I know," said Kipps, and then, endorsingly, "I been told. Fact is, I know a chap, a Nacter, *he's* told me. He's told me, and he's going to give me a lesso nor so."

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"I'm glad of that. It only requires a little care."

"Of course. On the stage they got to look out. They take regular lessons."

"Of course," said Helen, a little absently.

"I dessay I shall soon get into it," said Kipps.

"And then there's dress," said Helen, taking up her thread again.

Kipps became pink, but he remained respectfully attentive.

"You don't mind?" she said.

"Oo, no."

"You mustn't be too—too dressy. It's possible to be over-conventional, over-elaborate. It makes you look like a shop—like a common, well-off person. There's a sort of easiness that is better. A real gentleman looks right, without looking as though he had tried to be right."

"Jest as though 'e'd put on what came first?" said the pupil, in a faded voice.

"Not exactly that, but a sort of ease."

Kipps nodded his head intelligently. In his heart he was kicking his silk hat about the room in an ecstasy of disappointment.

"And you must accustom yourself to be more at your ease when you are with people," said Helen. "You've only got to forget yourself a little and not be anxious——"

"I'll try," said Kipps, looking rather hard at the teapot. "I'll do my best to try."

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"I know you will," she said, and laid a hand for an instant upon his shoulder and withdrew it.

He did not perceive her caress. "One has to learn," he said. His attention was distracted by the strenuous efforts that were going on in the back of his head to translate, "I say, didn't you ought to name the day?" into easy as well as elegant English, a struggle that was still undecided when the time came for them to part....

He sat for a long time at the open window of his sitting-room with an intent face, recapitulating that interview. His eyes rested at last almost reproachfully on the silk hat beside him. "'Ow is one to know?" he asked. His attention was caught by a rubbed place in the nap, and, still thoughtful, he rolled up his handkerchief skilfully into a soft ball and began to smooth this down.

His expression changed slowly.

"'Ow the Juice is one to know?" he said, putting down the hat with some emphasis.

He rose up, went across the room to the sideboard, and, standing there, opened and began to read "Manners and Rules."

[Pg 245]

CHAPTER IVTHE BICYCLE MANUFACTURER

§1

So Kipps embarked upon his engagement, steeled himself to the high enterprise of marrying above his breeding. The next morning found him dressing with a certain quiet severity of movement, and it seemed to his landlady's housemaid that he was unusually dignified at breakfast. He meditated profoundly over his kipper and his kidney and bacon. He was going to New Romney to tell the old people what had happened and where he stood. And the love of Helen had also

given him courage to do what Buggins had once suggested to him as a thing he would do were he in Kipps' place, and that was to hire a motor car for the afternoon. He had an early cold lunch, and then, with an air of quiet resolution, assumed a cap and coat he had purchased to this end, and thus equipped strolled around, blowing slightly, to the motor shop. The transaction was unexpectedly easy, and within the hour Kipps, spectacled and wrapped about, was tootling through Dymchurch.

They came to a stop smartly and neatly outside the[Pg 246] little toy shop. "Make that thing 'oot a bit, will you," said Kipps. "Yes, that's it." "Whup," said the motor car. "Whurrup!"

Both his Aunt and Uncle came out on the pavement. "Why, it's Artie," cried his Aunt, and Kipps had a moment of triumph.

He descended to hand claspings, removed wraps and spectacles, and the motor driver retired to take "an hour off." Old Kipps surveyed the machinery and disconcerted Kipps for a moment by asking him in a knowing tone what they asked him for a thing like that. The two men stood inspecting the machine and impressing the neighbours for a time, and then they strolled through the shop into the little parlour for a drink.

"They ain't settled," old Kipps had said to the neighbours. "They ain't got no further than experiments. There's a bit of take-in about each. You take my advice and wait, me boy, even if it's a year or two, before you buy one for your own use."

(Though Kipps had said nothing of doing anything of the sort.)

"'Ow d'you like that whiskey I sent?" asked Kipps, dodging the old familiar bunch of children's pails.

Old Kipps became tactful. "It's a very good whiskey, my boy," said old Kipps. "I 'aven't the slightest doubt it's a very good whiskey and cost you a tidy price. But—dashed if it soots me! They put this here Foozle Ile in it, my boy, and it ketches me jest 'ere." He indicated his centre of figure. "Gives[Pg 247] me the heartburn," he said, and shook his head rather sadly.

"It's a very good whiskey," said Kipps. "It's what the actor manager chaps drink in London, I 'appen to know."

"I dessay they do, my boy," said old Kipps, "but then they've 'ad their livers burnt out, and I 'aven't. They ain't dellicat like me. My stummik always *'as* been extrey

dellicat. Sometimes it's almost been as though nothing would lay on it. But that's in passing. I liked those segars. You can send me some of them segars...."

You cannot lead a conversation straight from the gastric consequences of Foozle Ile to Love, and so Kipps, after a friendly inspection of a rare old engraving after Morland (perfect except for a hole kicked through the centre) that his Uncle had recently purchased by private haggle, came to the topic of the old people's removal.

At the outset of Kipps' great fortunes there had been much talk of some permanent provision for them. It had been conceded they were to be provided for comfortably, and the phrase "retire from business" had been very much in the air. Kipps had pictured an ideal cottage, with a creeper always in exuberant flower about the door, where the sun shone forever and the wind never blew and a perpetual welcome hovered in the doorway. It was an agreeable dream, but when it came to the point of deciding upon this particular cottage or that, and on this particular[Pg 248] house or that, Kipps was surprised by an unexpected clinging to the little home, which he had always understood to be the worst of all possible houses.

"We don't want to move in a 'urry," said Mrs. Kipps.

"When we want to move, we want to move for life. I've had enough moving about in my time," said old Kipps.

"We can do here a bit more, now we done here so long," said Mrs. Kipps.

"You lemme look about a bit *fust*," said old Kipps.

And in looking about old Kipps found perhaps a finer joy than any mere possession could have given. He would shut his shop more or less effectually against the intrusion of customers, and toddle abroad seeking new matter for his dream; no house was too small and none too large for his knowing enquiries. Occupied houses took his fancy more than vacancies, and he would remark, "You won't be a livin' 'ere forever, even if you think you will," when irate householders protested against the unsolicited examination of their more intimate premises....

Remarkable difficulties arose of a totally unexpected sort.

"If we 'ave a larger 'ouse," said Mrs. Kipps with sudden bitterness, "we shall want a servant, and I don't want no gells in the place larfin' at me, sniggerin' and larfin' and prancin' and trapesin', lardy da! If we 'ave a smaller 'ouse, there won't be room to swing a cat."

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Room to swing a cat it seemed was absolutely essential. It was an infrequent but indispensable operation.

"When we *do* move," said old Kipps, "if we could get a bit of shootin'——. I don't want to sell off all this here stock for nothin'. It's took years to 'cumulate. I put a ticket in the winder sayin' 'sellin' orf,' but it 'asn't brought nothing like a roosh. One of these 'ere dratted visitors pretendin' to want an air gun, was all we 'ad in yesterday. Jest an excuse for spyin' round and then go away and larf at you. No-thanky to everything, it didn't matter what.... That's 'ow *I* look at it, Artie."

They pursued meandering fancies about the topic of their future settlement for a space and Kipps became more and more hopeless of any proper conversational opening that would lead to his great announcement, and more and more uncertain how such an opening should be taken. Once indeed old Kipps, anxious to get away from this dangerous subject of removals, began: "And what are you a-doin' of in Folkestone? I shall have to come over and see you one of these days," but before Kipps could get in upon that, his Uncle had passed into a general exposition of the proper treatment of landladies and their humbugging, cheating ways, and so the opportunity vanished. It seemed to Kipps the only thing to do was to go out into the town for a stroll, compose an effectual opening at leisure, and then come back and discharge it at them in its consecutive [Pg 250]completeness. And even out of doors and alone, he found his mind distracted by irrelevant thoughts.

§2

His steps led him out of the High Street towards the church, and he leant for a time over the gate that had once been the winning post of his race with Ann Pornick, and presently found himself in a sitting position on the top rail. He had to get things smooth again, he knew; his mind was like a mirror of water after a breeze. The image of Helen and his great future was broken and mingled into fragmentary reflections of remoter things, of the good name of Old Methusaleh Three Stars, of long dormant memories the High Street saw fit, by some trick of light and atmosphere, to arouse that afternoon....

Abruptly a fine, full voice from under his elbow shouted, "What—O Art!" and, behold, Sid Pornick was back in his world, leaning over the gate beside him, and holding out a friendly hand.

He was oddly changed and yet oddly like the Sid that Kipps had known. He had the old broad face and mouth, abundantly freckled, the same short nose, and the same blunt chin, the same odd suggestion of his sister Ann without a touch of her beauty; but he had quite a new voice, loud and a little hard, and his upper lip carried a stiff and very fair moustache.

Kipps shook hands. "I was jest thinking of *you*, Sid," he said, "jest this very moment and wondering[Pg 251] if ever I should see you again, ever. And 'ere you are!"

"One likes a look 'round at times," said Sid. "How are *you*, old chap?"

"All right," said Kipps. "I just been lef'——"

"You aren't changed much," interrupted Sid.

"Ent I?" said Kipps, foiled.

"I knew your back directly I came 'round the corner. Spite of that 'at you got on. Hang it, I said, that's Art Kipps or the devil. And so it was."

Kipps made a movement of his neck as if he would look at his back and judge. Then he looked Sid in the face. "You got a moustache, Sid," he said.

"I s'pose you're having your holidays?" said Sid.

"Well, partly. But I just been lef'——"

"*I'm* taking a bit of a holiday," Sid went on. "But the fact is, I have to give *myself* holidays nowadays. I've set up for myself."

"Not down here?"

"No fear! I'm not a turnip. I've started in Hammersmith, manufacturing." Sid spoke offhand as though there was no such thing as pride.

"Not drapery?"

"No fear! Engineer. Manufacture bicycles." He clapped his hand to his breast pocket and produced a number of pink handbills. He handed one to Kipps and prevented him reading it by explanations and explanatory dabs of a pointing finger. "That's our make, my make to be exact, The Red Flag, see?—I got a transfer with my name—Pantocrat tyres, eight[Pg 252] pounds—yes, *there*—Clinchers ten, Dunlop's eleven, Ladies' one pound more—that's the lady's. Best machine at a democratic price in London. No guineas and no discounts—honest trade. I build

'em—to order. I've built," he reflected, looking away seaward—"seventeen. Counting orders in 'and.... Come down to look at the old place a bit. Mother likes it at times."

"Thought you'd all gone away——"

"What! after my father's death? No! My mother's come back, and she's living at Muggett's cottages. The sea air suits 'er. She likes the old place better than Hammersmith ... and I can afford it. Got an old crony or so here.... Gossip ... have tea.... S'pose *you* ain't married, Kipps?"

Kipps shook his head, "I——" he began.

"*I* am," said Sid. "Married these two years and got a nipper. Proper little chap."

Kipps got his word in at last. "I got engaged day before yesterday," he said.

"Ah!" said Sid airily. "That's all right. Who's the fortunate lady?"

Kipps tried to speak in an offhand way. He stuck his hands in his pockets as he spoke. "She's a solicitor's daughter," he said, "in Folkestone. Rather'r nice set. County family. Related to the Earl of Beaupres——"

"Steady on!" cried Sid.

"You see, I've 'ad a bit of luck, Sid. Been lef' money."

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Sid's eye travelled instinctively to mark Kipps' garments. "How much?" he asked.

"'Bout twelve 'undred a year," said Kipps, more offhandedly than ever.

"Lord!" said Sid, with a note of positive dismay, and stepped back a pace or two.

"My granfaver it was," said Kipps, trying hard to be calm and simple. "'Ardly knew I *'ad* a granfaver. And then—bang! When o' Bean, the solicitor, told me of it, you could 'ave knocked me down——"

"*'Ow* much?" demanded Sid, with a sharp note in his voice.

"Twelve 'undred pound a year—'proximately, that is...."

Sid's attempt at genial unenvious congratulation did not last a minute. He shook hands with an unreal heartiness and said he was jolly glad. "It's a blooming stroke of Luck," he said.

"It's a bloomin' stroke of Luck," he repeated; "that's what it is," with the smile fading from his face. "Of course, better you 'ave it than me, o' chap. So I don't envy you, anyhow. *I* couldn't keep it, if I did 'ave it."

"'Ow's that?" said Kipps, a little hipped by Sid's patent chagrin.

"I'm a Socialist, you see," said Sid. "I don't 'old with Wealth. What *is* Wealth? Labour robbed out of the poor. At most it's only yours in Trust. Leastways, that 'ow *I* should take it." He reflected. "The Present distribution of Wealth," he said and stopped.

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Then he let himself go, with unmasked bitterness. "It's no sense at all. It's jest damn foolishness. Who's going to work and care in a muddle like this? Here first you do—something anyhow—of the world's work, and it pays you hardly anything, and then it invites you to do nothing, nothing whatever, and pays you twelve hundred pounds a year. Who's going to respect laws and customs when they come to damn silliness like that?" He repeated, "Twelve hundred pounds a year!"

At the sight of Kipps' face he relented slightly.

"It's not you I'm thinking of, o' man; it's the system. Better you than most people. Still——"

He laid both hands on the gate and repeated to himself, "Twelve 'undred a year.... Gee-Whizz, Kipps! You'll be a swell!"

"I shan't," said Kipps with imperfect conviction. "No fear."

"You can't 'ave money like that and not swell out. You'll soon be too big to speak to—'ow do they put it?—a mere mechanic like me."

"No fear, Siddee," said Kipps with conviction. "I ain't that sort."

"Ah!" said Sid, with a sort of unwilling scepticism, "money'll be too much for you. Besides—you're caught by a swell already."

"'Ow d'you mean?"

"That girl you're going to marry. Masterman says——"

"Oo's Masterman?"

[Pg 255]

"Rare good chap I know—takes my first floor front room. Masterson says it's always the wife pitches the key. Always. There's no social differences—till women come in."

"Ah!" said Kipps profoundly. "You don't know."

Sid shook his head. "Fancy!" he reflected, "Art Kipps!... Twelve 'Undred a Year!"

Kipps tried to bridge that opening gulf. "Remember the Hurons, Sid?"

"Rather," said Sid.

"Remember that wreck?"

"I can smell it now—sort of sour smell."

Kipps was silent for a moment with reminiscent eyes on Sid's still troubled face.

"I say, Sid, 'ow's Ann?"

"*She's* all right," said Sid.

"Where is she now?"

"In a place ... Ashford."

"Oh!"

Sid's face had become a shade sulkier than before.

"The fact is," he said, "we don't get on very well together. *I* don't hold with service. We're common people, I suppose, but I don't like it. I don't see why a sister of mine should wait at other people's tables. No. Not even if they got Twelve 'Undred a Year."

Kipps tried to change the point of application. "Remember 'ow you came out once when we were racing here?... She didn't run bad for a girl."

And his own words raised an image brighter than[Pg 256] he could have supposed, so bright it seemed to breathe before him and did not fade altogether, even when he was back in Folkestone an hour or so later.

But Sid was not to be deflected from that other rankling theme by any reminiscences of Ann.

"I wonder what you will do with all that money," he speculated. "I wonder if you will do any good at all. I wonder what you *could* do. You should hear Masterman.

He'd tell you things. Suppose it came to me, what should I do? It's no good giving it back to the state as things are. Start an Owenite profit-sharing factory perhaps. Or a new Socialist paper. We want a new Socialist paper."

He tried to drown his personal chagrin in elaborate exemplary suggestions....

§3

"I must be gettin' on to my motor," said Kipps at last, having to a large extent heard him out.

"What! Got a motor?"

"No!" said Kipps apologetically. "Only jobbed for the day."

"'Ow much?"

"Five pounds."

"Keep five families for a week! Good Lord!" That seemed to crown Sid's disgust.

Yet drawn by a sort of fascination he came with Kipps and assisted at the mounting of the motor. He[Pg 257] was pleased to note it was not the most modern of motors, but that was the only grain of comfort. Kipps mounted at once, after one violent agitation of the little shop-door to set the bell a-jingle and warn his Uncle and Aunt. Sid assisted with the great furlined overcoat and examined the spectacles.

"Good-bye, o' chap!" said Kipps.

"Good-bye, o' chap!" said Sid.

The old people came out to say good-bye.

Old Kipps was radiant with triumph. "'Pon my Sammy, Artie! I'm a goo' mind to come with you," he shouted, and then, "I got something you might take with you!"

He dodged back into the shop and returned with the perforated engraving after Morland.

"You stick to this, my boy," he said. "You get it repaired by someone who knows. It's the most vallyble thing I got you so far, you take my word."

"Warrup!" said the motor, and tuff, tuff, tuff, and backed and snorted while old Kipps danced about on the pavement as if foreseeing complex catastrophes, and told the driver, "That's all right."

He waved his stout stick to his receding nephew. Then he turned to Sid. "Now, if you could make something like that, young Pornick, you *might* blow a bit!"

"I'll make a doocid sight better than *that* before I done," said Sid, hands deep in his pockets.

"Not *you*," said old Kipps.

The motor set up a prolonged sobbing moan and[Pg 258] vanished around the corner. Sid stood motionless for a space, unheeding some further remark from old Kipps. The young mechanic had just discovered that to have manufactured seventeen bicycles, including orders in hand, is not so big a thing as he had supposed, and such discoveries try one's manhood....

"Oh well!" said Sid at last, and turned his face towards his mother's cottage.

She had got a hot teacake for him, and she was a little hurt that he was dark and preoccupied as he consumed it. He had always been such a boy for teacake, and then when one went out specially and got him one——!

He did not tell her—he did not tell anyone—he had seen young Kipps. He did not want to talk about Kipps for a bit to anyone at all.

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CHAPTER VTHE PUPIL LOVER

§1

When Kipps came to reflect upon his afternoon's work he had his first inkling of certain comprehensive incompatibilities lying about the course of true love in his particular case. He had felt without understanding the incongruity between the announcement he had failed to make and the circle of ideas of his Aunt and Uncle. It was this rather than the want of a specific intention that had silenced him, the perception that when he travelled from Folkestone to New Romney he travelled from an atmosphere where his engagement to Helen was sane and excellent to an atmosphere where it was only to be regarded with incredulous suspicion. Coupled and associated with this jar was his sense of the altered behaviour of Sid Pornick, the evident shock to that ancient alliance caused by the fact of his enrichment, the touch of hostility in his "You'll soon be swelled too big to speak to a poor mechanic like me." Kipps was unprepared for the unpleasant truth; that the path of social advancement is and must be strewn with broken

friendships.[Pg 260] This first protrusion of that fact caused a painful confusion in his mind. It was speedily to protrude in a far more serious fashion in relation to the "hands" from the Emporium, and Chitterlow.

From the day at Lympne Castle his relations with Helen had entered upon a new footing. He had prayed for Helen as good souls pray for Heaven, with as little understanding of what it was he prayed for. And now that period of standing humbly in the shadows before the shrine was over, and the Goddess, her veil of mystery flung aside, had come down to him and taken hold of him, a good, strong, firm hold, and walked by his side.... She liked him. What was singular was that very soon she had kissed him thrice, whimsically upon the brow, and he had never kissed her at all. He could not analyse his feelings, only he knew the world was wonderfully changed about them, but the truth was that, though he still worshipped and feared her, though his pride in his engagement was ridiculously vast, he loved her now no more. That subtle something woven of the most delicate strands of self-love and tenderness and desire, had vanished imperceptibly; and was gone now for ever. But that she did not suspect in him, nor as a matter of fact did he.

She took him in hand in perfect good faith. She told him things about his accent, she told him things about his bearing, about his costume and his way of looking at things. She thrust the blade of her intelligence into the tenderest corners of Kipps' secret [Pg 261]vanity, she slashed his most intimate pride to bleeding tatters. He sought very diligently to anticipate some at least of these informing thrusts by making great use of Coote. But the unanticipated made a brave number....

She found his simple willingness a very lovable thing.

Indeed she liked him more and more. There was a touch of motherliness in her feelings towards him. But his upbringing and his associations had been, she diagnosed, "awful." At New Romney she glanced but little; that was remote. But in her inventory—she went over him as one might go over a newly taken house, with impartial thoroughness—she discovered more proximate influences, surprising intimations of nocturnal "sing-songs"—she pictured it as almost shocking that Kipps should sing to the banjo—much low-grade wisdom treasured from a person called Buggins—"Who *is* Buggins?" said Helen—vague figures of indisputable vulgarity, Pierce and Carshot, and more particularly, a very terrible social phenomenon, Chitterlow.

Chitterlow blazed upon them with unheralded oppressive brilliance the first time they were abroad together.

They were going along the front of the Leas to see a school play in Sandgate—at the last moment Mrs. Walshingham had been unable to come with them—when Chitterlow loomed up into the new world. He was wearing the suit of striped flannel and the straw[Pg 262] hat that had followed Kipps' payment in advance for his course in elocution, his hands were deep in his side pockets and animated the corners of his jacket, and his attentive gaze at the passing loungers, the faint smile under his boldly drawn nose, showed him engaged in studying character—no doubt for some forthcoming play.

"What HO!" said he, at the sight of Kipps, and swept off the straw hat with so ample a clutch of his great, flat hand that it suggested to Helen's startled mind a conjurer about to palm a half-penny.

"'Ello, Chitt'low," said Kipps a little awkwardly and not saluting.

Chitterlow hesitated. "Half a mo', my boy," he said, and arrested Kipps by extending a large hand over his chest. "Excuse me, my dear," he said, bowing like his Russian count by way of apology to Helen and with a smile that would have killed at a hundred yards. He affected a semi-confidential grouping of himself and Kipps while Helen stood in white amazement.

"About that play," he said.

"'Ow about it?" asked Kipps, acutely aware of Helen.

"It's all right," said Chitterlow. "There's a strong smell of syndicate in the air, I may tell you—Strong."

"That's aw right," said Kipps.

"You needn't tell everybody," said Chitterlow with a transitory, confidential hand to his mouth, which pointed the application of the "everybody" just a[Pg 263] trifle too strongly. "But I think it's coming off. However——. I mustn't detain you now. So long. You'll come 'round, eh?"

"Right you are," said Kipps.

"To-night?"

"At eight."

And then, and more in the manner of a Russian prince than any common count, Chitterlow bowed and withdrew. Just for a moment he allowed a conquering eye to challenge Helen's and noted her for a girl of quality....

There was a silence between our lovers for a space.

"That," said Kipps with an allusive movement of the head, "was Chitterlow."

"Is he—a friend of yours?"

"In a way.... You see—I met 'im. Leastways 'e met me. Run into me with a bicycle, 'e did, and so we got talking together."

He tried to appear at his ease. The young lady scrutinised his profile.

"What is he?"

"'E's a Nacter chap," said Kipps. "Leastways 'e writes plays."

"And sells them?"

"Partly."

"Whom to?"

"Different people. Shares he sells.... It's all right, reely—I meant to tell you about him before."

Helen looked over her shoulder to catch a view of[Pg 264] Chitterlow's retreating aspect. It did not compel her complete confidence.

She turned to her lover and said in a tone of quiet authority, "You must tell me all about Chitterlow. Now."

The explanation began....

The School Play came almost as a relief to Kipps. In the flusterment of going in he could almost forget for a time his Laocoon struggle to explain, and in the intervals he did his best to keep forgetting. But Helen, with a gentle insistence, resumed the explanation of Chitterlow as they returned towards Folkestone.

Chitterlow was confoundedly difficult to explain. You could hardly imagine!

There was an almost motherly anxiety in Helen's manner, blended with the resolution of a schoolmistress to get to the bottom of the affair. Kipps' ears were soon quite brightly red.

"Have you seen one of his plays?"

"'E's tole me about one."

"But on the stage."

"No. He 'asn't 'ad any on the stage yet. That's all coming...."

"Promise me," she said in conclusion, "you won't do anything without consulting me."

And of course Kipps promised. "Oo—no!"

They went on their way in silence.

"One can't know everybody," said Helen in general.

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"Of course," said Kipps; "in a sort of way it was him that helped me to my money." And he indicated in a confused manner the story of the advertisement. "I don't like to drop 'im all at once," he added.

Helen was silent for a space, and when she spoke she went off at a tangent. "We shall live in London—soon," she remarked. "It's only while we are here."

It was the first intimation she gave him of their post-nuptial prospects.

"We shall have a nice little flat somewhere, not too far west, and there we shall build up a circle of our own."

§2

All that declining summer Kipps was the pupil lover. He made an extraordinarily open secret of his desire for self-improvement; indeed Helen had to hint once or twice that his modest frankness was excessive, and all this new circle of friends did, each after his or her manner, everything that was possible to supplement Helen's efforts and help him to ease and skill in the more cultivated circles to which he had come. Coote was still the chief teacher, the tutor—there are so many little difficulties that a man may take to another man that he would not care to propound to the woman he loves—but they were all, so to speak, upon the staff. Even the freckled girl said to him once in a pleasant way, "You mustn't say[Pg 266] "contre temps," you must say "contraytom,"" when he borrowed that expression from "Manners and Rules," and she tried at his own suggestion to give him clear ideas upon the subject of "as" and "has." A certain confusion between

these words was becoming evident, the first fruits of a lesson from Chitterlow on the aspirate. Hitherto he had discarded that dangerous letter almost altogether, but now he would pull up at words beginning with "h" and draw a sawing breath—rather like a startled kitten—and then aspirate with vigour.

Said Kipps one day, "*As* 'e?—I should say, ah—Has 'e? Ye know I got a lot of difficulty over them two words, which is which?"

"Well, 'as' is a conjunction and 'has' is a verb."

"I know," said Kipps, "but when is 'has' a conjunction and when is 'as' a verb?"

"Well," said the freckled girl, preparing to be very lucid. "It's *has* when it means one has, meaning having, but if it isn't it's *as*. As for instance one says 'e—I mean *he*—He has. But one says 'as he has.'"

"I see," said Kipps. "So I ought to say 'as 'e?'"

"No, if you are asking a question you say *has* 'e—I mean he—'as he?" She blushed quite brightly, but still clung to her air of lucidity.

"I see," said Kipps. He was about to say something further, but he desisted. "I got it much clearer now. *Has* 'e? *Has* 'e as. Yes."

"If you remember about having."

"Oo I will," said Kipps.

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Miss Coote specialised in Kipps' artistic development. She had early found an opinion that he had considerable artistic sensibility, his remarks on her work had struck her as decidedly intelligent, and whenever he called around to see them she would show him some work of art, now an illustrated book, now perhaps a colour print of a Botticelli, now the Hundred Best Paintings, now "Academy Pictures," now a German art handbook and now some magazine of furniture and design. "I know you like these things," she used to say, and Kipps said, "Oo I *do*." He soon acquired a little armoury of appreciative sayings. When presently the Walshinghams took him up to the Arts and Crafts, his deportment was intelligent in the extreme. For a time he kept a wary silence and suddenly pitched upon a colour print. "That's rather nace," he said to Mrs. Walshingham. "That lill' thing. There." He always said things like that by preference to the mother rather than the daughter unless he was perfectly sure.

He quite took to Mrs. Walshingham. He was impressed by her conspicuous tact and refinement; it seemed to him that the ladylike could go no further. She was always dressed with a delicate fussiness that was never disarranged and even a sort of faded quality about her hair and face and bearing and emotions contributed to her effect. Kipps was not a big man, and commonly he did not feel a big man, but with Mrs. Walshingham he always felt enormous and distended, as though he was a navvy who had taken[Pg 268] some disagreeable poison which puffed him up inside his skin as a preliminary to bursting. He felt, too, as though he had been rolled in clay and his hair dressed with gum. And he felt that his voice was strident and his accent like somebody swinging a crowded pig's pail in a free and careless manner. All this increased and enforced his respect for her. Her hand, which flitted often and again to his hand and arm, was singularly well shaped and cool. "Arthur," she called him from the very beginning.

She did not so much positively teach and tell him as tactfully guide and infect him. Her conversation was not so much didactic as exemplary. She would say, "I *do* like people to do" so and so. She would tell him anecdotes of nice things done, of gentlemanly feats of graceful consideration; she would record her neat observations of people in trains and omnibuses; how, for example, a man had passed her change to the conductor, "quite a common man he looked," but he had lifted his hat. She stamped Kipps so deeply with the hat-raising habit that he would uncover if he found himself in the same railway ticket office with a lady had to stand ceremoniously until the difficulties of change drove him to an apologetic provisional oblique resumption of his headgear.... And robbing these things of any air of personal application, she threw about them an abundant talk about her two children—she called them her Twin Jewels quite frequently—about their gifts, their temperaments, their ambition, their need of opportunity.[Pg 269] They needed opportunity, she would say, as other people needed air....

In his conversations with her Kipps always assumed, and she seemed to assume, that she was to join that home in London Helen foreshadowed, but he was surprised one day to gather that this was not to be the case. "It wouldn't do," said Helen, with decision. "We want to make a circle of our own."

"But won't she be a bit lonely down here?" asked Kipps.

"There's the Waces, and Mrs. Prebble and Mrs. Bindon Botting and—lots of people she knows." And Helen dismissed this possibility....

Young Walshingham's share in the educational syndicate was smaller. But he shone out when they went to London on that Arts and Crafts expedition. Then this

rising man of affairs showed Kipps how to buy the more theatrical weeklies for consumption in the train, how to buy and what to buy in the way of cigarettes with gold tips and shilling cigars, and how to order hock for lunch and sparkling Moselle for dinner, how to calculate the fare of a hansom cab—penny a minute while he goes—how to look intelligently at an hotel tape, and how to sit still in a train like a thoughtful man instead of talking like a fool and giving yourself away. And he, too, would glance at the good time coming when they were to be in London for good and all.

That prospect expanded and developed particulars. It presently took up a large part of Helen's [Pg 270]conversation. Her conversations with Kipps were never of a grossly sentimental sort; there was a shyness of speech in that matter with both of them, but these new adumbrations were at least as interesting and not so directly disagreeable as the clear-cut intimations of personal defect that for a time had so greatly chastened Kipps' delight in her presence. The future presented itself with an almost perfect frankness as a joint campaign of Mrs. Walshingham's Twin Jewels upon the Great World, with Kipps in the capacity of baggage and supply. They would still be dreadfully poor, of course—this amazed Kipps, but he said nothing—until "Brudderkins" began to succeed, but if they were clever and lucky they might do a great deal.

When Helen spoke of London a brooding look, as of one who contemplates a distant country, came into her eyes. Already it seemed they had the nucleus of a set. Brudderkins was a member of the Theatrical Judges, an excellent and influential little club of journalists and literary people, and he knew Shimer and Stargate and Whiffle, of the "Red Dragon," and besides these were the Revels. They knew the Revels quite well. Sidney Revel before his rapid rise to prominence as a writer of epigrammatic essays that were quite above the ordinary public, had been an assistant master at one of the best Folkestone schools, Brudderkins had brought him home to tea several times, and it was he had first suggested Helen should try and write. "It's perfectly easy," Sidney had said. He had been writing occasional things for the evening[Pg 271] papers, and for the weekly reviews even at that time. Then he had gone up to London and had almost unavoidedly become a dramatic critic. Those brilliant essays had followed, and then "Red Hearts a-Beating," the romance that had made him. It was a tale of spirited adventure, full of youth and beauty and naïve passion and generous devotion, bold, as the *Bookman* said, and frank in places, but never in the slightest degree morbid. He had met and married an American widow with quite a lot of money, and they had made a very distinct place for themselves, Kipps learnt, in the literary and

artistic society of London. Helen seemed to dwell on the Revels a great deal; it was her exemplary story, and when she spoke of Sidney—she often called him Sidney—she would become thoughtful. She spoke most of him naturally because she had still to meet Mrs. Revel.... Certainly they would be in the world in no time, even if the distant connection with the Beaupres family came to nothing.

Kipps gathered that with his marriage and the movement to London they were to undergo that subtle change of name Coote had first adumbrated. They were to become "Cuyps," Mr. and Mrs. Cuyps. Or, was it Cuyp?

"It'll be rum at first," said Kipps. "I dessay I shall soon get into it."...

So in their several ways they all contributed to enlarge and refine and exercise the intelligence of Kipps. And behind all these other influences, and, as it were,[Pg 272] presiding over and correcting these influences, was Kipps' nearest friend, Coote, a sort of master of the ceremonies. You figure his face, blowing slightly with solicitude, his slate coloured, projecting but not unkindly eye intent upon our hero. The thing he thought was going off admirably. He studied Kipps' character immensely. He would discuss him with his sister, with Mrs. Walshingham, with the freckled girl, with anyone who would stand it. "He is an interesting character," he would say, "likable—a sort of gentleman by instinct. He takes to all these things. He improves every day. He'll soon get Sang Froid. We took him up just in time. He wants now—well——. Next year, perhaps, if there is a good Extension Literature course, he might go in for it. He wants to go in for something like that."

"He's going in for his bicycle now," said Mrs. Walshingham.

"That's all right for summer," said Coote, "but he wants to go in for some serious, intellectual interest, something to take him out of himself a little more. Savoir Faire and self-forgetfulness is more than half the secret of Sang Froid."

§3

The world as Coote presented it was in part an endorsement, in part an amplification and in part a rectification of the world of Kipps, the world that derived from the old couple in New Romney and had[Pg 273] been developed in the Emporium; the world, in fact, of common British life. There was the same subtle sense of social graduation that had moved Mrs. Kipps to prohibit intercourse with labourers' children and the same dread of anything "common" that had kept the personal quality of Mr. Shalford's establishment so high. But now a certain disagreeable doubt about Kipps' own position was removed and he

stood with Coote inside the sphere of gentlemen assured. Within the sphere of gentlemen there are distinctions of rank indeed, but none of class; there are the Big People and the modest, refined, gentlemanly little people like Coote, who may even dabble in the professions and counterless trades; there are lords and magnificences, and there are gentle folk who have to manage, but they can all call on one another, they preserve a general equality of deportment throughout, they constitute that great state within the state, Society, or at any rate they make believe they do.

"But reely," said the Pupil, "not what you call being in Society?"

"Yes," said Coote. "Of course, down here one doesn't see much of it, but there's local society. It has the same rules."

"Calling and all that?"

"Precisely," said Coote.

Kipps thought, whistled a bar, and suddenly broached a question of conscience. "I often wonder," he said, "whether I oughtn't to dress for dinner—when I'm alone 'ere."

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Coote protruded his lips and reflected. "Not full dress," he adjudicated; "that would be a little excessive. But you should *change*, you know. Put on a mess jacket and that sort of thing—easy dress. That is what *I* should do, certainly, if I wasn't in harness—and poor."

He coughed modestly and patted his hair behind.

And after that the washing bill of Kipps quadrupled, and he was to be seen at times by the bandstand with his light summer overcoat unbuttoned to give a glimpse of his nice white tie. He and Coote would be smoking the gold-tipped cigarettes young Walshingham had prescribed as *chic*, and appreciating the music highly. "That's—puff—a very nice bit," Kipps would say, or better, "That's nace." And at the first grunts of the loyal anthem up they stood with religiously uplifted hats. Whatever else you might call them, you could never call them disloyal.

The boundary of Society was admittedly very close to Coote and Kipps, and a leading solicitude of the true gentleman was to detect clearly those "beneath" him, and to behave towards them in a proper spirit. "It's jest there it's so 'ard for

me," said Kipps. He had to cultivate a certain "distance," to acquire altogether the art of checking the presumption of bounders and old friends. It was difficult, Coote admitted. "That's what, so harkward—I mean awkward."

"I got mixed up with this lot 'ere," said Kipps.

"You could give them a hint," said Coote.

"'Ow?"

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"Oh!—the occasion will suggest something."

The occasion came one early closing night when Kipps was sitting in a canopy chair near the bandstand, with his summer overcoat fully open and a new Gibus pulled slightly forward over his brow, waiting for Coote. They were to hear the band for an hour and then go down to assist Miss Coote and the freckled girl in trying over some of Beethoven's duets, if they remembered them, that is, sufficiently well. And as Kipps lounged back in his chair and occupied his mind with his favourite amusement on such evenings, which consisted chiefly in supposing that everyone about him was wondering who he was, came a rude rap at the canvas back and the voice of Pierce.

"It's nice to be a gentleman," said Pierce, and swung a penny chair into position while Buggins appeared smiling agreeably on the other side and leant upon his stick. *He was smoking a common briar pipe!*

Two real ladies, very fashionably dressed and sitting close at hand, glanced quickly at Pierce, and then away again, and it was evident *their* wonder was at an end.

"*He's* all right," said Buggins, removing his pipe and surveying Kipps.

"'Ello, Buggins!" said Kipps, not too cordially. "'Ow goes it?"

"All right. Holiday's next week. If you don't look out, Kipps, I shall be on the Continong before you. Eh?"

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"You going t' Boologne?"

"Ra-ther. Parley vous Francey. You bet."

"*I* shall 'ave a bit of a run over there one of these days," said Kipps.

There came a pause. Pierce applied the top of his stick to his mouth for a space and regarded Kipps. Then he glanced at the people about them.

"I say, Kipps," he said in a distinct, loud voice, "see 'er Ladyship lately?"

Kipps perceived the audience was to be impressed, but he responded half-heartedly, "No, I 'aven't," he said.

"She was along of Sir William the other night," said Pierce, still loud and clear, "and she asked to be remembered to you."

It seemed to Kipps that one of the two ladies smiled faintly and said something to the other, and then certainly they glanced at Pierce. Kipps flushed scarlet. "*Did* she?" he answered.

Buggins laughed good-humouredly over his pipe.

"Sir William suffers a lot from his gout," Pierce continued unabashed.

(Buggins much amused with his pipe between his teeth.)

Kipps became aware of Coote at hand.

Coote nodded rather distantly to Pierce. "Hope I haven't kept you waiting, Kipps," he said.

"I kep' a chair for you," said Kipps and removed a guardian foot.

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"But you've got your friends," said Coote.

"Oh! *we* don't mind," said Pierce cordially, "the more the merrier," and, "why don't you get a chair, Buggins?" Buggins shook his head in a sort of aside to Pierce and Coote coughed behind his hand.

"Been kep' late at business?" asked Pierce.

Coote turned quite pale and pretended not to hear. His eyes sought in space for a time and with a convulsive movement he recognised a distant acquaintance and raised his hat.

Pierce had also become a little pale. He addressed himself to Kipps in an undertone.

"Mr. Coote, isn't he?" he asked.

Coote addressed himself to Kipps directly and exclusively. His manner had the calm of extreme tension.

"I'm rather late," he said. "I think we ought almost to be going on *now*."

Kipps stood up. "That's all right," he said.

"Which way are you going?" said Pierce, standing also, and brushing some crumbs of cigarette ash from his sleeve.

For a moment Coote was breathless. "Thank you," he said, and gasped. Then he delivered the necessary blow; "I don't think we're in need of your society, you know," and turned away.

Kipps found himself falling over chairs and things in the wake of Coote, and then they were clear of the crowd.

For a space Coote said nothing; then he remarked[Pg 278] abruptly and quite angrily for him, "I think that was *awful* Cheek!"

Kipps made no reply....

The whole thing was an interesting little object lesson in distance, and it stuck in the front of Kipps' mind for a long time. He had particularly vivid the face of Pierce, with an expression between astonishment and anger. He felt as though he had struck Pierce in the face under circumstances that gave Pierce no power to reply. He did not attend very much to the duets and even forgot at the end of one of them to say how perfectly lovely it was.

§4

But you must not imagine that the national ideal of a gentleman, as Coote developed it, was all a matter of deportment and selectness, a mere isolation from debasing associations. There is a Serious Side, a deeper aspect of the true, True Gentleman. The True Gentleman does not wear his heart on his sleeve. He is a polished surface above deeps. For example, he is deeply religious, as Coote was, as Mrs. Walshingham was, but outside the walls of a church it never appears, except perhaps now and then in a pause, in a profound look, in a sudden avoidance. In quite a little while Kipps also had learnt the pause, the profound look, the sudden avoidance, that final refinement of spirituality, impressionistic piety.

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And the True Gentleman is patriotic also. When one saw Coote lifting his hat to the National Anthem, then perhaps one got a glimpse of what patriotic emotions, what worship, the polish of a gentleman may hide. Or singing out his deep notes against the Hosts of Midian, in the St. Stylites choir; then indeed you plumbed his spiritual side.

Christian, dost thou heed them,

On the holy ground,

How the hosts of Mid-i-an,

Prowl and prowl around!

Christian, up and smai-it them....

But these were but gleams. For the rest, Religion, Nationality, Passion, Money, Politics; much more so those cardinal issues, Birth and Death, the True Gentleman skirted about, and became facially rigid towards and ceased to speak and panted and blew.

"One doesn't talk of that sort of thing," Coote would say with a gesture of the knuckly hand.

"O' course," Kipps would reply, with an equal significance.

Profundities. Deep as it were, blowing to deep.

One does not talk, but on the other hand one is punctilious to do. Actions speak. Kipps—in spite of the fact that the Walshinghams were more than a little lax—Kipps, who had formerly flitted Sunday after Sunday from one Folkestone church to another, had now a sitting of his own, paid for duly at Saint Stylites. There he was to be seen, always at the [Pg 280]surplice evening service, and sometimes of a morning, dressed with a sober precision, and with an eye on Coote in the chancel. No difficulties now about finding the place in his book. He became a communicant again—he had lapsed soon after his confirmation when the young lady in the costume-room, who was his adopted sister, left the Emporium—and he would sometimes go around to the Vestry for Coote after the service. One evening he was introduced to the Hon. and Rev. Densemore. He was much too confused to say anything, and the noble cleric had nothing to say, but indisputably they were introduced....

No! you must not imagine our national ideal of a gentleman is without its "serious side," without even its stern and uncompromising side. The imagination no doubt

refuses to see Coote displaying extraordinary refinements of courage upon the stricken field, but in the walks of peace there is sometimes sore need of sternness. Charitable as one may be, one must admit there are people who *do* things, impossible things; people who place themselves "out of it" in countless ways; people, moreover, who are by a sort of predestination out of it from the beginning, and against these Society has invented a terrible protection for its Cootery, the Cut. The cut is no joke for anyone. It is excommunication. You may be cut by an individual, you may be cut by a set or you may be—and this is so tragic that beautiful romances have been written about it—"Cut by the County." One figures Coote discharging this last duty and cutting somebody[Pg 281]—Coote, erect and pale, never speaking, going past with eyes of pitiless slate, lower jaw protruding a little, face pursed up and cold and stiff....

It never dawned upon Kipps that he would one day have to face this terrible front, to be to Coote not only as one dead, but as one gone more than a stage or so in decay, cut and passed, banned and outcast for ever.

Yet so it was to be!

One cannot hide any longer that all this fine progress of Kipps is doomed to end in collapse. So far indeed you have seen him ascend. You have seen him becoming more refined and careful day by day, more carefully dressed, less clumsy in the ways and methods of social life. You have seen the gulf widening between himself and his former low associates. I have brought you at last to the vision of him, faultlessly dressed and posed, in an atmosphere of candlelight and chanting, in his own sitting in one of the most fashionable churches in Folkestone.... All the time I have refrained from the lightest touch upon the tragic note that must now creep into my tale. Yet the net of his low connections has been about his feet, and moreover there was something interwoven in his being....

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CHAPTER VIDISCORDS

§1

One day Kipps set out upon his newly-mastered bicycle to New Romney to break the news of his engagement to his Uncle and Aunt—this time positively. He was now a finished cyclist, but as yet an unseasoned one; the southwest wind, even in its summer guise, as one meets it in the Marsh, is the equivalent of a reasonable

hill, and ever and again he got off and refreshed himself by a spell of walking. He was walking just outside New Romney preparatory to his triumphal entry (one hand off) when abruptly he came upon Ann Pornick.

It chanced he was thinking about her at the time. He had been thinking curious things; whether, after all, the atmosphere of New Romney and the Marsh had not some difference, some faint impalpable quality that was missing in the great and fashionable world of Folkestone behind there on the hill. Here there was a homeliness, a familiarity. He had noted as he passed that old Mr. Cliffordown's gate had been[Pg 283] mended with a fresh piece of string. In Folkestone he didn't take notice and he didn't care if they built three hundred houses. Come to think of it, that was odd. It was fine and grand to have twelve hundred a year; it was fine to go about on trams and omnibuses and think not a person aboard was as rich as oneself; it was fine to buy and order this and that and never have any work to do and to be engaged to a girl distantly related to the Earl of Beauprés, but yet there had been a zest in the old time out here, a rare zest in the holidays, in sunlight, on the sea beach and in the High Street, that failed from these new things. He thought of those bright windows of holiday that had seemed so glorious to him in the retrospect from his apprentice days. It was strange that now, amidst his present splendours, they were glorious still!

All those things were over now—perhaps that was it! Something had happened to the world and the old light had been turned out. He himself was changed, and Sid was changed, terribly changed, and Ann no doubt was changed.

He thought of her with the hair blown about her flushed cheeks as they stood together after their race....

Certainly she must be changed, and all the magic she had been fraught with to the very hem of her short petticoats gone no doubt for ever. And as he thought that, or before and while he thought it, for he came to all these things in his own vague and stumbling way, he looked up, and there was Ann!

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She was seven years older and greatly altered; yet for the moment it seemed to him that she had not changed at all. "Ann!" he said, and she, with a lifting note, "It's Art Kipps!"

Then he became aware of changes—improvements. She was as pretty as she had promised to be, her blue eyes as dark as his memory of them, and with a quick, high colour, but now Kipps by several inches was the taller again. She was

dressed in a simple grey dress that showed her very clearly as a straight and healthy little woman, and her hat was Sundayfied with pink flowers. She looked soft and warm and welcoming. Her face was alight to Kipps with her artless gladness at their encounter.

"It's Art Kipps!" she said.

"Rather," said Kipps.

"You got your holidays?"

It flashed upon Kipps that Sid had not told her of his great fortune. Much regretful meditation upon Sid's behaviour had convinced him that he himself was to blame for exasperating boastfulness in that affair, and this time he took care not to err in that direction. He erred in the other.

"I'm taking a bit of a 'oliday," he said.

"So'm I," said Ann.

"You been for a walk?" asked Kipps.

Ann showed him a bunch of wayside flowers.

"It's a long time since I seen you, Ann. Why, 'ow long must it be? Seven—eight years nearly."

"It don't do to count," said Ann.

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"It don't look like it," said Kipps, with the slightest emphasis.

"You got a moustache," said Ann, smelling her flowers and looking at him over them, not without admiration.

Kipps blushed....

Presently they came to the bifurcation of the roads.

"I'm going down this way to mother's cottage," said Ann.

"I'll come a bit your way if I may."

In New Romney social distinctions that are primary realities in Folkestone are absolutely non-existent, and it seemed quite permissible for him to walk with Ann, for all that she was no more than a servant. They talked with remarkable

ease to one another, they slipped into a vein of intimate reminiscence in the easiest manner. In a little while Kipps was amazed to find Ann and himself at this:

"You r'ember that half sixpence? What you cut for me?"

"Yes."

"I got it still."

She hesitated. "Funny, wasn't it?" she said, and then, "you got yours, Artie?"

"Rather," said Kipps. "What do you think?" and wondered in his heart of hearts why he had never looked at that sixpence for so long.

Ann smiled at him frankly.

"I didn't expect you'd keep it," she said. "I[Pg 286] thought often—it was silly to keep mine. Besides," she reflected, "it didn't mean anything really."

She glanced at him as she spoke and met his eye.

"Oh, didn't it!" said Kipps, a little late with his response, and realising his infidelity to Helen even as he spoke.

"It didn't mean much anyhow," said Ann. "You still in the drapery?"

"I'm living at Folkestone," began Kipps and decided that that sufficed. "Didn't Sid tell you he met me?"

"No! Here?"

"Yes. The other day. 'Bout a week or more ago."

"That was before I came."

"Ah! that was it," said Kipps.

"'E's got on," said Ann. "Got 'is own shop now, Artie."

"'E tole me."

They found themselves outside Muggett's cottages. "You going in?" said Kipps.

"I s'pose so," said Ann.

They both hung upon the pause. Ann took a plunge.

"D'you often come to New Romney?" she said.

"I ride over a bit at times," said Kipps.

Another pause. Ann held out her hand.

"I'm glad I seen you," she said.

Extraordinary impulses arose in neglected parts of Kipps' being. "Ann," he said and stopped.

"Yes," said she, and was bright to him.

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They looked at one another.

All and more than all of those first emotions of his adolescence had come back to him. Her presence banished a multitude of countervaling considerations. It was Ann more than ever. She stood breathing close to him, with her soft-looking lips a little apart and gladness in her eyes.

"I'm awful glad to see you again," he said; "it brings back old times."

"Doesn't it?"

Another pause. He would have liked to have had a long talk to her, to have gone for a walk with her or something, to have drawn nearer to her in any conceivable way, and, above all, to have had some more of the appreciation that shone in her eyes, but a vestige of Folkestone still clinging to him told him it "wouldn't do." "Well," he said, "I must be getting on," and turned away reluctantly, with a will under compulsion....

When he looked back from the corner she was still at the gate. She was perhaps a little disconcerted by his retreat. He felt that. He hesitated for a moment, half turned, stood and suddenly did great things with his hat. That hat! The wonderful hat of our civilisation!...

In another minute he was engaged in a singularly absent-minded conversation with his Uncle about the usual topics.

His Uncle was very anxious to buy him a few upright clocks as an investment for subsequent sale. And[Pg 288] there were also some very nice globes, one terrestrial and the other celestial, in a shop at Lydd that would look well in a drawing-room and inevitably increase in value.... Kipps either did or did not agree to this purchase; he was unable to recollect.

The southwest wind perhaps helped him back, at any rate he found himself through Dymchurch without having noticed the place. There came an odd effect

as he drew near Hythe. The hills on the left and the trees on the right seemed to draw together and close in upon him until his way was straight and narrow. He could not turn around on that treacherous, half-tamed machine, but he knew that behind him, he knew so well, spread the wide, vast flatness of the Marsh shining under the afternoon sky. In some way this was material to his thoughts. And as he rode through Hythe he came upon the idea that there was a considerable amount of incompatibility between the existence of one who was practically a gentleman and of Ann.

In the neighbourhood of Seabrook he began to think he had, in some subtle way, lowered himself by walking along by the side of Ann.... After all, she was only a servant.

Ann!

She called out all the least gentlemanly instincts of his nature. There had been a moment in their conversation when he had quite distinctly thought it would really be an extremely nice thing for someone to kiss her lips.... There was something[Pg 289] warming about Ann—at least for Kipps. She impressed him as having somewhen during their vast interval of separation contrived to make herself in some distinctive way his.

Fancy keeping that half sixpence all this time!

It was the most flattering thing that had ever happened to Kipps.

§2

He found himself presently sitting over "The Art of Conversing," lost in the strangest musings. He got up, walked about, became stagnant at the window for a space, roused himself and by way of something lighter tried "Sesame and Lilies." From that, too, his attention wandered. He sat back. Anon he smiled, anon sighed. He arose, pulled his keys from his pocket, looked at them, decided and went upstairs. He opened the little yellow box that had been the nucleus of all his possessions in the world, and took out a small "Escritoire," the very humblest sort of present, and opened it—kneeling. And there, in the corner, was a little packet of paper, sealed as a last defence against any prying invader, with red sealing wax. It had gone untouched for years. He held this little packet between finger and thumb for a moment, regarding it, and then put down the escritoire and broke the seal....

As he was getting into bed that night he remembered something for the first time!

"Dash it!" he said. "Dashed if I told 'em *this*[Pg 290] time.... *Well!* I shall 'ave to go over to New Romney again!"

He got into bed and remained sitting pensively on the pillow for a space.

"It's a rum world," he reflected after a vast interval.

Then he recalled that she had noticed his moustache and embarked upon a sea of egotistical musings.

He imagined himself telling Ann how rich he was. What a surprise that would be for her!

Finally he sighed profoundly, blew out his candle and snuggled down, and in a little while he was asleep....

But the next morning and at intervals afterwards he found himself thinking of Ann—Ann, the bright, the desirable, the welcoming, and with an extraordinary streakiness he wanted quite badly to go and then as badly not to go over to New Romney again.

Sitting on the Leas in the afternoon, he had an idea. "I ought to 'ave told 'er, I suppose, about my being engaged.

"Ann!"

All sorts of dreams and impressions that had gone clean out of his mental existence came back to him, changed and brought up to date to fit her altered presence. He thought of how he had gone back to New Romney for his Christmas holidays, determined to kiss her, and of the awful blankness of the discovery that she had gone away.

It seemed incredible now, and yet not wholly [Pg 291]incredible, that he had cried real tears for her—how many years was it ago?

§3

Daily I should thank my Maker that He did not appoint me Censor of the world of men. I should temper a fierce injustice with a spasmodic indecision that would prolong rather than mitigate the bitterness of the Day. For human dignity, for all conscious human superiority I should lack the beginnings of charity, for bishops, prosperous schoolmasters, judges and all large respect-pampered souls. And more especially bishops, towards whom I bear an atavistic, Viking grudge, dreaming not infrequently and with invariable zest of galleys and landings and

well known living ornaments of the episcopal bench sprinting inland on twinkling gaiters before my thirsty blade—all these people, I say, should treat below their deserts, but, on the other hand, for such as Kipps——. There the exasperating indecisions would come in. The Judgment would be arrested at Kipps. Everyone and everything would wait. *You* would wait. The balance would sway and sway, and whenever it heeled towards an adverse decision, my finger would set it swaying again. Kings, warriors, statesmen, brilliant women of our first families, personalities, gallants, panting with indignation, headline humanity in general, would stand undamned, unheeded, or be damned in the most casual manner for their importunity, while my eye went about for anything possible that could be said on behalf of Kipps....[Pg 292] Albeit I fear nothing can save him from condemnation upon this present score, that within two days he was talking to Ann again.

One seeks excuses. Overnight there had been an encounter of Chitterlow and young Walshingham in his presence, that had certainly warped his standards. They had called within a few minutes of each other, and the two swayed by virile attentions to Old Methuselah Four Stars, had talked against each other, over and at the hospitable presence of Kipps. Walshingham had seemed to win at the beginning, but finally Chitterlow had made a magnificent display of vociferation and swept him out of existence. At the beginning Chitterlow had opened upon the great profits of playwrights and young Walshingham had capped him at once with a cynical, but impressive, display of knowledge of the High Finance. If Chitterlow boasted his thousands, young Walshingham boasted his hundreds of thousands, and was for a space left in sole possession of the stage, juggling with the wealth of nations. He was going on by way of Financial Politics to the Overman, before Chitterlow recovered from his first check, and came back to victory. "Talking of Women," said Chitterlow, coming in abruptly upon some things not generally known, beyond Walshingham's more immediate circle, about a recently departed Empire-builder; "Talking of Women and the way they Get at a man——"

[Though as a matter of fact they had been talking of the Corruption of Society by Speculation.]

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Upon this new topic Chitterlow was soon manifestly invincible. He knew so much, he had known so many. Young Walshingham did his best with epigrams and reservations, but even to Kipps it was evident that this was a book-learned depravity. One felt Walshingham had never known the inner realities of passion.

But Chitterlow convinced and amazed. He had run away with girls, he had been run away with by girls, he had been in love with several at a time—"not counting Bessie"—he had loved and lost, he had loved and refrained, and he had loved and failed. He threw remarkable lights upon the moral state of America—in which country he had toured with great success. He set his talk to the tune of one of Mr. Kipling's best known songs. He told an incident of simple, romantic passion, a delirious dream of love and beauty in a Saturday to Monday steamboat trip up the Hudson, and tagged his end with, "I learnt about women from 'er!" After that he adopted the refrain and then lapsed into the praises of Kipling. "Little Kipling," said Chitterlow, with the familiarity of affection, "*he* knows," and broke into quotation:

"I've taken my fun where I found it;

I've rogued and I've ranged in my time;

I've 'ad my picking of sweet'earts,

An' four of the lot was Prime."

(These things, I say, affect the moral standards of the best of us.)

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"*I'd* have liked to have written that," said Chitterlow. "That's Life, that is! But go and put it on the Stage, put even a bit of the Realities of Life on the Stage, and see what they'll do to you! Only Kipling could venture on a job like that. That Poem KNOCKED me! I don't say Kipling hasn't knocked me before and since, but that was a Fair Knock Out. And yet—you know—there's one thing in it ... this:

"I've taken my fun where I've found it,

And now I must pay for my fun,

For the more you 'ave known o' the others,

The less will you settle to one——"

Well. In my case anyhow—I don't know how much that proves, seeing I'm exceptional in so many things and there's no good denying it—but so far as I'm concerned—I tell you two, but of course you needn't let it go any farther—I've been perfectly faithful to Muriel ever since I married her—ever since.... Not once. Not even by accident have I ever said or done anything in the slightest——." His little, brown eye became pensive after this flattering intimacy and the gorgeous

draperies of his abundant voice fell into graver folds. "*I learnt about women from 'er*," he said impressively.

"Yes," said Walshingham, getting into the hinder spaces of that splendid pause, "a man must know about women. And the only sound way of learning is the experimental method."

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"If you want to know about the experimental method, my boy," said Chitterlow, resuming....

So they talked. *Ex pede Herculem*, as Coote, that cultivated polyglot, would have put it. And in the small hours Kipps went to bed, with his brain whirling with words and whiskey, and sat for an unconscionable time upon his bed edge, musing sadly upon the unmanly monogamy of soul that had cast its shadow upon his career, musing with his thoughts pointing around more and more certainly to the possibility of at least duplicity with Ann.

§4

For some days he had been refraining with some insistence from going off to New Romney again....

I do not know if this may count in palliation of his misconduct. Men, real Strong-Souled, Healthy Men, should be, I suppose, impervious to conversational atmospheres, but I have never claimed for Kipps a place at these high levels. The unquenchable fact remains that the next day he spent the afternoon with Ann and found no scruple in displaying himself a budding lover.

He had met her in the High Street, had stopped her, and almost on the spur of the moment had boldly proposed a walk, "for the sake of old times."

"*I* don't mind," said Ann.

Her consent almost frightened Kipps. His imagination had not carried him to that. "It would be a[Pg 296] lark," said Kipps, and looked up the street and down. "Now?" he said.

"I don't mind a bit, Artie. I was just going for a walk along towards St. Mary's."

"Let's go that way be'ind the church," said Kipps, and presently they found themselves drifting seaward in a mood of pleasant commonplace. For a while they talked of Sid. It went clean out of Kipps' head at that early stage even that

Ann was a "girl" according to the exposition of Chitterlow, and for a time he remembered only that she was Ann. But afterwards, with the reek of that talk in his head, he lapsed a little from that personal relation. They came out upon the beach and sat down in a tumbled, pebbly place, where a meagre grass and patches of sea poppy were growing, and Kipps reclined on his elbow and tossed pebbles in his hand, and Ann sat up, sunlit, regarding him. They talked in fragments. They exhausted Sid, they exhausted Ann, and Kipps was chary of his riches.

He declined to a faint love-making. "I got that 'arf sixpence still," he said.

"Reely?"

That changed the key. "I always kept mine, some'ow," said Ann, and there was a pause.

They spoke of how often they had thought of each other during those intervening years. Kipps may have been untruthful, but Ann perhaps was not. "I met people here and there," said Ann; "but I never met anyone quite like you, Artie."

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"It's jolly our meeting again, anyhow," said Kipps. "Look at that ship out there. She's pretty close in...."

He had a dull period, became indeed almost pensive, and then he was enterprising for a while. He tossed up his pebbles so that as if by accident they fell on Ann's hand. Then, very penitently, he stroked the place. That would have led to all sorts of coquetries on the part of Flo Banks, for example, but it disconcerted and checked Kipps to find Ann made no objection, smiled pleasantly down on him, with eyes half shut because of the sun. She was taking things very much for granted.

He began to talk, and Chitterlow standards resuming possession of him he said he had never forgotten her.

"I never forgotten you either, Artie," she said. "Funny, isn't it?"

It impressed Kipps also as funny.

He became reminiscent, and suddenly a warm summer's evening came back to him. "Remember them cockchafers, Ann?" he said. But the reality of the evening he recalled was not the chase of cockchafers. The great reality that had suddenly

arisen between them was that he had never kissed Ann in his life. He looked up and there were her lips.

He had wanted to very badly, and his memory leaped and annihilated an interval. That old resolution came back to him and all sorts of new resolutions passed out of mind. And he had learnt something[Pg 298] since those boyish days. This time he did not ask. He went on talking, his nerves began very faintly to quiver and his mind grew bright.

Presently, having satisfied himself that there was no one to see, he sat up beside her and remarked upon the clearness of the air, and how close Dungeness seemed to them. Then they came upon a pause again.

"Ann," he whispered, and put an arm that quivered about her.

She was mute and unresisting, and, as he was to remember, solemn.

He turned her face towards him, and kissed her lips, and she kissed him back again—kisses frank and tender as a child's.

§5

It was curious that in the retrospect he did not find nearly the satisfaction in this infidelity he had imagined was there. It was no doubt desperately doggish, doggish to an almost Chitterlowesque degree to recline on the beach at Littlestone with a "girl," to make love to her and to achieve the triumph of kissing her, when he was engaged to another "girl" at Folkestone, but somehow these two people were not "girls," they were Ann and Helen. Particularly Helen declined to be considered as a "girl." And there was something in Ann's quietly friendly eyes, in her frank smile, in the naïve pressure of her hand, there was something undefended and welcoming that imparted a flavour to the business upon which he had[Pg 299] not counted. He had learnt about women from her. That refrain ran through his mind and deflected his thoughts, but as a matter of fact he had learnt about nothing but himself.

He wanted very much to see Ann some more and explain. He did not clearly know what it was he wanted to explain.

He did not clearly know anything. It is the last achievement of the intelligence to get all of one's life into one coherent scheme, and Kipps was only in a measure more aware of himself as a whole than is a tree. His existence was an affair of dissolving and recurring moods. When he thought of Helen or Ann or any of his friends, he thought sometimes of this aspect and sometimes of that—and often

one aspect was finally incongruous with another. He loved Helen, he revered Helen. He was also beginning to hate her with some intensity. When he thought of that expedition to Lympne, profound, vague, beautiful emotions flooded his being; when he thought of paying calls with her perforce, or of her latest comment on his bearing, he found himself rebelliously composing fierce and pungent insults, couched in the vernacular. But Ann, whom he had seen so much less of, was a simpler memory. She was pretty, she was almost softly feminine, and she was possible to his imagination just exactly where Helen was impossible. More than anything else, she carried the charm of respect for him, the slightest glance of her eyes was balm for his perpetually wounded self-conceit.

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Chance suggestions it was set the tune of his thoughts, and his state of health and repletion gave the colour. Yet somehow he had this at least almost clear in his mind, that to have gone to see Ann a second time, to have implied that she had been in possession of his thoughts through all this interval, and, above all, to have kissed her, was shabby and wrong. Only unhappily this much of lucidity had come now just a few hours after it was needed.

§6

Four days after this it was that Kipps got up so late. He got up late, cut his chin while shaving, kicked a slipper into his sponge bath and said, "Desh!"

Perhaps you know those intolerable mornings, dear Reader, when you seem to have neither the heart nor the strength to rise, and your nervous adjustments are all wrong and your fingers thumbs, and you hate the very birds for singing. You feel inadequate to any demand whatever. Often such awakenings follow a poor night's rest, and commonly they mean indiscriminate eating, or those subtle mental influences old Kipps ascribed to "Foozle Ile" in the system, or worry. And with Kipps—albeit Chitterlow had again been his guest overnight—assuredly worry had played a leading rôle. Troubles had been gathering upon him for days, there had been a sort of concentration of these hosts of Midian overnight, and in the grey small hours Kipps had held his review.

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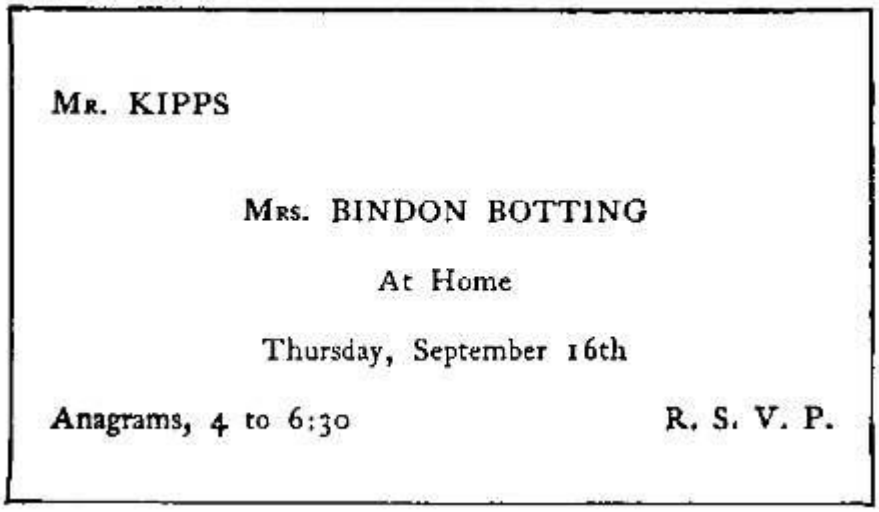
The predominating trouble marched under this banner:



a banner that was the fac-simile of a card upon his looking glass in the room below. And in relation to this terribly significant document things had come to a pass with Helen that he could only describe in his own expressive idiom as "words."

It had long been a smouldering issue between them that Kipps was not availing himself with any energy or freedom of the opportunities he had of social exercises, much less was he seeking additional opportunities. He had, it was evident, a peculiar dread of that universal afternoon enjoyment, the Call, and Helen made it unambiguously evident that this dread was "silly" and had to be overcome. His first display of this unmanly weakness occurred at the Coote's on the day before he kissed Ann. They were all there, chatting very pleasantly, when the little servant with the big cap announced the younger Miss Wace.

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Whereupon Kipps manifested a lively horror and rose partially from his chair. "O Gum!" he protested. "Carn't I go upstairs?"

Then he sank back, for it was too late. Very probably the younger Miss Wace had heard him as she came in.

Helen said nothing of that, though her manner may have shown her surprise, but afterwards she told Kipps he must get used to seeing people, and suggested that he should pay a series of calls with Mrs. Walshingham and herself. Kipps gave a reluctant assent at the time and afterwards displayed a talent for evasion that she had not suspected in him. At last she did succeed in securing him for a call upon Miss Punchafer, of Radnor Park—a particularly easy call because Miss

Punchafer being so deaf one could say practically what one liked—and then outside the gate he shirked again. "I can't go in," he said in a faded voice.

"You *must*," said Helen, beautiful as ever, but even more than a little hard and forbidding.

"I can't."

He produced his handkerchief hastily, thrust it to his face, and regarded her over it with rounded, hostile eyes.

"'Possible," he said in a hoarse, strange voice out of the handkerchief. "Nozzez bleedin'."

But that was the end of his power of resistance, and when the rally for the Anagram Tea occurred she bore down his feeble protests altogether. She insisted.[Pg 303] She said frankly, "I am going to give you a good talking to about this," and she did....

From Coote he gathered something of the nature of Anagrams and Anagram parties. An anagram, Coote explained, was a word spelt the same way as another, only differently arranged, as, for instance, T. O. C. O. E. would be an anagram for his own name, Coote.

"T. O. C. O. E.," repeated Kipps very carefully.

"Or T. O. E. C. O.," said Coote.

"Or T. O. E. C. O.," said Kipps, assisting his poor head by nodding it at each letter.

"Toe Company like," he said in his efforts to comprehend.

When Kipps was clear what an anagram meant, Coote came to the second heading, the Tea. Kipps gathered there might be from thirty to sixty people present, and that each one would have an anagram pinned on. "They give you a card to put your guesses on, rather like a dance programme, and then, you know, you go around and guess," said Coote. "It's rather good fun."

"Oo rather!" said Kipps, with simulated gusto.

"It shakes everybody up together," said Coote.

Kipps smiled and nodded....

In the small hours all his painful meditations were threaded by the vision of that Anagram Tea; it kept marching to and fro and in and out of all his other troubles,

from thirty to sixty people, mostly ladies and callers, and a great number of the letters of the[Pg 304] alphabet, and more particularly P. I. K. P. S. and T. O. E. C. O., and he was trying to make one word out of the whole interminable procession....

This word, as he finally gave it with some emphasis to the silence of the night, was *"Demn!"*

Then, wreathed as it were in this lettered procession, was the figure of Helen as she had appeared at the moment of "words"; her face a little hard, a little irritated, a little disappointed. He imagined himself going around and guessing under her eye....

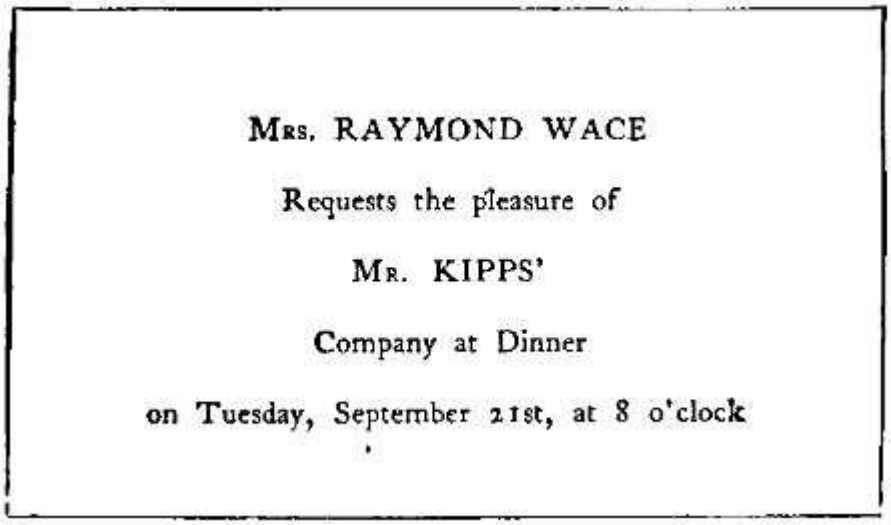
He tried to think of other things, without lapsing upon a still deeper uneasiness that was wreathed with yellow sea poppies, and the figures of Buggins, Pierce and Carshot, three murdered Friendships, rose reproachfully in the stillness and changed horrible apprehensions into unspeakable remorse. Last night had been their customary night for the banjo, and Kipps, with a certain tremulous uncertainty, had put old Methuselah amidst a retinue of glasses on the table and opened a box of choice cigars. In vain. They were in no need, it seemed, of *his* society. But instead Chitterlow had come, anxious to know if it was all right about that syndicate plan. He had declined anything but a very weak whiskey and soda, "just to drink," at least until business was settled, and had then opened the whole affair with an effect of great orderliness to Kipps. Soon he was taking another whiskey by sheer inadvertency, and the complex fabric of his conversation was running more easily from the broad loom of his mind. Into that pattern[Pg 305] had interwoven a narrative of extensive alterations in the Pestered Butterfly—the neck and beetle business was to be restored—the story of a grave difference of opinion with Mrs. Chitterlow, where and how to live after the play had succeeded, the reasons why the Hon. Thomas Norgate had never financed a syndicate, and much matter also about the syndicate now under discussion. But if the current of their conversation had been vortical and crowded, the outcome was perfectly clear. Kipps was to be the chief participator in the syndicate, and his contribution was to be two thousand pounds. Kipps groaned and rolled over and found Helen, as it were, on the other side. "Promise me," she had said, "you won't do anything without consulting me."

Kipps at once rolled back to his former position, and for a space lay quite still. He felt like a very young rabbit in a trap.

Then suddenly, with extraordinary distinctness, his heart cried out for Ann, and he saw her as he had seen her at New Romney, sitting amidst the yellow sea

poppies with the sunlight on her face. His heart called out for her in the darkness as one calls for rescue. He knew, as though he had known it always, that he loved Helen no more. He wanted Ann, he wanted to hold her and be held by her, to kiss her again and again, to turn his back forever on all these other things....

He rose late, but this terrible discovery was still there, undispelled by cockcrow or the day. He rose[Pg 306] in a shattered condition, and he cut himself while shaving, but at last he got into his dining-room and could pull the bell for the hot constituents of his multifarious breakfast. And then he turned to his letters. There were two real letters in addition to the customary electric belt advertisement, continental lottery circular and betting tout's card. One was in a slight mourning envelope and addressed in an unfamiliar hand. This he opened first and discovered a note:



MRS. RAYMOND WACE

Requests the pleasure of

MR. KIPPS'

Company at Dinner

on Tuesday, September 21st, at 8 o'clock

With a hasty movement Kipps turned his mind to the second letter. It was an unusually long one from his Uncle, and ran as follows:

"My Dear Nephew:

"We are considerably startled by your letter though expecting something of the sort and disposed to hope for the best. If the young lady is a relation to the Earl of Beauprés well and good but take care you are not being imposed upon for there are many who will be glad enough to snap you up now your[Pg 307] circumstances are altered—I waited on the old Earl once while in service and he was remarkably close with his tips and suffered from corns. A hasty old gent and hard to please—I daresay he has forgotten me altogether—and anyhow there is no need to rake up bygones. To-morrow is bus day and as you say the

young lady is living near by we shall shut up shop for there is really nothing doing now what with all the visitors bringing everything with them down to their very children's pails and say how de do to her and give her a bit of a kiss and encouragement if we think her suitable—she will be pleased to see your old uncle—We wish we could have had a look at her first but still there is not much mischief done and hoping that all will turn out well yet I am

"Your affectionate Uncle
"Edward George Kipps.

"My heartburn still very bad. I shall bring over a few bits of rhubub I picked up, a sort you won't get in Folkestone and if possible a good bunch of flowers for the young lady."

"Comin' over to-day," said Kipps, standing helplessly with the letter in his hand.

"'Ow, the Juice——?

"I carn't.

"Kiss 'er!"

"I carn't even face 'er——!"

A terrible anticipation of that gathering framed itself in his mind—a hideous, impossible disaster.

[Pg 308]

His voice went up to a note of despair, "And it's too late to telegrarf and stop 'em!"

About twenty minutes after this, an outporter in Castle Hill Avenue was accosted by a young man, with a pale, desperate face, an exquisitely rolled umbrella and a heavy Gladstone bag.

"Carry this to the station, will you?" said the young man. "I want to ketch the nex' train to London.... You'll 'ave to look sharp—I 'aven't very much time."

[Pg 309]

CHAPTER VIILONDON

§1

London was Kipps' third world. There were no doubt other worlds, but Kipps knew only these three; firstly, New Romney and the Emporium, constituting his primary world, his world of origin, which also contained Ann; secondly, the world of culture and refinement, the world of which Coote was chaperon, and into which Kipps was presently to marry, a world it was fast becoming evident absolutely incompatible with the first, and, thirdly, a world still to a large extent unexplored, London. London presented itself as a place of great, grey spaces and incredible multitudes of people, centring about Charing Cross station and the Royal Grand Hotel, and containing at unexpected arbitrary points shops of the most amazing sort, statuary, Squares, Restaurants—where it was possible for clever people like Walshingham to order a lunch item by item, to the waiters' evident respect and sympathy—exhibitions of incredible things—the Walshinghams had taken him to the Arts and[Pg 310] Crafts and to a picture gallery—and theatres. London, moreover, is rendered habitable by hansom cabs. Young Walshingham was a natural cab taker, he was an all-round large minded young man, and he had in the course of their two days' stay taken Kipps into no less than nine, so that Kipps was singularly not afraid of these vehicles. He knew that whereever you were, so soon as you were thoroughly lost you said "Hi!" to a cab, and then "Royal Grand Hotel." Day and night these trusty conveyances are returning the strayed Londoner back to his point of departure, and were it not for their activity in a little while the whole population, so vast and incomprehensible is the intricate complexity of this great city, would be hopelessly lost forever. At any rate, that is how the thing presented itself to Kipps, and I have heard much the same from visitors from America.

His train was composed of corridor carriages, and he forgot his trouble for a time in the wonders of this modern substitute for railway compartments. He went from the non-smoking to the smoking carriage and smoked a cigarette, and strayed from his second-class carriage to a first and back. But presently Black Care got aboard the train and came and sat beside him. The exhilaration of escape had evaporated now, and he was presented with a terrible picture of his Aunt and Uncle arriving at his lodgings and finding him fled. He had left a hasty message that he was called away suddenly on business, "ver' important business," and they were to be sumptuously [Pg 311]entertained. His immediate motive had been his passionate dread of an encounter between these excellent but unrefined old people and the Walshinghams, but now that end was secured, he could see how thwarted and exasperated they would be.

How to explain to them?

He ought never to have written to tell them!

He ought to have got married and told them afterwards.

He ought to have consulted Helen.

"Promise me," she had said.

"Oh, *desh*!" said Kipps, and got up and walked back into the smoking car and began to consume cigarettes.

Suppose, after all, they found out the Walshingham's address and went there!

At Charing Cross, however, there were distractions again. He took a cab in an entirely Walshingham manner, and was pleased to note the enhanced respect of the cabman when he mentioned the Royal Grand. He followed Walshingham's routine on their previous visit with perfect success. They were very nice in the office, and gave him an excellent room at fourteen shillings the night.

He went up and spent a considerable time in examining the furniture of his room, scrutinising himself in its various mirrors and sitting on the edge of the bed whistling. It was a vast and splendid apartment, and cheap at fourteen shillings. But, finding the figure of Ann inclined to resume possession of[Pg 312] his mind, he roused himself and descended by the staircase after a momentary hesitation before the lift. He had thought of lunch, but he drifted into the great drawing-room and read a guide to the Hotels of Europe for a space, until a doubt whether he was entitled to use this palatial apartment without extra charge arose in his mind. He would have liked something to eat very much now, but his inbred terror of the table was very strong. He did at last get by a porter in uniform towards the dining-room, but at the sight of a number of waiters and tables, with remarkable complications of knives and glasses, terror seized him, and he backed out again, with a mumbled remark to the waiter in the doorway about this not being the way.

He hovered in the hall and lounge until he thought the presiding porter regarded him with suspicion, and then went up to his room again by the staircase, got his hat and umbrella and struck boldly across the courtyard. He would go to a restaurant instead.

He had a moment of elation in the gateway. He felt all the Strand must notice him as he emerged through the great gate of the Hotel. "One of these here rich swells," they would say. "Don't they do it just!" A cabman touched his hat. "No fear," said Kipps, pleasantly.

Then he remembered he was hungry again.

Yet he decided he was in no great hurry for lunch, in spite of an internal protest, and turned eastward along the Strand in a leisurely manner. He tried to[Pg 313] find a place to suit him soon enough. He tried to remember the sort of things Walshingham had ordered. Before all things he didn't want to go into a place and look like a fool. Some of these places rook you dreadful, besides making fun of you. There was a place near Essex Street where there was a window brightly full of chops, tomatoes and lettuce. He stopped at this and reflected for a time, and then it occurred to him that you were expected to buy these things raw and cook them at home. Anyhow, there was sufficient doubt in the matter to stop him. He drifted on to a neat window with champagne bottles, a dish of asparagus and a framed menu of a two shilling lunch. He was about to enter, when fortunately he perceived two waiters looking at him over the back screen of the window with a most ironical expression, and he sheered off at once. There was a wonderful smell of hot food half way down Fleet Street and a nice looking Tavern with several doors, but he could not decide which door. His nerve was going under the strain.

He hesitated at Farringdon Street and drifted up to St. Paul's and round the church yard, full chiefly of dead bargains in the shop windows, to Cheapside. But now Kipps was getting demoralised, and each house of refreshment seemed to promise still more complicated obstacles to food. He didn't know how you went in and what was the correct thing to do with your hat, he didn't know what you said to the waiter or what you called the different things; he was[Pg 314] convinced absolutely he would "fumble," as Shalford would have said, and look like a fool. Somebody might laugh at him! The hungrier he got the more unendurable was the thought that anyone should laugh at him. For a time he considered an extraordinary expedient to account for his ignorance. He would go in and pretend to be a foreigner and not know English. Then they might understand.... Presently he had drifted into a part of London where there did not seem to be any refreshment places at all.

"Oh, *desh*!" said Kipps, in a sort of agony of indecisiveness. "The very nex' place I see, in I go."

The next place was a fried fish shop in a little side street, where there were also sausages on a gas-lit grill.

He would have gone in, but suddenly a new scruple came to him, that he was too well dressed for the company he could see dimly through the steam sitting at the counter and eating with a sort of nonchalant speed.

§2

He was half minded to resort to a hansom and brave the terrors of the dining-room of the Royal Grand—they wouldn't know why he had gone out really—when the only person he knew in London appeared (as the only person one does know will do in[Pg 315] London) and slapped him on the shoulder. Kipps was hovering at a window at a few yards from the fish shop, pretending to examine some really strikingly cheap pink baby linen, and trying to settle finally about those sausages.

"Hullo, Kipps!" cried Sid; "spending the millions?"

Kipps turned, and was glad to perceive no lingering vestige of the chagrin that had been so painful at New Romney. Sid looked grave and important, and he wore a quite new silk hat that gave a commercial touch to a generally socialistic costume. For a moment the sight of Sid uplifted Kipps wonderfully. He saw him as a friend and helper, and only presently did it come clearly into his mind that this was the brother of Ann.

He made amiable noises.

"I've just been up this way," Sid explained, "buying a second-hand 'namelling stove.... I'm going to 'namel myself."

"Lor'!" said Kipps.

"Yes. Do me a lot of good. Let the customer choose his colour. See? What brings *you* up?"

Kipps had a momentary vision of his foiled Uncle and Aunt. "Jest a bit of a change," he said.

Sid came to a swift decision. "Come down to my little show. I got someone I'd like to see talking to you."

Even then Kipps did not think of Ann in this connection.

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"Well," he said, trying to invent an excuse on the spur of the moment. "Fact is," he explained, "I was jest looking 'round to get a bit of lunch."

"Dinner, we call it," said Sid. "But that's all right. You can't get anything to eat hereabout. If you're not too haughty to do a bit of slumming, there's some mutton spoiling for me now——"

The word "mutton" affected Kipps greatly.

"It won't take us 'arf an hour," said Sid, and Kipps was carried.

He discovered another means of London locomotion in the Underground Railway, and recovered his self-possession in that interest. "You don't mind going third?" asked Sid, and Kipps said, "Nort a *bit* of it." They were silent in the train for a time, on account of strangers in the carriage, and then Sid began to explain who it was that he wanted Kipps to meet. "It's a chap named Masterman—do you no end of good.

"He occupies our first floor front room, you know. It isn't so much for gain I let as company. We don't *want* the whole 'ouse, and another, I knew the man before. Met him at our Sociological, and after a bit he said he wasn't comfortable where he was. That's how it came about. He's a first-class chap—first-class. Science! You should see his books!

"Properly he's a sort of journalist. He's written a lot of things, but he's been too ill lately to do very much. Poetry he's written, all sorts. He writes for the *Commonweal* sometimes, and sometimes he [Pg 317]reviews books. 'E's got 'eaps of books—'eaps. Besides selling a lot.

"He knows a regular lot of people, and all sorts of things. He's been a dentist, and he's a qualified chemist, an' I seen him often reading German and French. Taught 'imself. He was here——"

Sid indicated South Kensington, which had come opportunely outside the carriage windows, with a nod of his head, "—three years. Studying science. But you'll see 'im. When he really gets to talking—he *pours* it out."

"Ah!" said Kipps, nodding sympathetically, with his two hands on his umbrella knob.

"He'll do big things some day," said Sid. "He's written a book on science already. 'Physiography,' it's called. 'Elementary Physiography'! Some day he'll write an Advanced—when he gets time."

He let this soak into Kipps.

"I can't introduce you to Lords and swells," he went on, "but I *can* show you a Famous Man, that's going to be. I *can* do that. Leastways—unless——"

Sid hesitated.

"He's got a frightful cough," he said.

"He won't care to talk with me," weighed Kipps.

"That's all right; *he* won't mind. He's fond of talking. He'd talk to anyone," said Sid, reassuringly, and added a perplexing bit of Londonized Latin. "He doesn't *pute* anything, *non alienum*. You know."

"*I* know," said Kipps, intelligently, over his [Pg 318]umbrella knob, though of course that was altogether untrue.

§3

Kipps found Sid's shop a practical looking establishment, stocked with the most remarkable collection of bicycles and pieces of bicycle that he had ever beheld. "My hiring stock," said Sid, with a wave to this ironmongery, "and there's the best machine at a democratic price in London, The Red-Flag, built by *me*. See?"

He indicated a graceful, grey-brown framework in the window. "And there's my stock of accessories—store prices.

"Go in for motors a bit," added Sid.

"Mutton?" said Kipps, not hearing him distinctly.

"Motors, I *said*.... 'Owever, Mutton Department 'ere," and he opened a door that had a curtain guarded window in its upper panel, to reveal a little room with red walls and green furniture, with a white clothed table and the generous promise of a meal. "Fanny!" he shouted. "Here's Art Kipps."

A bright-eyed young woman of five or six and twenty in a pink print appeared, a little flushed from cooking, and wiped a hand on an apron and shook hands and smiled, and said it would all be ready in a minute. She went on to say she had heard of Kipps and his luck, and meanwhile Sid vanished to draw the beer, and returned with two glasses for himself and Kipps.

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"Drink that," said Sid, and Kipps felt all the better for it.

"I give Mr. Masterman *'is* upstairs a hour ago," said Mrs. Sid. "I didn't think 'e ought to wait."

A rapid succession of brisk movements on the part of everyone, and they were all four at dinner—the fourth person being Master Walt Whitman Pornick, a cheerful young gentleman of one and a half, who was given a spoon to hammer on the table with to keep him quiet, and who got "Kipps" right at the first effort and kept it all through the meal, combining it first with this previous acquisition, and then that. "Peacock Kipps" said Master Walt, at which there was great laughter, and also "More Mutton, Kipps."

"He's a regular oner," said Mrs. Sid, "for catching up words. You can't say a word but what 'e's on to it."

There were no serviettes and less ceremony, and Kipps thought he had never enjoyed a meal so much. Everyone was a little excited by the meeting and chatting, and disposed to laugh, and things went off easily from the very beginning. If there was a pause Master Walt filled it in. Mrs. Sid, who tempered her enormous admiration for Sid's intellect and his socialism and his severe business methods by a motherly sense of her sex and seniority, spoke of them both as "you boys," and dilated—when she was not urging Kipps to have some more of this or that—on the disparity between herself and her husband.

[Pg 320]

"Shouldn't ha' thought there was a year between you," said Kipps; "you seem jest a match."

"*I'm his* match, anyhow," said Mrs. Sid, and no epigram of young Walshingham's was ever better received.

"Match," said young Walt, coming in on the trail of the joke and getting a round for himself.

Any sense of superior fortune had long vanished from Kipps' mind, and he found himself looking at host and hostess with enormous respect. Really, old Sid was a wonderful chap, here in his own house at two and twenty, carving his own mutton and lording it over wife and child. No legacies needed by him! And Mrs. Sid, so kind and bright and hearty! And the child, old Sid's child! Old Sid had jumped round a bit. It needed the sense of his fortune at the back of his mind to keep Kipps from feeling abject. He resolved he'd buy young Walt something tremendous in toys at the first opportunity.

"Drop more beer, Art?"

"Right you are, old man."

"Cut Mr. Kipps a bit more bread, Sid."

"Can't I pass *you* a bit?"

Sid was all right, Sid was, and there was no mistake about that.

It was growing up in his mind that Sid was the brother of Ann, but he said nothing about her for excellent reasons. After all, because he remembered Sid's irritation at her name when they had met in New Romney seemed to show a certain separation. They[Pg 321] didn't tell each other much.... He didn't know how things might be between Ann and Sid, either.

Still, for all that, Sid was Ann's brother.

The furniture of the room did not assert itself very much above the cheerful business at the table, but Kipps was impressed with the idea that it was pretty. There was a dresser at the end with a number of gay plates and a mug or so, a Labour Day poster, by Walter Crane, on the wall, and through the glass and over the blind of the shop door one had a glimpse of the bright coloured advertisement cards of bicycle dealers, and a shelfful of boxes labelled, The Paragon Bell, The Scarum Bell, and The Patent Omi! Horn....

It seemed incredible that he had been in Folkestone that morning, and even now his Aunt and Uncle——!

Brrr. It didn't do to think of his Aunt and Uncle.

§4

When Sid repeated his invitation to come and see Masterman, Kipps, now flushed with beer and Irish stew, said he didn't mind if he did, and after a preliminary shout from Sid that was answered by a voice and a cough, the two went upstairs.

"Masterman's a rare one," said Sid over his arm and in an undertone. "You should hear him speak at a meeting.... If he's in form, that is."

[Pg 322]

He rapped and went into a large, untidy room.

"This is Kipps," he said. "You know. The chap I told you of. With twelve 'undred a year."

Masterman sat gnawing at an empty pipe and as close to the fire as though it was alight and the season midwinter. Kipps concentrated upon him for a space, and only later took in something of the frowsy furniture, the little bed half behind, and evidently supposed to be wholly behind, a careless screen, the spittoon by the fender, the remains of a dinner on the chest of drawers and the scattered books and papers. Masterman's face showed him a man of forty or more, with curious hollows at the side of his forehead and about his eyes. His eyes were very bright; there was a spot of red in his cheeks, and the wiry black moustache under his short, red nose had been trimmed with scissors into a sort of brush along his upper lip. His teeth were darkened ruins. His jacket collar was turned up about a knitted white neck wrap, and his sleeves betrayed no cuffs. He did not rise to greet Kipps, but held out a thin wristed hand and pointed with the other to a bedroom arm chair.

"Glad to see you," he said. "Sit down and make yourself at home. Will you smoke?"

Kipps said he would, and produced his store. He was about to take one, and then, with a civil afterthought, handed the packet first to Masterman and Sid. Masterman pretended surprise to find his pipe out before he took one. There was an interlude of matches. Sid pushed the end of the screen out of his[Pg 323] way, sat down on the bed thus frankly admitted, and prepared, with a certain quiet satisfaction of manner, to witness Masterman's treatment of Kipps.

"And how does it feel to have twelve hundred a year?" asked Masterman, holding his cigarette to his nose tip in a curious manner.

"It's rum," confided Kipps, after a reflective interval. "It feels juiced rum."

"I never felt it," said Masterman.

"It takes a bit of getting into," said Kipps. "I can tell you that."

Masterman smoked and regarded Kipps with curious eyes.

"I expect it does," he said presently.

"And has it made you perfectly happy?" he asked, abruptly.

"I couldn't 'ardly say *that*," said Kipps.

Masterman smiled. "No," he said. "Has it made you much happier?"

"It did at first."

"Yes. But you got used to it. How long, for example, did the real delirious excitement last?"

"Oo, *that*! Perhaps a week," said Kipps.

Masterman nodded his head. "That's what discourages *me* from amassing wealth," he said to Sid. "You adjust yourself. It doesn't last. I've always had an inkling of that, and it's interesting to get it confirmed. I shall go on sponging for a bit longer on *you*, I think."

"You don't," said Sid. "No fear."

[Pg 324]

"Twenty-four thousand pounds," said Masterman, and blew a cloud of smoke. "Lord! Doesn't it worry you?"

"It is a bit worrying at times.... Things 'appen."

"Going to marry?"

"Yes."

"H'm. Lady, I guess, of a superior social position?"

"Rather," said Kipps. "Cousin to the Earl of Beauprés."

Masterman readjusted his long body with an air of having accumulated all the facts he needed. He snuggled his shoulder-blades down into the chair and raised his angular knees. "I doubt," he said, flicking cigarette ash into the atmosphere, "if any great gain or loss of money does—as things are at present—make more than the slightest difference in one's happiness. It ought to—if money was what it ought to be, the token for given service; one ought to get an increase in power and happiness for every pound one got. But the plain fact is the times are out of joint, and money—money, like everything else, is a deception and a disappointment."

He turned his face to Kipps and enforced his next words with the index finger of his lean, lank hand. "If I thought otherwise," he said, "I should exert *myself* to get some. But, if one sees things clearly, one is so discouraged. So confoundedly discouraged.... When you first got your money, you thought[Pg 325] that it meant you might buy just anything you fancied?"

"I was a bit that way," said Kipps.

"And you found that you couldn't. You found that for all sorts of things it was a question of where to buy and how to buy, and what you didn't know how to buy with your money, straight away this world planted something else upon you——"

"I got rather done over a banjo first day," said Kipps. "Leastways, my Uncle says."

"Exactly," said Masterman.

Sid began to speak from the bed. "That's all very well, Masterman," he said, "but, after all, money is Power, you know. You can do all sorts of things——"

"I'm talking of happiness," said Masterman. "You can do all sorts of things with a loaded gun in the Hammersmith Broadway, but nothing—practically—that will make you or any one else very happy. Nothing. Power's a different matter altogether. As for happiness, you want a world in order before money or property, or any of those things that have any real value, and this world, I tell you, is hopelessly out of joint. Man is a social animal with a mind nowadays that goes around the globe, and a community cannot be happy in one part and unhappy in another. It's all or nothing, no patching any more for ever. It is the standing mistake of the world not to understand that. Consequently people think there is a class or order somewhere, just above them or just[Pg 326] below them, or a country or place somewhere, that is really safe and happy. The fact is, Society is one body, and it is either well or ill. That's the law. This society we live in is ill. It's a fractious, feverish invalid, gouty, greedy and ill-nourished. You can't have a happy left leg with neuralgia, or a happy throat with a broken leg. That's my position, and that's the knowledge you'll come to. I'm so satisfied of it that I sit here and wait for my end quite calmly, sure that I can't better things by bothering—in my time, and so far as I am concerned, that is. I'm not even greedy any more—my egotism's at the bottom of a pond, with a philosophical brick around its neck. The world is ill, my time is short and my strength is small. I'm as happy here as anywhere."

He coughed and was silent for a moment, then brought the index finger around to Kipps again. "You've had the opportunity of sampling two grades of society, and you don't find the new people you're among much better or any happier than the old?"

"No," said Kipps, reflectively. "No. I 'aven't seen it quite like that before, but——. No. They're not."

"And you might go all up the scale and down the scale and find the same thing. Man's a gregarious beast, a gregarious beast, and no money will buy you out of

your own time—any more than out of your own skill. All the way up and all the way down the scale there's the same discontent. No one is quite sure where they stand, and everyone's fretting. The[Pg 327] herd's uneasy and feverish. All the old tradition goes or has gone, and there's no one to make a new tradition. Where are your nobles now? Where are your gentlemen? They vanished directly the peasant found out he wasn't happy and ceased to be a peasant. There's big men and little men mixed up together, that's all. None of us know where we are. Your cads in a bank holiday train and your cads on a two thousand pound motor; except for a difference in scale, there's not a pin to choose between them. Your smart society is as low and vulgar and uncomfortable for a balanced soul as a gin palace, no more and no less; there's no place or level of honour or fine living left in the world; so what's the good of climbing?"

"'Ear, 'ear," said Sid.

"It's true," said Kipps.

"*I* don't climb," said Masterman, and accepted Kipps' silent offer of another cigarette.

"No," he said. "This world is out of joint. It's broken up, and I doubt if it will heal. I doubt very much if it'll heal. We're in the beginning of the Sickness of the World."

He rolled his cigarette in his lean fingers and repeated with satisfaction: "The Sickness of the World."

"It's we've got to make it better," said Sid, and looked at Kipps.

"Ah, Sid's an optimist," said Masterman.

"So are you, most times," said Sid.

[Pg 328]

Kipps lit another cigarette with an air of intelligent participation.

"Frankly," said Masterman, recrossing his legs and expelling a jet of smoke luxuriously, "frankly, I think this civilisation of ours is on the topple."

"There's Socialism," said Sid.

"There's no imagination to make use of it."

"We've got to *make* one," said Sid.

"In a couple of centuries perhaps," said Masterman. "But meanwhile we're going to have a pretty acute attack of confusion. Universal confusion. Like one of those crushes when men are killed and maimed for no reason at all, going into a meeting or crowding for a train. Commercial and Industrial Stresses. Political Exploitation. Tariff Wars. Revolutions. All the bloodshed that will come of some fools calling half the white world yellow. These things alter the attitude of everybody to everybody. Everybody's going to feel 'em. Every fool in the world panting and shoving. *We're* all going to be as happy and comfortable as a household during a removal. What else can we expect?"

Kipps was moved to speak, but not in answer to Masterman's enquiry. "I've never rightly got the 'eng of this Socialism," he said. "What's it going to do, like?"

They had been imagining that he had some elementary idea in the matter, but as soon as he had made it clear that he hadn't, Sid plunged at exposition, and in a little while Masterman, abandoning[Pg 329] his pose of the detached man ready to die, joined in. At first he joined in only to correct Sid's version, but afterwards he took control. His manner changed. He sat up and rested his elbow on his knees, and his cheek flushed a little. He expanded his case against Property and the property class with such vigour that Kipps was completely carried away, and never thought of asking for a clear vision of the thing that would fill the void this abolition might create. For a time he quite forgot his own private opulence. And it was as if something had been lit in Masterman. His languor passed. He enforced his words by gestures of his long, thin hands. And as he passed swiftly from point to point of his argument it was evident he grew angry.

"To-day," he said, "the world is ruled by rich men; they may do almost anything they like with the world. And what are they doing? Laying it waste!"

"Hear, hear!" said Sid, very sternly.

Masterman stood up, gaunt and long, thrust his hands in his pockets and turned his back to the fireplace.

"Collectively, the rich to-day have neither heart nor imagination. No! They own machinery, they have knowledge and instruments and powers beyond all previous dreaming, and what are they doing with them? Think what they are doing with them, Kipps, and think what they might do. God gives them a power like the motor car, and all they can do with it[Pg 330] is to go careering about the roads in goggled masks killing children and making machinery hateful to the soul of man! ("True," said Sid, "true.") God gives them means of communication, power

unparalleled of every sort, time and absolute liberty! They waste it all in folly! Here under their feet (and Kipps' eyes followed the direction of a lean index finger to the hearthrug) under their accursed wheels, the great mass of men festers and breeds in darkness, darkness those others make by standing in the light. The darkness breeds and breeds. It knows no better.... Unless you can crawl or pander or rob you must stay in the stew you are born in. And those rich beasts above claw and clutch as though they had nothing! They grudge us our schools, they grudge us a gleam of light and air, they cheat us and then seek to forget us.... There is no rule, no guidance, only accidents and happy flukes.... Our multitudes of poverty increase, and this crew of rulers makes no provision, foresees nothing, anticipates nothing...."

He paused and made a step, and stood over Kipps in a white heat of anger. Kipps nodded in a non-commital manner and looked hard and rather gloomily at his host's slipper as he talked.

"It isn't as though they had something to show for the waste they make of us, Kipps. They haven't. They are ugly and cowardly and mean. Look at their women! Painted, dyed and drugged, hiding their ugly shapes under a load of dress! There isn't[Pg 331] a woman in the swim of society at the present time, wouldn't sell herself, body and soul, who wouldn't lick the boots of a Jew or marry a nigger, rather than live decently on a hundred a year! On what would be wealth for you and me! They know it. They know we know it.... No one believes in them. No one believes in nobility any more. Nobody believes in kingship any more. Nobody believes there is justice in the law.... But people have habits, people go on in the old grooves, as long as there's work, as long as there's weekly money.... It won't last, Kipps."

He coughed and paused. "Wait for the lean years," he cried. "Wait for the lean years." And suddenly he fell into a struggle with his cough and spat a gout of blood. "It's nothing," he said to Kipps' note of startled horror.

He went on talking, and the protests of his cough interlaced with his words, and Sid beamed in an ecstasy of painful admiration.

"Look at the fraud they have let life become, the miserable mockery of the hope of one's youth. What have *I* had? I found myself at thirteen being forced into a factory like a rabbit into a chloroformed box. Thirteen!—when *their* children are babies. But even a child of that age could see what it meant, that Hell of a factory! Monotony and toil and contempt and dishonour! And then death. So I fought—at thirteen!"

Minton's "crawling up a drain pipe until you die"[Pg 332] echoed in Kipps' mind, but Masterman, instead of Minton's growl, spoke in a high, indignant tenor.

"I got out at last—somehow," he said, quietly, suddenly plumping back in his chair. He went on after a pause. "For a bit. Some of us get out by luck, some by cunning, and crawl on to the grass, exhausted and crippled to die. That's a poor man's success, Kipps. Most of us don't get out at all. I worked all day and studied half the night, and here I am with the common consequences. Beaten! And never once have I had a fair chance, never once!" His lean, clenched fist flew out in a gust of tremulous anger. "These Skunks shut up all the university scholarships at nineteen for fear of men like me. And then—do *nothin'*.... We're wasted for nothing. By the time I'd learnt something the doors were locked. I thought knowledge would do it—I did think that! I've fought for knowledge as other men fight for bread. I've starved for knowledge. I've turned my back on women; I've done even that. I've burst my accursed lung...." His voice rose with impotent anger. "I'm a better man than any ten princes alive! And I'm beaten and wasted. I've been crushed, trampled and defiled by a drove of hogs. I'm no use to myself or the world. I've thrown my life away to make myself too good for use in this huckster's scramble. If I had gone in for business, if I had gone in for plotting to cheat my fellow men—ah, well! It's too late. It's too late for that, anyhow. It's too late for anything now! And I couldn't have done it....[Pg 333] And over in New York now there's a pet of society making a corner in wheat!

"By God!" he cried hoarsely, with a clutch of the lean hand. "By God! If I had his throat! Even now I might do something for the world."

He glared at Kipps, his face flushed deep, his sunken eyes glowing with passion, and then suddenly he changed altogether.

There was a sound of tea things rattling upon a tray outside the door, and Sid rose to open it.

"All of which amounts to this," said Masterman, suddenly quiet and again talking against time. "The world is out of joint, and there isn't a soul alive who isn't half waste or more. You'll find it the same with you in the end, wherever your luck may take you.... I suppose you won't mind my having another cigarette?"

He took Kipps' cigarette with a hand that trembled so violently it almost missed its object, and stood up, with something of guilt in his manner as Mrs. Sid came into the room.

Her eye met his and marked the flush upon his face.

"Been talking Socialism?" said Mrs. Sid, a little severely.

§5

Six o'clock that day found Kipps drifting eastward along the southward margin of Rotten Row. You[Pg 334] figure him a small, respectably attired figure going slowly through a sometimes immensely difficult and always immense world. At times he becomes pensive and whistles softly. At times he looks about him. There are a few riders in the Row, a carriage flashes by every now and then along the roadway, and among the great rhododendrons and laurels and upon the greensward there are a few groups and isolated people dressed in the style Kipps adopted to call upon the Walshinghams when first he was engaged. Amid the complicated confusion of Kipps' mind was a regret that he had not worn his other things....

Presently he perceived that he would like to sit down; a green chair tempted him. He hesitated at it, took possession of it, and leant back and crossed one leg over the other.

He rubbed his under lip with his umbrella handle and reflected upon Masterman and his denunciation of the world.

"Bit orf 'is 'ead, poor chap," said Kipps, and added: "I wonder."

He thought intently for a space.

"I wonder what he meant by the lean years?"

The world seemed a very solid and prosperous concern just here, and well out of reach of Masterman's dying clutch. And yet——

It was curious he should have been reminded of Minton.

His mind turned to a far more important matter. Just at the end Sid had said to him, "Seen Ann?"[Pg 335] and as he was about to answer, "You'll see a bit more of her now. She's got a place in Folkestone."

It had brought him back from any concern about the world being out of joint or anything of that sort.

Ann!

One might run against her any day.

He tugged at his little moustache.

He would like to run against Ann very much....

"And it would be juiced awkward if I did!"

In Folkestone! It was a jolly sight too close....

Then, at the thought that he might run against Ann in his beautiful evening dress on the way to the band, he fluttered into a momentary dream, that jumped abruptly into a nightmare.

Suppose he met her when he was out with Helen! "Oh, Lor'!" said Kipps. Life had developed a new complication that would go on and go on. For some time he wished with the utmost fervour that he had not kissed Ann, that he had not gone to New Romney the second time. He marvelled at his amazing forgetfulness of Helen on that occasion. Helen took possession of his mind. He would have to write to Helen, an easy, off-hand letter, to say that he had come to London for a day or so. He tried to imagine her reading it. He would write just such another letter to the old people, and say he had had to come up on business. That might do for *them* all right, but Helen was different. She would insist on explanations.

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He wished he could never go back to Folkestone again. That would settle the whole affair.

A passing group attracted his attention, two faultlessly dressed gentlemen and a radiantly expensive lady. They were talking, no doubt, very brilliantly. His eyes followed them. The lady tapped the arm of the left hand gentleman with a daintily tinted glove. Swells! No end....

His soul looked out upon life in general as a very small nestling might peep out of its nest. What an extraordinary thing life was, to be sure, and what a remarkable variety of people there were in it!

He lit a cigarette and speculated upon that receding group of three, and blew smoke and watched them. They seemed to do it all right. Probably they all had incomes of very much over twelve hundred a year. Perhaps not. Probably none of them suspected, as they went past, that he, too, was a gentleman of independent means, dressed, as he was, without distinction. Of course things were easier for them. They were brought up always to dress well and do the right thing from their very earliest years; they started clear of all his perplexities; they had never got mixed up with all sorts of different people who didn't go together. If, for example, that lady there got engaged to that gentleman, she would be quite safe from any

encounter from a corpulent, osculatory Uncle, or Chitterlow, or the dangerously insignificant eye of Pierce.

His thoughts came round to Helen.

[Pg 337]

When they were married and Cuyps, or Cuyp—Coote had failed to justify his "s"—and in that west end flat and shaken free of all these low class associations, would he and she parade here of an afternoon dressed like that? It would be rather fine to do so. If one's dress was all right.

Helen!

She was difficult to understand at times.

He blew extensive clouds of cigarette smoke.

There would be teas, there would be dinners, there would be calls. Of course he would get into the way of it.

But Anagrams were a bit stiff to begin with!

It was beastly confusing at first to know when to use your fork at dinner, and all that. Still——

He felt an extraordinary doubt whether he would get into the way of it. He was interested for a space by a girl and groom on horseback, and then he came back to his personal preoccupations.

He would have to write to Helen. What could he say to explain his absence from the Anagram Tea? She had been pretty clear she wanted him to come. He recalled her resolute face without any great tenderness. He *knew* he would look like a silly ass at that confounded tea! Suppose he shirked it and went back in time for the dinner! Dinners were beastly difficult, too, but not as bad as Anagrams. The very first thing that might happen when he got back to Folkestone would be to run against Ann. Suppose, after all, he did meet Ann when he was with Helen!

[Pg 338]

What queer encounters were possible in the world!

Thank goodness, they were going to live in London!

But that brought him around to Chitterlow. The Chitterlows were coming to London, too. If they didn't get money they'd come after it; they weren't the sort of

people to be choked off easily, and if they did they'd come to London to produce their play. He tried to imagine some seemly social occasion invaded by Chitterlow and his rhetoric, by his torrential thunder of self-assertion, the whole company flattened thereunder like wheat under a hurricane.

Confound and hang Chitterlow! Yet, somehow, somewhen, one would have to settle accounts with him! And there was Sid! Sid was Ann's brother. He realised with sudden horror the social indiscretion of accepting Sid's invitation to dinner.

Sid wasn't the sort of chap one could snub or cut, and besides—Ann's brother! He didn't want to cut him. It would be worse than cutting Buggins and Pierce—a sight worse. And after that lunch!

It would be the next thing to cutting Ann herself. And even as to Ann!

Suppose he was with Helen or Coote!...

"Oh, Blow!" he said, at last, and then, viciously, "*Blow!*" and so rose and flung away his cigarette end, and pursued his reluctant, dubiating way towards the really quite uncongenial splendours of the Royal Grand....

[Pg 339]

And it is vulgarly imagined that to have money is to have no troubles at all!

§6

Kipps endured splendour at the Royal Grand Hotel for three nights and days, and then he retreated in disorder. The Royal Grand defeated and overcame and routed Kipps, not of intention, but by sheer royal grandeur, grandeur combined with an organisation for his comfort carried to excess. On his return he came upon a difficulty; he had lost his circular piece of cardboard with the number of his room, and he drifted about the hall and passages in a state of perplexity for some time, until he thought all the porters and officials in gold lace caps must be watching him and jesting to one another about him. Finally, in a quiet corner, down below the hairdresser's shop, he found a kindly looking personage in bottle green, to whom he broached his difficulty. "I say," he said, with a pleasant smile, "I can't find my room nohow." The personage in bottle green, instead of laughing in a nasty way, as he might well have done, became extremely helpful, showed Kipps what to do, got his key, and conducted him by lift and passage to his chamber. Kipps tipped him half a crown.

Safe in his room, Kipps pulled himself together for dinner. He had learnt enough from young Walshingham to bring his dress clothes, and now he began[Pg 340] to assume them. Unfortunately, in the excitement of his flight from his Aunt and Uncle, he had forgotten to put in his other boots, and he was some time deciding between his purple cloth slippers, with a golden marigold, and the prospect of cleaning the boots he was wearing with the towel, but finally, being a little footsore, he took the slippers.

Afterwards, when he saw the porters and waiters and the other guests catch a sight of the slippers, he was sorry he had not chosen the boots. However, to make up for any want of style at that end, he had his crush hat under his arm.

He found the dining-room without excessive trouble. It was a vast and splendidly decorated place, and a number of people, evidently quite *au fait*, were dining there at little tables lit with electric, red shaded candles, gentlemen in evening dress, and ladies with dazzling, astonishing necks. Kipps had never seen evening dress in full vigour before, and he doubted his eyes. And there were also people not in evening dress who, no doubt, wondered what noble family Kipps represented. There was a band in a decorated recess, and the band looked collectively at the purple slippers, and so lost any chance they may have had of a collection, so far as Kipps was concerned. The chief drawback to this magnificent place was the excessive space of floor that had to be crossed before you got your purple slippers hid in under a table.

He selected a little table—not the one where a rather impudent looking waiter held a chair, but [Pg 341]another—sat down, and finding his gibus in his hand, decided after a moment of thought to rise slightly and sit on it. (It was discovered in his abandoned chair at a late hour by a supper party, and restored to him next day.)

He put the napkin carefully on one side, selected his soup without difficulty, "Clear, please," but he was rather floored by the presentation of a quite splendidly bound wine card. He turned it over, discovered a section devoted to whiskey, and had a bright idea.

"'Ere," he said to the waiter, with an encouraging movement of his head, and then in a confidential manner, "you haven't any Old Methuselah Three Stars, 'ave you?"

The waiter went away to enquire, and Kipps went on with his soup with an enhanced self-respect. Finally, Old Methuselah being unobtainable, he ordered a

claret from about the middle of the list. "Let's 'ave some of this," he said. He knew claret was a good sort of wine.

"A half bottle?" said the waiter.

"Right you are," said Kipps.

He felt he was getting on. He leant back after his soup, a man of the world, and then slowly brought his eyes around to the ladies in evening dress on his right....

He couldn't have thought it!

They were scorchers. Jest a bit of black velvet over the shoulders!

He looked again. One of them was laughing with[Pg 342] a glass of wine half raised—wicked-looking woman she was—the other, the black velvet one, was eating bits of bread with nervous quickness and talking fast.

He wished old Buggins could see them.

He found a waiter regarding him and blushed deeply. He did not look again for some time, and became confused about his knife and fork over the fish. Presently he remarked a lady in pink to the left of him eating the fish with an entirely different implement.

It was over the *vol au vent* that he began to go to pieces. He took a knife to it; then saw the lady in pink was using a fork only, and hastily put down his knife, with a considerable amount of rich creaminess on the blade, upon the cloth. Then he found that a fork in his inexperienced hand was an instrument of chase rather than capture. His ears became violently red, and then he looked up, to discover the lady in pink glancing at him and then smiling as she spoke to the man beside her.

He hated the lady in pink very much.

He stabbed a large piece of the *vol au vent* at last, and was too glad of his luck not to take a mouthful of it. But it was an extensive fragment, and pieces escaped him. Shirt front! "Desh it!" he said, and had resort to his spoon. His waiter went and spoke to two other waiters, no doubt jeering at him. He became very fierce suddenly. "Ere!" he said, gesticulating, and then, "clear this away!"

The entire dinner party on his right, the party of[Pg 343] the ladies in advanced evening dress, looked at him.... He felt that everyone was watching him and making fun of him, and the injustice of this angered him. After all, they had every

advantage he hadn't. And then, when they got him there doing his best, what must they do but glance and sneer and nudge one another. He tried to catch them at it, and then took refuge in a second glass of wine.

Suddenly and extraordinarily he found himself a socialist. He did not care how close it was to the lean years when all these things would end.

Mutton came with peas. He arrested the hand of the waiter. "No peas," he said. He knew something of the difficulty and danger of eating peas. Then, when the peas went away again he was embittered again.... Echoes of Masterman's burning rhetoric began to reverberate in his mind. Nice lot of people these were to laugh at anyone! Women half undressed. It was that made him so beastly uncomfortable. How could one eat one's dinner with people about him like that? Nice lot they were. He was glad he wasn't one of them, anyhow. Yes, they might look. He resolved if they looked at him again he would ask one of the men who he was staring at. His perturbed and angry face would have concerned anyone. The band by an unfortunate accident was playing truculent military music. The mental change Kipps underwent was, in its way, what psychologists call a conversion. In a few moments all Kipps' ideals were changed. He[Pg 344] who had been "practically a gentleman," the sedulous pupil of Coote, the punctilious raiser of hats, was instantly a rebel, an outcast, the hater of everything "stuck up," the foe of Society and the social order of to-day. Here they were among the profits of their robbery, these people who might do anything with the world....

"No, thenks," he said to a dish.

He addressed a scornful eye at the shoulders of the lady to his left.

Presently he was refusing another dish. He didn't like it—fussed up food! Probably cooked by some foreigner. He finished up his wine and his bread.

"No, thenks."

"No, thenks."...

He discovered the eye of a diner fixed curiously upon his flushed face. He responded with a glare. Couldn't he go without things if he liked?

"What's this?" said Kipps to a great green cone.

"Ice," said the waiter.

"I'll 'ave some," said Kipps.

He seized a fork and spoon and assailed the bombe. It cut rather stiffly. "Come up!" said Kipps, with concentrated bitterness, and the truncated summit of the bombe flew off suddenly, travelling eastward with remarkable velocity. Flop, it went upon the floor a yard away, and for awhile time seemed empty.

At the adjacent table they were laughing together.

Shy the rest of the bombe at them?

Flight?

[Pg 345]

At any rate a dignified withdrawal.

"No!" said Kipps, "no more," arresting the polite attempt of the waiter to serve him with another piece. He had a vague idea he might carry off the affair as though he had meant the ice to go on the floor—not liking ice, for example, and being annoyed at the badness of his dinner. He put both hands on the table, thrust back his chair, disengaged a purple slipper from his napkin, and rose. He stepped carefully over the prostrate ice, kicked the napkin under the table, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and marched out—shaking the dust of the place, as it were, from his feet. He left behind him a melting fragment of ice upon the floor, his gibus hat, warm and compressed in his chair, and in addition every social ambition he had ever entertained in the world.

§7

Kipps went back to Folkestone in time for the Anagram Tea. But you must not imagine that the change of heart that came to him in the dining-room of the Royal Grand Hotel involved any change of attitude toward this promised social and intellectual treat. He went back because the Royal Grand was too much for him.

Outwardly calm, or at most a little flushed and ruffled, inwardly Kipps was a horrible, tormented battleground of scruples, doubts, shames and self-assertions during that three days of silent, desperate[Pg 346] grappling with the big hotel. He did not intend the monstrosity should beat him without a struggle, but at last he had sullenly to admit himself overcome. The odds were terrific. On the one hand himself—with, among other things, only one pair of boots; on the other a vast wilderness of rooms, covering several acres, and with over a thousand people, staff and visitors, all chiefly occupied in looking queerly at Kipps, in laughing at him behind his back, in watching for difficult corners at which to confront and perplex him, and inflict humiliations upon him. For

example, the hotel scored over its electric light. After the dinner the chambermaid, a hard, unsympathetic young woman with a superior manner, was summoned by a bell Kipps had rung under the impression the button was the electric light switch. "Look 'ere," said Kipps, rubbing a shin that had suffered during his search in the dark, "why aren't there any candles or matches?" The hotel explained and scored heavily.

"It isn't everyone is up to these things," said Kipps.

"No, it isn't," said the chambermaid, with ill-concealed scorn, and slammed the door at him.

"S'pose I ought to have tipped her," said Kipps.

After that Kipps cleaned his boots with a pocket-handkerchief and went for a long walk and got home in a hansom, but the hotel scored again by his not putting out his boots and so having to clean them again in the morning. The hotel also snubbed him[Pg 347] by bringing him hot water when he was fully dressed and looking surprised at his collar, but he got a breakfast, I must admit, with scarcely any difficulty.

After that the hotel scored heavily by the fact that there are twenty-four hours in the day and Kipps had nothing to do in any of them. He was a little footsore from his previous day's pedestrianism, and he could make up his mind for no long excursions. He flitted in and out of the hotel several times, and it was the polite porter who touched his hat every time that first set Kipps tipping.

"What 'e wants is a tip," said Kipps.

So at the next opportunity he gave the man an unexpected shilling, and having once put his hand in his pocket, there was no reason why he should not go on. He bought a newspaper at the book-stall and tipped the boy the rest of the shilling, and then went up by the lift and tipped the man a sixpence, leaving his newspaper inadvertently in the lift. He met his chambermaid in the passage and gave her half a crown. He resolved to demonstrate his position to the entire establishment in this way. He didn't like the place; he disapproved of it politically, socially, morally, but he resolved no taint of meanness should disfigure his sojourn in its luxurious halls. He went down by the lift (tipping again), and, being accosted by a waiter with his gibus, tipped the finder half a crown. He had a vague sense that he was making a flank movement upon the hotel and buying over its staff. They would regard him as a character. They[Pg 348] would get to like him. He found his stock of small silver diminishing, and replenished it at a desk in the

hall. He tipped a man in bottle green who looked like the man who had shown him his room the day before, and then he saw a visitor eyeing him, and doubted whether he was in this instance doing right. Finally he went out and took chance 'buses to their destinations, and wandered a little in remote, wonderful suburbs and returned. He lunched at a chop house in Islington, and found himself back in the Royal Grand, now unmistakably footsore and London weary, about three. He was drawn towards the drawing-room by a neat placard about afternoon tea.

It occurred to him that the campaign of tipping upon which he had embarked was perhaps after all a mistake. He was confirmed in this by observing that the hotel officials were watching him, not respectfully, but with a sort of amused wonder, as if to see whom he would tip next. However, if he backed out now, they would think him an awful fool. Everyone wasn't so rich as he was. It was his way to tip. Still——

He grew more certain the hotel had scored again.

He pretended to be lost in thought and so drifted by, and having put hat and umbrella in the cloak-room went into the drawing-room for afternoon tea.

There he did get what for a time he held to be a point in his favour. The room was large and quiet at first, and he sat back restfully until it occurred to him that his attitude brought his extremely dusty boots too prominently into the light, so instead he sat[Pg 349] up, and then people of the upper and upper middle classes began to come and group themselves about him and have tea likewise, and so revive the class animosities of the previous day.

Presently a fluffy, fair-haired lady came into prominent existence a few yards away. She was talking to a respectful, low-voiced clergyman, whom she was possibly entertaining at tea. "No," she said, "dear Lady Jane wouldn't like that!"

"Mumble, mumble, mumble," from the clergyman.

"Poor dear Lady Jane was always so sensitive," the voice of the lady sang out clear and emphatic.

A fat, hairless, important-looking man joined this group, took a chair and planted it firmly with its back in the face of Kipps, a thing that offended Kipps mightily. "Are you telling him," gurgled the fat, hairless man, "about dear Lady Jane's affliction?" A young couple, lady brilliantly attired and the man in a magnificently cut frock coat, arranged themselves to the right, also with an air of exclusion towards Kipps. "I've told him," said the gentleman in a flat, abundant voice. "My!"

said the young lady, with an American smile. No doubt they all thought Kipps was out of it. A great desire to assert himself in some way surged up in his heart. He felt he would like to cut in on the conversation in some dramatic way. A monologue something in the manner of Masterman? At any rate, abandoning that as impossible, he would like to appear self-centred and at ease. His eyes, wandering over the black surfaces of a noble [Pg 350]architectural mass close by, discovered a slot—an enamelled plaque of directions.

It was some sort of musical box! As a matter of fact, it was the very best sort of Harmonicon and specially made to the scale of the Hotel.

He scrutinised the plaque with his head at various angles and glanced about him at his neighbours.

It occurred to Kipps that he would like some music, that to inaugurate some would show him a man of taste and at his ease at the same time. He rose, read over a list of tunes, selected one haphazard, pressed his sixpence—it was sixpence!—home, and prepared for a confidential, refined little melody.

Considering the high social tone of the Royal Grand, it was really a very loud instrument indeed. It gave vent to three deafening brays and so burst the dam of silence that had long pent it in. It seemed to be chiefly full of the greatuncles of trumpets, megalo-trombones and railway brakes. It made sounds like shunting trains. It did not so much begin as blow up your counter-scarp or rush forward to storm under cover of melodious shrapnel. It had not so much an air as a *ricochette*. The music had, in short, the inimitable quality of Sousa. It swept down upon the friend of Lady Jane and carried away something socially striking into the eternal night of the unheard; the American girl to the left of it was borne shrieking into the inaudible. "High cockalorum Tootletootle tootle loo. High cockalorum tootle lootle loo. Bump, bump, bump—BUMP." Joyous, exorbitant music it[Pg 351] was from the gigantic nursery of the Future, bearing the hearer along upon its torrential succession of sounds, as if he was in a cask on Niagara. Whiroo! Yah and have at you! The strenuous Life! Yaha! Stop! A Reprieve! A Reprieve! No! Bang! Bump!

Everybody looked around, conversation ceased and gave place to gestures.

The friend of Lady Jane became terribly agitated.

"Can't it be stopped?" she vociferated, pointing a gloved finger and saying something to the waiter about "That dreadful young man."

"Ought not to be working," said the clerical friend of Lady Jane.

The waiter shook his head at the fat, hairless gentleman. People began to move away. Kipps leant back luxurious, and then tipped with a half crown to pay. He paid, tipped like a gentleman, rose with an easy gesture, and strolled towards the door. His retreat evidently completed the indignation of the friend of Lady Jane, and from the door he could still discern her gestures as asking, "Can't it be stopped?" The music followed him into the passage and pursued him to the lift and only died away completely in the quiet of his own room, and afterwards from his window he saw the friend of Lady Jane and her party having their tea carried out to a little table in the court. Bump, bump, bump, BUMP floated up to him, and certainly that was a point to him. But it was his only score; all the rest of the game lay in the hands of[Pg 352] the upper classes and the big hotel. And presently he was doubting whether even this was really a point. It seemed a trifle vulgar, come to think it over, to interrupt people when they were talking.

He saw a clerk peering at him from the office, and suddenly it occurred to him that the place might get back at him tremendously over the bill.

They would probably take it out of him by charging pounds and pounds.

Suppose they charged more than he had!

The clerk had a particularly nasty face, just the face to take advantage of a vacillating Kipps.

He became aware of a man in a cap touching it, and produced his shilling automatically, but the strain was beginning to tell. It was a deuce and all of an expense—this tipping.

If the hotel chose to stick it on to the bill something tremendous what was Kipps to do? Refuse to pay? Make a row?

If he did he couldn't fight all these men in bottle green....

He went out about seven and walked for a long time and dined at last upon a chop in the Euston Road; then he walked along to the Edgeware Road and sat and rested in the Metropolitan Music Hall for a time until a trapeze performance unnerved him and finally he came back to bed. He tipped the lift man sixpence and wished him good-night. In the silent watches of the night he reviewed the tale of the day's tipping, went over the horrors of the previous[Pg 353] night's dinner, and heard again the triumphant bray of the harmonicon devil released from its long imprisonment. Everyone would be told about him to-morrow. He couldn't go

on! He admitted his defeat. Never in their whole lives had any of these people seen such a Fool as he! Ugh!...

His method of announcing his withdrawal to the clerk was touched with bitterness.

"I'm going to get out of this," said Kipps, blowing windily. "Let's see what you got on my bill."

"One breakfast?" asked the clerk.

"Do I *look* as if I'd ate two?"...

At his departure Kipps, with a hot face, convulsive gestures and an embittered heart, tipped everyone who did not promptly and actively resist, including an absent-minded South African diamond merchant, who was waiting in the hall for his wife and succumbed to old habit. He paid his cabman a four shilling piece at Charing Cross, having no smaller change, and wished he could burn him alive. Then in a sudden reaction of economy he refused the proffered help of a porter and carried his bag quite violently to the train.

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CHAPTER VIIIKIPPS ENTERS SOCIETY

§1

Submission to Inexorable Fate took Kipps to the Anagram Tea.

At any rate he would meet Helen there in the presence of other people and be able to carry off the worst of the difficulty of explaining his little jaunt to London. He had not seen her since his last portentous visit to New Romney. He was engaged to her, he would have to marry her, and the sooner he faced her again the better. Before wild plans of turning socialist, defying the world and repudiating all calling for ever, his heart on second thoughts sank. He felt Helen would never permit anything of the sort. As for the Anagrams he could do no more than his best and that he was resolved to do. What had happened at the Royal Grand, what had happened at New Romney, he must bury in his memory and begin again at the reconstruction of his social position. Ann, Buggins, Chitterlow, all these, seen in the matter-of-fact light of the Folkestone train, stood just as they stood before; people of an inferior social position[Pg 355] who had to be eliminated from his world. It was a bother about Ann, a bother and a pity. His mind rested so for a

space on Ann until the memory of these Anagrams drew him away. If he could see Coote that evening he might, he thought, be able to arrange some sort of connivance about the Anagrams, and his mind was chiefly busy sketching proposals for such an arrangement. It would not, of course, be ungentlemanly cheating, but only a little mystification. Coote very probably might drop him a hint of the solution of one or two of the things, not enough to win a prize, but enough to cover his shame. Or failing that he might take a humorous, quizzical line and pretend he was pretending to be very stupid. There were plenty of ways out of it if one kept a sharp lookout....

The costume Kipps wore to the Anagram Tea was designed as a compromise between the strict letter of high fashion and seaside laxity, a sort of easy, semi-state for afternoon. Helen's first reproof had always lingered in his mind. He wore a frock coat, but mitigated it by a Panama hat of romantic shape with a black band, grey gloves, but for relaxation brown button boots. The only other man besides the clergy present, a new doctor with an attractive wife, was in full afternoon dress. Coote was not there.

Kipps was a little pale, but quite self-possessed, as he approached Mrs. Bindon Botting's door. He took a turn while some people went in and then faced it manfully. The door opened and revealed—Ann!

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In the background through a draped doorway behind a big fern in a great art pot the elder Miss Botting was visible talking to two guests; the auditory background was a froth of feminine voices....

Our two young people were much too amazed to give one another any formula of greeting, though they had parted warmly enough. Each was already in a state of extreme tension to meet the demands of this great and unprecedented occasion of an Anagram Tea. "Lor'!" said Ann, her sole remark, and then the sense of Miss Botting's eye ruled her straight again. She became very pale, but she took his hat mechanically, and he was already removing his gloves. "Ann," he said in a low tone, and then "Fency!" The eldest Miss Botting knew Kipps was the sort of guest who requires nursing, and she came forward vocalising charm. She said it was "Awfully jolly of him to come, awfully jolly. It was awfully difficult to get any good men!"

She handed Kipps forward, mumbling in a dazed condition, to the drawing-room, and there he encountered Helen looking unfamiliar in an unfamiliar hat. It was as if he had not met her for years.

She astonished him. She didn't seem to mind in the least his going to London. She held out a shapely hand, and smiled encouragingly. "You've faced the anagrams?" she said.

The second Miss Botting accosted them, a number of oblong pieces of paper in her hand, mysteriously inscribed. "Take an anagram," she said; "take an[Pg 357] anagram," and boldly pinned one of these brief documents to Kipps' lapel. The letters were "Cypshi," and Kipps from the very beginning suspected this was an anagram for Cuyps. She also left a thing like a long dance programme, from which dangled a little pencil in his hand. He found himself being introduced to people, and then he was in a corner with the short lady in a big bonnet, who was pelting him with gritty little bits of small talk that were gone before you could take hold of them and reply.

"Very hot," said this lady. "Very hot, indeed—hot all the summer—remarkable year—all the years remarkable now—don't know what we're coming to—don't you think so, Mr. Kipps?"

"Oo rather," said Kipps, and wondered if Ann was still in the hall. Ann!

He ought not to have stared at her like a stuck fish and pretended not to know her. That couldn't be right. But what *was* right?

The lady in the big bonnet proceeded to a second discharge. "Hope you're fond of anagrams, Mr. Kipps—difficult exercise—still one must do something to bring people together—better than Ludo anyhow. Don't you think so, Mr. Kipps?"

Ann fluttered past the open door. Her eyes met his in amazed enquiry. Something had got dislocated in the world for both of them....

He ought to have told her he was engaged. He ought to have explained things to her. Perhaps even now he might be able to drop her a hint.

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"Don't you think so, Mr. Kipps?"

"Oo rather," said Kipps for the third time.

A lady with a tired smile, who was labelled conspicuously "Wogdelenk," drifted towards Kipps' interlocutor and the two fell into conversation. Kipps found himself socially aground. He looked about him. Helen was talking to a curate and laughing. Kipps was overcome by a vague desire to speak to Ann. He was for sidling doorward.

"What are *you*, please?" said an extraordinarily bold, tall girl, and arrested him while she took down "Cypshi."

"I'm sure I don't know what it means," she explained. "I'm Sir Bubh. Don't you think anagrams are something chronic?"

Kipps made stockish noises, and the young lady suddenly became the nucleus of a party of excited friends who were forming a syndicate to guess, and barred his escape. She took no further notice of him. He found himself jammed against an occasional table and listening to the conversation of Mrs. "Wogdelenk" and his lady with the big bonnet.

"She packed her two beauties off together," said the lady in the big bonnet. "Time enough, too. Don't think much of this girl; she's got as housemaid now. Pretty, of course, but there's no occasion for a housemaid to be pretty—none whatever. And she doesn't look particularly up to her work either. Kind of 'mazed expression."

"You never can tell," said the lady labelled [Pg 359]"Wogdelenk;" "you never can tell. My wretches are big enough, Heaven knows, and do they work? Not a bit of it!"...

Kipps felt dreadfully out of it with regard to all these people, and dreadfully in it with Ann.

He scanned the back of the big bonnet and concluded it was an extremely ugly bonnet indeed. It got jerking forward as each short, dry sentence was snapped off at the end and a plume of osprey on it jerked excessively. "She hasn't guessed even one!" followed by a shriek of girlish merriment, came from the group about the tall, bold girl. They'd shriek at him presently, perhaps. Beyond thinking his own anagram might be Cuyps, he hadn't a notion. What a chatter they were all making! It was just like a summer sale! Just the sort of people who'd give a lot of trouble and swap you! And suddenly the smouldering fires of rebellion leapt to flame again. These were a rotten lot of people, and the anagrams were rotten nonsense, and he, Kipps, had been a rotten fool to come. There was Helen away there, still laughing, with her curate. Pity she couldn't marry a curate and leave

him (Kipps) alone! Then he'd know what to do. He disliked the whole gathering collectively and in detail. Why were they all trying to make him one of themselves? He perceived unexpected ugliness everywhere about him. There were two great pins jabbed through the tall girl's hat, and the swirls of her hair below the brim with the minutest piece of tape tie-up showing did not repay close examination.[Pg 360] Mrs. "Wogdelenk" wore a sort of mumps bandage of lace, and there was another lady perfectly dazzling with beads, and jewels and bits of trimming. They were all flaps and angles and flounces—these women. Not one of them looked as neat and decent a shape as Ann's clean, trim, little figure. Echoes of Masterman woke up in him again. Ladies indeed! Here were all these chattering people, with money, with leisure, with every chance in the world, and all they could do was to crowd like this into a couple of rooms and jabber nonsense about anagrams.

"Could Cypshi really mean Cuyps?" floated like a dissolving wreath of mist across his mind.

Abruptly resolution stood armed in his heart. He was going to get out of this!

"'Scuse me," he said, and began to wade neck deep through the bubbling tea party.

He was going to get out of it all!

He found himself close by Helen. "I'm orf," he said, but she gave him the briefest glance. She did not appear to hear him. "Still, Mr. Spratlingdown, you *must* admit there's a limit even to conformity," she was saying....

He was in a curtained archway, and Ann was before him carrying a tray supporting several small sugar bowls.

He was moved to speech. "*What* a Lot!" he said, and then mysteriously, "I'm engaged to *her*." He indicated Helen's new hat, and became aware of a skirt he had stepped upon.

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Ann stared at him helplessly, borne past in the grip of incomprehensible imperatives.

Why shouldn't they talk together?

He was in a small room, and then at the foot of the staircase in the hall. He heard the rustle of a dress, and what was conceivable his hostess was upon him.

"But you're not going, Mr. Kipps?" she said.

"I must," he said; "I got to."

"But, Mr. Kipps!"

"I must," he said. "I'm not well."

"But before the guessing! Without any tea!"

Ann appeared and hovered behind him.

"I got to go," said Kipps.

If he parleyed with her Helen might awake to his desperate attempt.

"Of course if you *must* go."

"It's something I've forgotten," said Kipps, beginning to feel regrets. "Reely I must."

Mrs. Botting turned with a certain offended dignity, and Ann in a state of flushed calm that evidently concealed much came forward to open the door.

"I'm very sorry," he said; "I'm very sorry," half to his hostess and half to her, and was swept past her by superior social forces—like a drowning man in a mill-race—and into the Upper Sandgate Road. He half turned upon the step, and then slam went the door....

He retreated along the Leas, a thing of shame and perplexity—Mrs. Botting's aggrieved astonishment uppermost in his mind....

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Something—reinforced by the glances of the people he was passing—pressed its way to his attention through the tumultuous disorder of his mind.

He became aware that he was still wearing his little placard with the letters "Cypshi."

"Desh it!" he said, clutching off this abomination. In another moment its several letters, their task accomplished, were scattering gleefully before the breeze down the front of the Leas.

§2

Kipps was dressed for Mrs. Wace's dinner half an hour before it was time to start, and he sat waiting until Coote should come to take him around. "Manners and Rules of Good Society" lay before him neglected. He had read the polished prose of the Member of the Aristocracy, on page 96, as far as—

"the acceptance of an invitation is in the eyes of diners out, a binding obligation which only ill-health, family bereavement, or some all-important reason justifies its being set on one side or otherwise evaded"—

and then he had lapsed into gloomy thoughts.

That afternoon he had had a serious talk with Helen.

He had tried to express something of the change of heart that had happened to him. But to broach the real state of the matter had been altogether too [Pg 363]terrible for him. He had sought a minor issue. "I don't like all this Society," he had said.

"But you must *see* people," said Helen.

"Yes, but——. It's the sort of people you see." He nerved himself. "I didn't think much of that lot at the Enegram Tea."

"You have to see all sorts of people if you want to see the world," said Helen.

Kipps was silent for a space and a little short of breath.

"My dear Arthur," she began, almost kindly, "I shouldn't ask you to go to these affairs if I didn't think it good for you, should I?"

Kipps acquiesced in silence.

"You will find the benefit of it all when we get to London. You learn to swim in a tank before you go out into the sea. These people here are good enough to learn upon. They're stiff and rather silly and dreadfully narrow and not an idea in a dozen of them, but it really doesn't matter at all. You'll soon get Savoir Faire."

He made to speak again, and found his powers of verbal expression lacking. Instead he blew a sigh.

"You'll get used to it all very soon," said Helen helpfully....

As he sat meditating over that interview and over the vistas of London that opened before him, on the little flat, and teas and occasions and the constant presence of Brudderkins and all the bright prospect of his new and better life, and

how he would never[Pg 364] see Ann any more, the housemaid entered with a little package, a small, square envelope to "Arthur Kipps, Esquire."

"A young woman left this, Sir," said the housemaid, a little severely.

"Eh?" said Kipps; "what young woman?" and then suddenly began to understand.

"She looked an ordinary young woman," said the housemaid coldly.

"Ah!" said Kipps. "*That's* orlright."

He waited till the door had closed behind the girl, staring at the envelope in his hand, and then, with a curious feeling of increasing tension, tore it open. As he did so, some quicker sense than sight or touch told him its contents. It was Ann's half sixpence. And, besides, not a word!

Then she must have heard him——!

She had kept the half sixpence all these years!

He was standing with the envelope in his hand, trying to get on from that last inference, when Coote became audible without.

Coote appeared in evening dress, a clean and radiant Coote, with large, greenish, white gloves and a particularly large white tie, edged with black. "For a third cousin," he presently explained. "Nace, isn't it?" He could see Kipps was pale and disturbed and put this down to the approaching social trial. "You keep your nerve up, Kipps, my dear chap, and you'll be all right," said Coote, with a big, brotherly glove on Kipps' sleeve.

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§3

The dinner came to a crisis so far as Kipps' emotions were concerned, with Mrs. Bindon Botting's talk about servants, but before that there had been several things of greater or smaller magnitude to perturb and disarrange his social front. One little matter that was mildly insurgent throughout the entire meal was, if I may be permitted to mention so intimate a matter, the behaviour of his left brace. The webbing—which was of a cheerful scarlet silk—had slipped away from its buckle, fastened no doubt in agitation, and had developed a strong tendency to place itself obliquely in the manner rather of an official decoration, athwart his spotless front. It first asserted itself before they went in to dinner. He replaced this ornament by a dexterous thrust when no one was looking and thereafter the

suppression of his novel innovation upon the stereotyped sombreness of evening dress became a standing preoccupation. On the whole, he was inclined to think his first horror excessive; at any rate no one remarked upon it. However you imagine him constantly throughout the evening, with one eye and one hand, whatever the rest of him might be doing, predominantly concerned with the weak corner.

But this, I say, was a little matter. What exercised him much more was to discover Helen quite terribly in evening dress.

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The young lady had let her imagination rove Londonward, and this costume was perhaps an anticipation of that clever little flat not too far west which was to become the centre of so delightful a literary and artistic set. It was, of all the feminine costumes present, most distinctly an evening dress. One was advised Miss Walshingham had arms and shoulders of a type by no means despicable, one was advised Miss Walshingham was capable not only of dignity but charm, even a certain glow of charm. It was, you know, her first evening dress, a tribute paid by Walshingham finance to her brightening future. Had she wanted keeping in countenance, she would have had to have fallen back upon her hostess, who was resplendent in black and steel. The other ladies had to a certain extent compromised. Mrs. Walshingham had dressed with just a refined, little V and Mrs. Bindon Botting, except for her dear mottled arms, confided scarcely more of her plump charm to the world. The elder Miss Botting stopped short of shoulders, and so did Miss Wace. But Helen didn't. She was—had Kipps had eyes to see it—a quite beautiful human figure; she knew it and she met him with a radiant smile that had forgotten all the little difference of the afternoon. But to Kipps her appearance was the last release. With that, she had become as remote, as foreign, as incredible as a wife and mate, as though the Cnidian Venus herself, in all her simple elegance, was before witnesses, declared to be his. If, indeed, she had ever been credible as a wife and mate.

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She ascribed his confusion to modest reverence, and having blazed smiling upon him for a moment turned a shapely shoulder towards him and exchanged a remark with Mrs. Bindon Botting. Ann's poor little half sixpence came against Kipps' fingers in his pocket and he clutched at it suddenly as though it was a talisman. Then he abandoned it to suppress his Order of the Brace. He was

affected by a cough. "Miss Wace tells me Mr. Revel is coming," Mrs. Botting was saying.

"Isn't it delightful?" said Helen. "We saw him last night. He's stopped on his way to Paris. He's going to meet his wife there."

Kipps' eyes rested for a moment on Helen's dazzling deltoid, and then went enquiringly, accusingly almost to Coote's face. Where, in the presence of this terrible emergency, was the gospel of suppression now—that Furtive treatment of Religion and Politics, and Birth and Death and Bathing and Babies, and "all those things" which constitutes your True Gentleman? He had been too modest even to discuss this question with his Mentor, but surely, surely this quintessence of all that is good and nice could regard these unsolicited confidences only in one way. With something between relief and the confirmation of his worst fears he perceived, by a sort of twitching of the exceptionally abundant muscles about Coote's lower jaw, in a certain deliberate avoidance of one particular direction by these pale, but resolute, grey eyes, by the almost convulsive grip of the ample, greenish[Pg 368] white gloves behind him, a grip broken at times for controlling pats at the black-bordered tie and the back of that spacious head, and by a slight but increasing disposition to cough, that *Coote did not approve*!

To Kipps Helen had once supplied a delicately beautiful dream, a thing of romance and unsubstantial mystery. But this was her final materialisation, and the last thin wreath of glamour about her was dispelled. In some way (he had forgotten how and it was perfectly incomprehensible) he was bound to this dark, solid and determined young person whose shadow and suggestion he had once loved. He had to go through with the thing as a gentleman should. Still——

And when he was sacrificing Ann!

He wouldn't stand this sort of thing, whatever else he stood.... Should he say something about her dress to her—to-morrow?

He could put his foot down firmly. He could say, "Look 'ere. I don't care. I ain't going to stand it. See?"

She'd say something unexpected, of course. She always did say something unexpected.

Suppose for once he overrode what she said? Simply repeated his point?

He found these thoughts battling with certain conversational aggressions from Mrs. Wace, and then Revel arrived and took the centre of the stage.

The author of that brilliant romance, "Red Hearts a-Beating," was a less imposing man than Kipps had[Pg 369] anticipated, but he speedily effaced that disappointment by his predominating manners. Although he lived habitually in the vivid world of London, his collar and tie were in no way remarkable, and he was neither brilliantly handsome nor curly nor long-haired. His personal appearance suggested arm chairs, rather than the equestrian exercises and amorous toyings and passionate intensities of his masterpiece; he was inclined to be fat, with whitish flesh, muddy coloured straight hair, he had a rather shapeless and truncated nose and his chin was asymmetrical. One eye was more inclined to stare than the other. He might have been esteemed a little undistinguished looking were it not for his beeswaxed moustache, which came amidst his features with a pleasing note of incongruity, and the whimsical wrinkles above and about his greater eye. His regard sought and found Helen's as he entered the room and they shook hands presently with an air of intimacy Kipps, for no clear reason, found objectionable. He saw them clasp their hands, heard Coote's characteristic cough—a sound rather more like a very, very old sheep, a quarter of a mile away, being blown to pieces by a small charge of gunpowder than anything else in the world—did some confused beginnings of a thought, and then they were all going in to dinner and Helen's shining bare arm lay along his sleeve. Kipps was in no state for conversation. She glanced at him, and, though he did not know it, very slightly pressed his elbow. He struggled with strange respiratory [Pg 370]dislocations. Before them went Coote, discoursing in amiable reverberations to Mrs. Walshingham, and at the head of the procession was Mrs. Bindon Botting talking fast and brightly beside the erect military figure of little Mr. Wace. (He was not a soldier really, but he had caught a martinet bearing by living so close to Shorncliffe.) Revel came last, in charge of Mrs. Wace's queenly black and steel, politely admiring in a flute-like cultivated voice the mellow wall paper of the staircase. Kipps marvelled at everybody's self-possession.

From the earliest spoonful of soup it became evident that Revel considered himself responsible for the table talk. And before the soup was over it was almost as manifest that Mrs. Bindon Botting inclined to consider his sense of responsibility excessive. In her circle Mrs. Bindon Botting was esteemed an agreeable rattle, her manner and appearance were conspicuously vivacious for one so plump, and she had an almost Irish facility for humorous description. She would keep people amused all through an afternoon call, with the story of how her jobbing gardener had got himself married and what his home was like, or how

her favourite butt, Mr. Stigson Warder, had all his unfortunate children taught almost every conceivable instrument because they had the phrenological bump of music abnormally large. "They got to trombones, my dear!" she would say, with her voice coming to a climax. Usually her friends conspired to draw her out, but on this occasion they neglected to[Pg 371] do so, a thing that militated against her keen desire to shine in Revel's eyes. After a time she perceived that the only thing for her to do was to cut in on the talk, on her own account, and this she began to do. She made several ineffectual snatches at the general attention and then Revel drifted towards a topic she regarded as particularly her own, the ordering of households.

They came to the thing through talk about localities. "We are leaving our house in The Boltons," said Revel, "and taking a little place at Wimbledon, and I think of having rooms in Dane's Inn. It will be more convenient in many ways. My wife is furiously addicted to golf and exercise of all sorts, and I like to sit about in clubs—I haven't the strength necessary for these hygienic proceedings—and the old arrangement suited neither of us. And, besides, no one could imagine the demoralisation the domestics of West London have undergone during the last three years."

"It's the same everywhere," said Mrs. Bindon Botting.

"Very possibly it is. A friend of mine calls it the servile tradition in decay and regards it all as a most hopeful phenomenon——"

"He ought to have had my last two criminals," said Mrs. Bindon Botting.

She turned to Mrs. Wace while Revel came again a little too late with a "Possibly——"

"And I haven't told you, my dear," she said,[Pg 372] speaking with voluble rapidity, "I'm in trouble again."

"The last girl?"

"The last girl. Before I can get a cook, my hard won housemaid"—she paused—"chucks it."

"Panic?" asked young Walshingham.

"Mysterious grief! Everything merry as a marriage bell until my Anagram Tea! Then in the evening a portentous rigour of bearing, a word or so from my Aunt, and immediately—Floods of Tears and Notice!" For a moment her eye rested

thoughtfully on Kipps, as she said: "Is there anything heartrending about Anagrams?"

"I find them so," said Revel. "I——"

But Mrs. Bindon Botting got away again. "For a time it made me quite uneasy——"

Kipps jabbed his lip with his fork rather painfully, and was recalled from a fascinated glare at Mrs. Botting to the immediate facts of dinner.

"——whether anagrams might not have offended the good domestic's Moral Code—you never can tell. We made enquiries. No. No. No. She *must* go and that's all!"

"One perceives," said Revel, "in these disorders, dimly and distantly, the last dying glow of the age of Romance. Let us suppose, Mrs. Botting, let us at least try to suppose—it is Love."

Kipps clattered with his knife and fork.

"It's love," said Mrs. Botting; "what else can it be? Beneath the orderly humdrum of our lives these[Pg 373] romances are going on, until at last they bust up and give Notice and upset our humdrum altogether. Some fatal, wonderful soldier——"

"The passions of the common or house domestic," said Revel, and recovered possession of the table.

Upon the troubled disorder of Kipps' table manners there had supervented a quietness, an unusual calm. For once in his life he had distinctly made up his mind on his own account. He listened no more to Revel. He put down his knife and fork and refused anything that followed. Coote regarded him with tactful concern and Helen flushed a little.

§4

About half-past nine that night came a violent pull at the bell of Mrs. Bindon Botting, and a young man in a dress suit, a gibus and other marks of exalted social position stood without. Athwart his white expanse of breast lay a ruddy bar of patterned silk that gave him a singular distinction and minimised the glow of a few small stains of burgundy. His gibus was thrust back and exposed a disorder of hair that suggested a reckless desperation. He had, in fact, burnt his boats and refused to join the ladies. Coote, in the subsequent conversation, had protested quietly, "You're going on all right, you know," to which Kipps had answered he

didn't care a "Eng" about that, and so, after a brief tussle with Walshingham's detaining arm, had got away. "I got something to do," he said. "'Ome." And here he was—panting an[Pg 374] extraordinary resolve. The door opened, revealing the pleasantly furnished hall of Mrs. Bindon Botting, lit by rose-tinted lights, and in the centre of the picture, neat and pretty in black and white, stood Ann. At the sight of Kipps her colour vanished.

"Ann," said Kipps, "I want to speak to you. I got something to say to you right away. See? I'm——"

"This ain't the door to speak to me at," said Ann.

"But, Ann! It's something special."

"You spoke enough," said Ann.

"Ann!"

"Besides. That's my door, down there. Basement. If I was caught talking at *this* door——!"

"But, Ann, *I'm*——"

"Basement after nine. Them's my hours. I'm a servant and likely to keep one. If you're calling here, what name please? But you got your friends and I got mine and you mustn't go talking to *me*."

"But, Ann, I want to ask you——"

Someone appeared in the hall behind Ann. "Not here," said Ann. "Don't know anyone of that name," and incontinently slammed the door in his face.

"What was that, Ann?" said Mrs. Bindon Botting's invalid Aunt.

"Ge'm a little intoxicated, Ma'am—asking for the wrong name, Ma'am."

"What name did he want?" asked the lady, doubtfully.

"No name that *we* know, Ma'am," said Ann, hustling along the hall towards the kitchen stairs.

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"I hope you weren't too short with him, Ann."

"No shorter than he deserved, considering 'ow he be'aved," said Ann, with her bosom heaving.

And Mrs. Bindon Botting's invalid Aunt, perceiving suddenly that this call had some relation to Ann's private and sentimental trouble, turned, after one moment of hesitating scrutiny, away.

She was an extremely sympathetic lady, was Mrs. Bindon Botting's invalid Aunt; she took an interest in the servants, imposed piety, extorted confessions and followed human nature, blushing and lying defensively, to its reluctantly revealed recesses, but Ann's sense of privacy was strong and her manner under drawing out and encouragement, sometimes even alarming....

So the poor old lady went upstairs again.

§5

The basement door opened and Kipps came into the kitchen. He was flushed and panting.

He struggled for speech.

"'Ere," he said, and held out two half sixpences.

Ann stood behind the kitchen table—face pale and eyes round, and now—and it simplified Kipps very much—he could see she had indeed been crying.

"Well?" she said.

"Don't you see?"

Ann moved her head slightly.

"I kep' it all these years."

"You kep' it too long."

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His mouth closed and his flush died away. He looked at her. The amulet, it seemed, had failed to work.

"Ann!" he said.

"Well?"

"Ann."

The conversation still hung fire.

"Ann," he said, made a movement with his hands that suggested appeal, and advanced a step.

Ann shook her head more defiantly, and became defensive.

"Look here, Ann," said Kipps. "I been a fool."

They stared into each other's miserable eyes.

"Ann," he said. "I want to marry you."

Ann clutched the table edge. "You can't," she said faintly.

He made as if to approach her around the table, and she took a step that restored their distance.

"I must," he said.

"You can't."

"I must. You *got* to marry me, Ann."

"You can't go marrying everybody. You got to marry 'er."

"I shan't."

Ann shook her head. "You're engaged to that girl. Lady, rather. You can't be engaged to me."

"I don't want to be engaged to you. I *been* engaged. I want to be married to you. See? Rightaway."

Ann turned a shade paler. "But what d'you mean?" she asked.

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"Come right off to London and marry me. Now."

"What d'you mean?"

Kipps became extremely lucid and earnest.

"I mean come right off and marry me now before anyone else can. *See?*"

"In London?"

"In London."

They stared at one another again. They took things for granted in the most amazing way.

"I couldn't," said Ann. "For one thing my month's not up for mor'n free weeks yet."

They hung before that for a moment as though it was insurmountable.

"Look 'ere, Ann! Arst to go. Arst to go!"

"*She* wouldn't," said Ann.

"Then come without arsting," said Kipps.

"She's keep my box——"

"She won't."

"She will."

"She won't."

"You don't know 'er."

"Well, desh'er—let'er! Let'er! Who cares? I'll buy you a 'undred boxes if you'll come."

"It wouldn't be right towards Her."

"It isn't Her you got to think about, Ann. It's me."

"And you 'aven't treated me properly," she said. "You 'aven't treated me properly, Artie. You didn't ought to 'ave——"

"I didn't say I *'ad*," he interrupted, "did I, Ann?"[Pg 378] he appealed. "I didn't come to arguefy. I'm all wrong. I never said I wasn't. It's yes or no. Me or not.... I been a fool. There! See? I been a fool. Ain't that enough? I got myself all tied up with everyone and made a fool of myself all around...."

He pleaded, "It isn't as if we didn't care for one another, Ann."

She seemed impassive and he resumed his discourse.

"I thought I wasn't likely ever to see you again, Ann. I reely did. It isn't as though I was seein' you all the time. I didn't know what I wanted, and I went and be'aved like a fool—jest as anyone might. I know what I want and I know what I don't want now."

"Ann!"

"Well?"

"Will you come?... Will you come?..."

Silence.

"If you don't answer me, Ann—I'm desprit—if you don't answer me now, if you don't say you'll come I'll go right out now——"

He turned doorward passionately as he spoke, with his threat incomplete.

"I'll go," he said; "I 'aven't a friend in the world! I been and throwed everything away. I don't know why I done things and why I 'aven't. All I know is I can't stand nothing in the world any more." He choked. "The pier," he said.

He fumbled with the door latch, grumbling some[Pg 379] inarticulate self-pity, as if he sought a handle, and then he had it open.

Clearly he was going.

"Artie!" said Ann, sharply.

He turned about and the two hung, white and tense.

"I'll do it," said Ann.