

## VII.

There were moments during that wonderful night when it seemed to Bensington that he was planned by nature for a life of fantastic adventure. This was particularly the case for an hour or so after he had taken a stiff whisky. "Shan't go back to Sloane Street," he confided to the tall, fair, dirty engineer.

"You won't, eh?"

"No fear," said Bensington, nodding darkly.

The exertion of dragging the seven dead rats to the funeral pyre by the nettle grove left him bathed in perspiration, and Cossar pointed out the obvious physical reaction of whisky to save him from the otherwise inevitable chill. There was a sort of brigand's supper in the old bricked kitchen, with the row of dead rats lying in the moonlight against the hen-runs outside, and after thirty minutes or so of rest, Cossar roused them all to the labours that were still to do. "Obviously," as he said, they had to "wipe the place out. No litter—no scandal. See?" He stirred them up to the idea of making destruction complete. They smashed and splintered every fragment of wood in the house; they built trails of chopped wood wherever big vegetation was springing; they made a pyre for the rat bodies and soaked them in paraffin.

Bensington worked like a conscientious navvy. He had a sort of climax of exhilaration and energy towards two o'clock. When in the work of destruction he wielded an axe the bravest fled his neighbourhood. Afterwards he was a little sobered by the temporary loss of his spectacles, which were found for him at last in his side coat-pocket.

Men went to and fro about him—grimy, energetic men. Cossar moved amongst them like a god.

Bensington drank that delight of human fellowship that comes to happy armies, to sturdy expeditions—never to those who live the life of the sober citizen in cities. After Cossar had taken his axe away and set him to carry wood he went to and fro, saying they were all "good fellows." He kept on—long after he was aware of fatigue.

At last all was ready, and the broaching of the paraffin began. The moon, robbed now of all its meagre night retinue of stars, shone high above the dawn.

"Burn everything," said Cossar, going to and fro—"burn the ground and make a clean sweep of it. See?"

Bensington became aware of him, looking now very gaunt and horrible in the pale beginnings of the daylight, hurrying past with his lower jaw projected and a flaring torch of touchwood in his hand.

“Come away!” said some one, pulling Bensington’s arm.

The still dawn—no birds were singing there—was suddenly full of a tumultuous crackling; a little dull red flame ran about the base of the pyre, changed to blue upon the ground, and set out to clamber, leaf by leaf, up the stem of a giant nettle. A singing sound mingled with the crackling....

They snatched their guns from the corner of the Skinners’ living-room, and then every one was running. Cossar came after them with heavy strides....

Then they were standing looking back at the Experimental Farm. It was boiling up; the smoke and flames poured out like a crowd in a panic, from doors and windows and from a thousand cracks and crevices in the roof. Trust Cossar to build a fire! A great column of smoke, shot with blood-red tongues and darting flashes, rushed up into the sky. It was like some huge giant suddenly standing up, straining upward and abruptly spreading his great arms out across the sky. It cast the night back upon them, utterly hiding and obliterating the incandescence of the sun that rose behind it. All Hickleybrow was soon aware of that stupendous pillar of smoke, and came out upon the crest, in various *deshabille*, to watch them coming.

Behind, like some fantastic fungus, this smoke pillar swayed and fluctuated, up, up, into the sky—making the Downs seem low and all other objects petty, and in the foreground, led by Cossar, the makers of this mischief followed the path, eight little black figures coming wearily, guns shouldered, across the meadow.

As Bensington looked back there came into his jaded brain, and echoed there, a familiar formula. What was it? “You have lit to-day—? You have lit to-day—?” Then he remembered Latimer’s words: “We have lit this day such a candle in England as no man may ever put out again—”

What a man Cossar was, to be sure! He admired his back view for a space, and was proud to have held that hat. Proud! Although he was an eminent investigator and Cossar only engaged in applied science.

Suddenly he fell shivering and yawning enormously and wishing he was warmly tucked away in bed in his little flat that looked out upon Sloane Street. (It didn’t do even to think of Cousin Jane.) His legs became cotton strands, his feet lead. He

wondered if any one would get them coffee in Hickleybrow. He had never been up all night for three-and-thirty years.

### VIII.

And while these eight adventurers fought with rats about the Experimental Farm, nine miles away, in the village of Cheasing Eyebright, an old lady with an excessive nose struggled with great difficulties by the light of a flickering candle. She gripped a sardine tin opener in one gnarled hand, and in the other she held a tin of Herakleophobia, which she had resolved to open or die. She struggled indefatigably, grunting at each fresh effort, while through the flimsy partition the voice of the Caddles infant wailed.

“Bless ‘is poor ‘art,” said Mrs. Skinner; and then, with her solitary tooth biting her lip in an ecstasy of determination, “Come *up!*”

And presently, “*Jab!*” a fresh supply of the Food of the Gods was let loose to wreak its powers of giantry upon the world.

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## CHAPTER THE FOURTH. — THE GIANT CHILDREN.

### I.

For a time at least the spreading circle of residual consequences about the Experimental Farm must pass out of the focus of our narrative—how for a long time a power of bigness, in fungus and toadstool, in grass and weed, radiated from that charred but not absolutely obliterated centre. Nor can we tell here at any length how these mournful spinsters, the two surviving hens, made a wonder of and a show, spent their remaining years in eggless celebrity. The reader who is hungry for fuller details in these matters is referred to the newspapers of the period—to the voluminous, indiscriminate files of the modern Recording Angel. Our business lies with Mr. Bensington at the focus of the disturbance.

He had come back to London to find himself a quite terribly famous man. In a night the whole world had changed with respect to him. Everybody understood. Cousin Jane, it seemed, knew all about it; the people in the streets knew all about it; the

newspapers all and more. To meet Cousin Jane was terrible, of course, but when it was over not so terrible after all. The good woman had limits even to her power over facts; it was clear that she had communed with herself and accepted the Food as something in the nature of things.

She took the line of huffy dutifulness. She disapproved highly, it was evident, but she did not prohibit. The flight of Bensington, as she must have considered it, may have shaken her, and her worst was to treat him with bitter persistence for a cold he had not caught and fatigue he had long since forgotten, and to buy him a new sort of hygienic all-wool combination underwear that was apt to get involved and turned partially inside out and partially not, and as difficult to get into for an absent-minded man, as—Society. And so for a space, and as far as this convenience left him leisure, he still continued to participate in the development of this new element in human history, the Food of the Gods.

The public mind, following its own mysterious laws of selection, had chosen him as the one and only responsible Inventor and Promoter of this new wonder; it would hear nothing of Redwood, and without a protest it allowed Cossar to follow his natural impulse into a terribly prolific obscurity. Before he was aware of the drift of these things, Mr. Bensington was, so to speak, stark and dissected upon the hoardings. His baldness, his curious general pinkness, and his golden spectacles had become a national possession. Resolute young men with large expensive-looking cameras and a general air of complete authorisation took possession of the flat for brief but fruitful periods, let off flash lights in it that filled it for days with dense, intolerable vapour, and retired to fill the pages of the syndicated magazines with their admirable photographs of Mr. Bensington complete and at home in his second-best jacket and his slashed shoes. Other resolute-mannered persons of various ages and sexes dropped in and told him things about Boomfood—it was *Punch* first called the stuff “Boomfood”—and afterwards reproduced what they had said as his own original contribution to the Interview. The thing became quite an obsession with Broadbeam, the Popular Humourist. He scented another confounded thing he could not understand, and he fretted dreadfully in his efforts to “laugh the thing down.” One saw him in clubs, a great clumsy presence with the evidences of his midnight oil burning manifest upon his large unwholesome face, explaining to every one he could buttonhole: “These Scientific chaps, you know, haven’t a Sense of Humour, you know. That’s what it is. This Science—kills it.” His jests at Bensington became malignant libels....

An enterprising press-cutting agency sent Bensington a long article about himself from a sixpenny weekly, entitled “A New Terror,” and offered to supply one hundred such disturbances for a guinea, and two extremely charming young ladies, totally

unknown to him, called, and, to the speechless indignation of Cousin Jane, had tea with him and afterwards sent him their birthday books for his signature. He was speedily quite hardened to seeing his name associated with the most incongruous ideas in the public press, and to discover in the reviews articles written about Boomfood and himself in a tone of the utmost intimacy by people he had never heard of. And whatever delusions he may have cherished in the days of his obscurity about the pleasantness of Fame were dispelled utterly and for ever.

At first—except for Broadbeam—the tone of the public mind was quite free from any touch of hostility. It did not seem to occur to the public mind as anything but a mere playful supposition that any more Herakleophobia was going to escape again. And it did not seem to occur to the public mind that the growing little band of babies now being fed on the food would presently be growing more “up” than most of us ever grow. The sort of thing that pleased the public mind was caricatures of eminent politicians after a course of Boom-feeding, uses of the idea on hoardings, and such edifying exhibitions as the dead wasps that had escaped the fire and the remaining hens.

Beyond that the public did not care to look, until very strenuous efforts were made to turn its eyes to the remoter consequences, and even then for a while its enthusiasm for action was partial. “There’s always somethin’ New,” said the public—a public so glutted with novelty that it would hear of the earth being split as one splits an apple without surprise, and, “I wonder what they’ll do next.”

But there were one or two people outside the public, as it were, who did already take that further glance, and some it seems were frightened by what they saw there. There was young Caterham, for example, cousin of the Earl of Pewterstone, and one of the most promising of English politicians, who, taking the risk of being thought a faddist, wrote a long article in the *Nineteenth Century and After* to suggest its total suppression. And—in certain of his moods, there was Bensington.

“They don’t seem to realise—” he said to Cossar.

“No, they don’t.”

“And do we? Sometimes, when I think of what it means—This poor child of Redwood’s—And, of course, your three... Forty feet high, perhaps! After all, *ought* we to go on with it?”

“Go on with it!” cried Cossar, convulsed with inelegant astonishment and pitching his note higher than ever. “Of *course* you’ll go on with it! What d’you think you were made for? Just to loaf about between meal-times?”

“Serious consequences,” he screamed, “of course! Enormous. Obviously. Ob-viously. Why, man, it’s the only chance you’ll ever get of a serious consequence! And you want to shirk it!” For a moment his indignation was speechless, “It’s downright Wicked!” he said at last, and repeated explosively, “Wicked!”

But Bensington worked in his laboratory now with more emotion than zest. He couldn’t, tell whether he wanted serious consequences to his life or not; he was a man of quiet tastes. It was a marvellous discovery, of course, quite marvellous—but— He had already become the proprietor of several acres of scorched, discredited property near Hickleybrow, at a price of nearly #90 an acre, and at times he was disposed to think this as serious a consequence of speculative chemistry as any unambitious man could wish. Of course he was Famous—terribly Famous. More than satisfying, altogether more than satisfying, was the Fame he had attained.

But the habit of Research was strong in him....

And at moments, rare moments in the laboratory chiefly, he would find something else than habit and Cossar’s arguments to urge him to his work. This little spectacled man, poised perhaps with his slashed shoes wrapped about the legs of his high stool and his hand upon the tweezer of his balance weights, would have again a flash of that adolescent vision, would have a momentary perception of the eternal unfolding of the seed that had been sown in his brain, would see as it were in the sky, behind the grotesque shapes and accidents of the present, the coming world of giants and all the mighty things the future has in store—vague and splendid, like some glittering palace seen suddenly in the passing of a sunbeam far away.... And presently it would be with him as though that distant splendour had never shone upon his brain, and he would perceive nothing ahead but sinister shadows, vast declivities and darkneses, inhospitable immensities, cold, wild, and terrible things.

## II.

Amidst the complex and confused happenings, the impacts from the great outer world that constituted Mr. Bensington’s fame, a shining and active figure presently became conspicuous—became almost, as it were, a leader and marshal of these externalities in Mr. Bensington’s eyes. This was Dr. Winkles, that convincing young practitioner, who has already appeared in this story as the means whereby Redwood was able to convey the Food to his son. Even before the great outbreak, it was evident that the mysterious powders Redwood had given him had awakened this gentleman’s interest immensely, and so soon as the first wasps came he was putting two and two together.

He was the sort of doctor that is in manners, in morals, in methods and appearance, most succinctly and finally expressed by the word “rising.” He was large and fair, with a hard, alert, superficial, aluminium-coloured eye, and hair like chalk mud, even-featured and muscular about the clean-shaven mouth, erect in figure and energetic in movement, quick and spinning on the heel, and he wore long frock coats, black silk ties and plain gold studs and chains and his silk hats had a special shape and brim that made him look wiser and better than anybody. He looked as young or old as anybody grown up. And after that first wonderful outbreak he took to Bensington and Redwood and the Food of the Gods with such a convincing air of proprietorship, that at times, in spite of the testimony of the Press to the contrary, Bensington was disposed to regard him as the original inventor of the whole affair.

“These accidents,” said Winkles, when Bensington hinted at the dangers of further escapes, “are nothing. Nothing. The discovery is everything. Properly developed, suitably handled, sanely controlled, we have—we have something very portentous indeed in this food of ours.... We must keep our eye on it ... We mustn’t let it out of control again, and—we mustn’t let it rest.”

He certainly did not mean to do that. He was at Bensington’s now almost every day. Bensington, glancing from the window, would see the faultless equipage come spanking up Sloane Street and after an incredibly brief interval Winkles would enter the room with a light, strong motion, and pervade it, and protrude some newspaper and supply information and make remarks.

“Well,” he would say, rubbing his hands, “how are we getting on?” and so pass to the current discussion about it.

“Do you see,” he would say, for example, “that Caterham has been talking about our stuff at the Church Association?”

“Dear me!” said Bensington, “that’s a cousin of the Prime Minister, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Winkles, “a very able young man—very able. Quite wrong-headed; you know, violently reactionary—but thoroughly able. And he’s evidently disposed to make capital out of this stuff of ours. Takes a very emphatic line. Talks of our proposal to use it in the elementary schools—”

“Our proposal to use it in the elementary schools!”

“I said something about that the other day—quite in passing—little affair at a Polytechnic. Trying to make it clear the stuff was really highly beneficial. Not in the

slightest degree dangerous, in spite of those first little accidents. Which cannot possibly occur again.... You know it *would* be rather good stuff—But he's taken it up."

"What did you say?"

"Mere obvious nothings. But as you see—! Takes it up with perfect gravity. Treats the thing as an attack. Says there is already a sufficient waste of public money in elementary schools without this. Tells the old stories about piano lessons again—you know. No one; he says, wishes to prevent the children of the lower classes obtaining an education suited to their condition, but to give them a food of this sort will be to destroy their sense of proportion utterly. Expands the topic. What Good will it do, he asks, to make poor people six-and-thirty feet high? He really believes, you know, that they *will* be thirty-six feet high."

"So they would *be*," said Bensington, "if you gave them our food at all regularly. But nobody said anything—"

"I said something."

"But, my dear Winkles—!"

"They'll be Bigger, of course," interrupted Winkles, with an air of knowing all about it, and discouraging the crude ideas of Bensington. "Bigger indisputably. But listen to what he says! Will it make them happier? That's his point. Curious, isn't it? Will it make them better? Will they be more respectful to properly constituted authority? Is it fair to the children themselves?? Curious how anxious his sort are for justice—so far as any future arrangements go. Even nowadays, he says, the cost of feeding and clothing children is more than many of their parents can contrive, and if this sort of thing is to be permitted—! Eh?"

"You see he makes my mere passing suggestion into a positive proposal. And then he calculates how much a pair of breeches for a growing lad of twenty feet high or so will cost. Just as though he really believed—Ten pounds, he reckons, for the merest decency. Curious this Caterham! So concrete! The honest, and struggling ratepayer will have to contribute to that, he says. He says we have to consider the Rights of the Parent. It's all here. Two columns. Every Parent has a right to have his children brought up in his own Size....

"Then comes the question of school accommodation, cost of enlarged desks and forms for our already too greatly burthened National Schools. And to get what?—a proletariat of hungry giants. Winds up with a very serious passage, says even if this wild suggestion—mere passing fancy of mine, you know, and misinterpreted at that—

this wild suggestion about the schools comes to nothing, that doesn't end the matter. This is a strange food, so strange as to seem to him almost wicked. It has been scattered recklessly—so he says—and it may be scattered again. Once you've taken it, it's poison unless you go on with it. 'So it is,' said Bensington. And in short he proposes the formation of a National Society for the Preservation of the Proper Proportions of Things. Odd? Eh? People are hanging on to the idea like anything."

"But what do they propose to do?"

Winkles shrugged his shoulders and threw out his hands. "Form a Society," he said, "and fuss. They want to make it illegal to manufacture this Herakleophobia—or at any rate to circulate the knowledge of it. I've written about a bit to show that Caterham's idea of the stuff is very much exaggerated—very much exaggerated indeed, but that doesn't seem to check it. Curious how people are turning against it. And the National Temperance Association, by-the-bye, has founded a branch for Temperance in Growth."

"Mm," said Bensington and stroked his nose.

"After all that has happened there's bound to be this uproar. On the face of it the thing's—*startling*."

Winkles walked about the room for a time, hesitated, and departed.

It became evident there was something at the back of his mind, some aspect of crucial importance to him, that he waited to display. One day, when Redwood and Bensington were at the flat together he gave them a glimpse of this something in reserve.

"How's it all going?" he said; rubbing his hands together.

"We're getting together a sort of report."

"For the Royal Society?"

"Yes."

"Hm," said Winkles, very profoundly, and walked to the hearth-rug. "Hm. But—Here's the point. *Ought* you?"

"Ought we—what?"

"Ought you to publish?"

"We're not in the Middle Ages," said Redwood.

“I know.”

“As Cossar says, swapping wisdom—that’s the true scientific method.”

“In most cases, certainly. But—This is exceptional.”

“We shall put the whole thing before the Royal Society in the proper way,” said Redwood.

Winkles returned to that on a later occasion.

“It’s in many ways an Exceptional discovery.”

“That doesn’t matter,” said Redwood.

“It’s the sort of knowledge that could easily be subject to grave abuse—grave dangers, as Caterham puts it.”

Redwood said nothing.

“Even carelessness, you know—”

“If we were to form a committee of trustworthy people to control the manufacture of Boomfood—Herakleophorbia, I *should* say—we might—”

He paused, and Redwood, with a certain private discomfort, pretended that he did not see any sort of interrogation....

Outside the apartments of Redwood and Bensington, Winkle, in spite of the incompleteness of his instructions, became a leading authority upon Boomfood. He wrote letters defending its use; he made notes and articles explaining its possibilities; he jumped up irrelevantly at the meetings of the scientific and medical associations to talk about it; he identified himself with it. He published a pamphlet called “The Truth about Boomfood,” in which he minimised the whole of the Hicklebrow affair almost to nothing. He said that it was absurd to say Boomfood would make people thirty-seven feet high. That was “obviously exaggerated.” It would make them Bigger, of course, but that was all....

Within that intimate circle of two it was chiefly evident that Winkles was extremely anxious to help in the making of Herakleophorbia, help in correcting any proofs there might be of any paper there might be in preparation upon the subject—do anything indeed that might lead up to his participation in the details of the making of Herakleophorbia. He was continually telling them both that he felt it was a Big Thing, that it had big possibilities. If only they were—“safeguarded in some way.” And at last one day he asked outright to be told just how it was made.

“I’ve been thinking over what you said,” said Redwood.

“Well?” said Winkles brightly.

“It’s the sort of knowledge that could easily be subject to grave abuse,” said Redwood.

“But I don’t see how that applies,” said Winkles.

“It does,” said Redwood.

Winkles thought it over for a day or so. Then he came to Redwood and said that he doubted if he ought to give powders about which he knew nothing to Redwood’s little boy; it seemed to him it was uncommonly like taking responsibility in the dark. That made Redwood thoughtful.

“You’ve seen that the Society for the Total Suppression of Boomfood claims to have several thousand members,” said Winkles, changing the subject. “They’ve drafted a Bill,” said Winkles. “They’ve got young Caterham to take it up—readily enough. They’re in earnest. They’re forming local committees to influence candidates. They want to make it penal to prepare and store Herakleophobia without special license, and felony—matter of imprisonment without option—to administer Boomfood—that’s what they call it, you know—to any person under one-and-twenty. But there’s collateral societies, you know. All sorts of people. The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Statures is going to have Mr. Frederic Harrison on the council, they say. You know he’s written an essay about it; says it is vulgar, and entirely inharmonious with that Revelation of Humanity that is found in the teachings of Comte. It is the sort of thing the Eighteenth Century *couldn’t* have produced even in its worst moments. The idea of the Food never entered the head of Comte—which shows how wicked it really is. No one, he says, who really understood Comte....”

“But you don’t mean to say—” said Redwood, alarmed out of his disdain for Winkles.

“They’ll not do all that,” said Winkles. “But public opinion is public opinion, and votes are votes. Everybody can see you are up to a disturbing thing. And the human instinct is all against disturbance, you know. Nobody seems to believe Caterham’s idea of people thirty-seven feet high, who won’t be able to get inside a church, or a meeting-house, or any social or human institution. But for all that they’re not so easy in their minds about it. They see there’s something—something more than a common discovery—”

“There is,” said Redwood, “in every discovery.”

“Anyhow, they’re getting—restive. Caterham keeps harping on what may happen if it gets loose again. I say over and over again, it won’t, and it can’t. But—there it is!”

And he bounced about the room for a little while as if he meant to reopen the topic of the secret, and then thought better of it and went.

The two scientific men looked at one another. For a space only their eyes spoke.

“If the worst comes to the worst,” said Redwood at last, in a strenuously calm voice, “I shall give the Food to my little Teddy with my own hands.”

### III.

It was only a few days after this that Redwood opened his paper to find that the Prime Minister had promised a Royal Commission on Boomfood. This sent him, newspaper in hand, round to Bensington’s flat.

“Winkles, I believe, is making mischief for the stuff. He plays into the hands of Caterham. He keeps on talking about it, and what it is going to do, and alarming people. If he goes on, I really believe he’ll hamper our inquiries. Even as it is—with this trouble about my little boy—”

Bensington wished Winkles wouldn’t.

“Do you notice how he has dropped into the way of calling it Boomfood?”

“I don’t like that name,” said Bensington, with a glance over his glasses.

“It is just so exactly what it is—to Winkles.”

“Why does he keep on about it? It isn’t his!”

“It’s something called Booming,” said Redwood. “I don’t understand. If it isn’t his, everybody is getting to think it is. Not that *that* matters.”

“In the event of this ignorant, this ridiculous agitation becoming—Serious,” began Bensington.

“My little boy can’t get on without the stuff,” said Redwood. “I don’t see how I can help myself now. If the worst comes to the worst—”

A slight bouncing noise proclaimed the presence of Winkles. He became visible in the middle of the room rubbing his hands together.

“I wish you’d knock,” said Bensington, looking vicious over the gold rims.

Winkles was apologetic. Then he turned to Redwood. "I'm glad to find you here," he began; "the fact is—"

"Have you seen about this Royal Commission?" interrupted Redwood.

"Yes," said Winkles, thrown out. "Yes."

"What do you think of it?"

"Excellent thing," said Winkles. "Bound to stop most of this clamour. Ventilate the whole affair. Shut up Caterham. But that's not what I came round for, Redwood. The fact is—"

"I don't like this Royal Commission," said Bensington.

"I can assure you it will be all right. I may say—I don't think it's a breach of confidence—that very possibly I may have a place on the Commission—"

"Oom," said Redwood, looking into the fire.

"I can put the whole thing right. I can make it perfectly clear, first, that the stuff is controllable, and, secondly, that nothing short of a miracle is needed before anything like that catastrophe at Hickleybrow can possibly happen again. That is just what is wanted, an authoritative assurance. Of course, I could speak with more confidence if I knew—But that's quite by the way. And just at present there's something else, another little matter, upon which I'm wanting to consult you. Ahem. The fact is—Well—I happen to be in a slight difficulty, and you can help me out."

Redwood raised his eyebrows, and was secretly glad.

"The matter is—highly confidential."

"Go on," said Redwood. "Don't worry about that."

"I have recently been entrusted with a child—the child of—of an Exalted Personage."

Winkles coughed.

"You're getting on," said Redwood.

"I must confess it's largely your powders—and the reputation of my success with your little boy—There is, I cannot disguise, a strong feeling against its use. And yet I find that among the more intelligent—One must go quietly in these things, you know—little by little. Still, in the case of Her Serene High—I mean this new little patient of mine. As a matter of fact—the suggestion came from the parent. Or I should never—"

He struck Redwood as being embarrassed.

“I thought you had a doubt of the advisability of using these powders,” said Redwood.

“Merely a passing doubt.”

“You don’t propose to discontinue—”

“In the case of your little boy? Certainly not!”

“So far as I can see, it would be murder.”

“I wouldn’t do it for the world.”

“You shall have the powders,” said Redwood.

“I suppose you couldn’t—”

“No fear,” said Redwood. “There isn’t a recipe. It’s no good, Winkles, if you’ll pardon my frankness. I’ll make you the powders myself.”

“Just as well, perhaps,” said Winkles, after a momentary hard stare at Redwood—“just as well.” And then: “I can assure you I really don’t mind in the least.”

#### IV.

When Winkles had gone Bensington came and stood on the hearth-rug and looked down at Redwood.

“Her Serene Highness!” he remarked.

“Her Serene Highness!” said Redwood.

“It’s the Princess of Weser Dreiburg!”

“No further than a third cousin.”

“Redwood,” said Bensington; “it’s a curious thing to say, I know, but—do you think Winkles understands?”

“What?”

“Just what it is we have made.

“Does he really understand,” said Bensington, dropping his voice and keeping his eye doorward, “that in the Family—the Family of his new patient—”

“Go on,” said Redwood.

“Who have always been if anything a little *under—under—*”

“The Average?”

“Yes. And so *very* tactfully undistinguished in *any* way, he is going to produce a royal personage—an outsize royal personage—of *that* size. You know, Redwood, I’m not sure whether there is not something almost—*treasonable* ...”

He transferred his eyes from the door to Redwood.

Redwood flung a momentary gesture—index finger erect—at the fire. “By Jove!” he said, “he *doesn’t* know!”

“That man,” said Redwood, “doesn’t know anything. That was his most exasperating quality as a student. Nothing. He passed all his examinations, he had all his facts—and he had just as much knowledge—as a rotating bookshelf containing the *Times Encyclopedia*. And he doesn’t know anything *now*. He’s Winkles, and incapable of really assimilating anything not immediately and directly related to his superficial self. He is utterly void of imagination and, as a consequence, incapable of knowledge. No one could possibly pass so many examinations and be so well dressed, so well done, and so successful as a doctor without that precise incapacity. That’s it. And in spite of all he’s seen and heard and been told, there he is—he has no idea whatever of what he has set going. He has got a Boom on, he’s working it well on Boomfood, and some one has let him in to this new Royal Baby—and that’s Boomier than ever! And the fact that Weser Dreiburg will presently have to face the gigantic problem of a thirty-odd-foot Princess not only hasn’t entered his head, but couldn’t—it couldn’t!”

“There’ll be a fearful row,” said Bensington.

“In a year or so.”

“So soon as they really see she is going on growing.”

“Unless after their fashion—they hush it up.”

“It’s a lot to hush up.”

“Rather!”

“I wonder what they’ll do?”

“They never do anything—Royal tact.”

“They’re bound to do something.”

“Perhaps *she* will.”

“O Lord! Yes.”

“They’ll suppress her. Such things have been known.”

Redwood burst into desperate laughter. “The redundant royalty—the bouncing babe in the Iron Mask!” he said. “They’ll have to put her in the tallest tower of the old Weser Dreiburg castle and make holes in the ceilings as she grows from floor to floor! Well, I’m in the very same pickle. And Cossar and his three boys. And—Well, well.”

“There’ll be a fearful row,” Bensington repeated, not joining in the laughter.

“A *fearful row*.”

“I suppose,” he argued, “you’ve really thought it out thoroughly, Redwood. You’re quite sure it wouldn’t be wiser to warn Winkles, wean your little boy gradually, and—and rely upon the Theoretical Triumph?”

“I wish to goodness you’d spend half an hour in my nursery when the Food’s a little late,” said Redwood, with a note of exasperation in his voice; “then you wouldn’t talk like that, Bensington. Besides—Fancy warning Winkles... No! The tide of this thing has caught us unawares, and whether we’re frightened or whether we’re not—we’ve *got to swim!*”

“I suppose we have,” said Bensington, staring at his toes. “Yes. We’ve got to swim. And your boy will have to swim, and Cossar’s boys—he’s given it to all three of them. Nothing partial about Cossar—all or nothing! And Her Serene Highness. And everything. We are going on making the Food. Cossar also. We’re only just in the dawn of the beginning, Redwood. It’s evident all sorts of things are to follow. Monstrous great things. But I can’t imagine them, Redwood. Except—”

He scanned his finger nails. He looked up at Redwood with eyes bland through his glasses.

“I’ve half a mind,” he ventured, “that Caterham is right. At times. It’s going to destroy the Proportions of Things. It’s going to dislocate—What isn’t it going to dislocate?”

“Whatever it dislocates,” said Redwood, “my little boy must have the Food.”

They heard some one falling rapidly upstairs. Then Cossar put his head into the flat.

“Hullo!” he said at their expressions, and entering, “Well?”

They told him about the Princess.

“*Difficult question!*” he remarked. “Not a bit of it. *She’ll* grow. Your boy’ll grow. All the others you give it to ‘ll grow. Everything. Like anything. What’s difficult about that? That’s all right. A child could tell you that. Where’s the bother?”

They tried to make it clear to him.

“*Not go on with it!*” he shrieked. “But—! You can’t help yourselves now. It’s what you’re for. It’s what Winkles is for. It’s all right. Often wondered what Winkles was for. *Now* it’s obvious. What’s the trouble?”

“*Disturbance? Obviously. Upset things?* Upset everything. Finally—upset every human concern. Plain as a pikestaff. They’re going to try and stop it, but they’re too late. It’s their way to be too late. You go on and start as much of it as you can. Thank God He has a use for you!”

“But the conflict!” said Bensington, “the stress! I don’t know if you have imagined—”

“You ought to have been some sort of little vegetable, Bensington,” said Cossar—“that’s what you ought to have been. Something growing over a rockery. Here you are, fearfully and wonderfully made, and all you think you’re made for is just to sit about and take your vittles. D’you think this world was made for old women to mop about in? Well, anyhow, you can’t help yourselves now—you’ve *got* to go on.”

“I suppose we must,” said Redwood. “Slowly—”

“No!” said Cossar, in a huge shout. “No! Make as much as you can and as soon as you can. Spread it about!”

He was inspired to a stroke of wit. He parodied one of Redwood’s curves with a vast upward sweep of his arm.

“Redwood!” he said, to point the allusion, “make it SO!”

## V.

There is, it seems, an upward limit to the pride of maternity, and this in the case of Mrs. Redwood was reached when her offspring completed his sixth month of terrestrial existence, broke down his high-class bassinet-perambulator, and was brought home, bawling, in the milk-truck. Young Redwood at that time weighed fifty-nine and a half pounds, measured forty-eight inches in height, and gripped about sixty pounds. He was carried upstairs to the nursery by the cook and housemaid. After that, discovery was only a question of days. One afternoon Redwood came home from his laboratory to find his unfortunate wife deep in the fascinating pages of *The Mighty Atom*, and at the sight of him she put the book aside and ran violently forward and burst into tears on his shoulder.

“Tell me what you have *done* to him,” she wailed. “Tell me what you have done.” Redwood took her hand and led her to the sofa, while he tried to think of a satisfactory line of defence.

“It’s all right, my dear,” he said; “it’s all right. You’re only a little overwrought. It’s that cheap perambulator. I’ve arranged for a bath-chair man to come round with something stouter to-morrow—”

Mrs. Redwood looked at him tearfully over the top of her handkerchief.

“A baby in a bath-chair?” she sobbed.

“Well, why not?”

“It’s like a cripple.”

“It’s like a young giant, my dear, and you’ve no cause to be ashamed of him.”

“You’ve done something to him, Dandy,” she said. “I can see it in your face.”

“Well, it hasn’t stopped his growth, anyhow,” said Redwood heartlessly.

“I *knew*,” said Mrs. Redwood, and clenched her pocket-handkerchief ball fashion in one hand. She looked at him with a sudden change to severity. “What have you done to our child, Dandy?”

“What’s wrong with him?”

“He’s so big. He’s a monster.”

“Nonsense. He’s as straight and clean a baby as ever a woman had. What’s wrong with him?”

“Look at his size.”

“That’s all right. Look at the puny little brutes about us! He’s the finest baby—”

“He’s *too* fine,” said Mrs. Redwood.

“It won’t go on,” said Redwood reassuringly; “it’s just a start he’s taken.”

But he knew perfectly well it would go on. And it did. By the time this baby was twelve months old he tottered just one inch under five feet high and scaled eight stone three; he was as big in fact as a St. Peter’s *in Vaticano* cherub, and his affectionate clutch at the hair and features of visitors became the talk of West Kensington. They had an invalid’s chair to carry him up and down to his nursery, and his special nurse, a muscular young person just out of training, used to take him for his airings in a

Panhard 8 h.p. hill-climbing perambulator specially made to meet his requirement. It was lucky in every way that Redwood had his expert witness connection in addition to his professorship.

When one got over the shock of little Redwood's enormous size, he was, I am told by people who used to see him almost daily teufteufing slowly about Hyde Park, a singularly bright and pretty baby. He rarely cried or needed a comforter. Commonly he clutched a big rattle, and sometimes he went along hailing the bus-drivers and policemen along the road outside the railings as "Dadda!" and "Babba!" in a sociable, democratic way.

"There goes that there great Boomfood baby," the bus-driver used to say.

"Looks 'ealthy," the forward passenger would remark.

"Bottle fed," the bus-driver would explain. "They say it 'olds a gallon and 'ad to be specially made for 'im."

"Very 'ealthy child any'ow," the forward passenger would conclude.

When Mrs. Redwood realized that his growth was indeed going on indefinitely and logically—and this she really did for the first time when the motor-perambulator arrived—she gave way to a passion of grief. She declared she never wished to enter her nursery again, wished she was dead, wished the child was dead, wished everybody was dead, wished she had never married Redwood, wished no one ever married anybody, Ajaxed a little, and retired to her own room, where she lived almost exclusively on chicken broth for three days. When Redwood came to remonstrate with her, she banged pillows about and wept and tangled her hair.

"*He's* all right," said Redwood. "He's all the better for being big. You wouldn't like him smaller than other people's children."

"I want him to be *like* other children, neither smaller nor bigger. I wanted him to be a nice little boy, just as Georgina Phyllis is a nice little girl, and I wanted to bring him up nicely in a nice way, and here he is"—and the unfortunate woman's voice broke—"wearing number four grown-up shoes and being wheeled about by—booboo!—Petroleum!"

"I can never love him," she wailed, "never! He's too much for me! I can never be a mother to him, such as I meant to be!"

But at last, they contrived to get her into the nursery, and there was Edward Monson Redwood ("Pantagruel" was only a later nickname) swinging in a specially

strengthened rocking-chair and smiling and talking “goo” and “wow.” And the heart of Mrs. Redwood warmed again to her child, and she went and held him in her arms and wept.

“They’ve done something to you,” she sobbed, “and you’ll grow and grow, dear; but whatever I can do to bring you up nice I’ll do for you, whatever your father may say.”

And Redwood, who had helped to bring her to the door, went down the passage much relieved. (Eh! but it’s a base job this being a man—with women as they are!)

## **VI.**

Before the year was out there were, in addition to Redwood’s pioneer vehicle, quite a number of motor-perambulators to be seen in the west of London. I am told there were as many as eleven; but the most careful inquiries yield trustworthy evidence of only six within the Metropolitan area at that time. It would seem the stuff acted differently upon different types of constitution. At first Herakleophobia was not adapted to injection, and there can be no doubt that quite a considerable proportion of human beings are incapable of absorbing this substance in the normal course of digestion. It was given, for example, to Winkles’ youngest boy; but he seems to have been as incapable of growth as, if Redwood was right, his father was incapable of knowledge. Others again, according to the Society for the Total Suppression of Boomfood, became in some inexplicable way corrupted by it, and perished at the onset of infantile disorders. The Cossar boys took to it with amazing avidity.

Of course a thing of this kind never comes with absolute simplicity of application into the life of man; growth in particular is a complex thing, and all generalisations must needs be a little inaccurate. But the general law of the Food would seem to be this, that when it could be taken into the system in any way it stimulated it in very nearly the same degree in all cases. It increased the amount of growth from six to seven times, and it did not go beyond that, whatever amount of the Food in excess was taken. Excess of Herakleophobia indeed beyond the necessary minimum led, it was found, to morbid disturbances of nutrition, to cancer and tumours, ossifications, and the like. And once growth upon the large scale had begun, it was soon evident that it could only continue upon that scale, and that the continuous administration of Herakleophobia in small but sufficient doses was imperative.

If it was discontinued while growth was still going on, there was first a vague restlessness and distress, then a period of voracity—as in the case of the young rats at Hankey—and then the growing creature had a sort of exaggerated anaemia and sickened and died. Plants suffered in a similar way. This, however, applied only to the

growth period. So soon as adolescence was attained—in plants this was represented by the formation of the first flower-buds—the need and appetite for Herakleophorbia diminished, and so soon as the plant or animal was fully adult, it became altogether independent of any further supply of the food. It was, as it were, completely established on the new scale. It was so completely established on the new scale that, as the thistles about Hickleybrow and the grass of the down side already demonstrated, its seed produced giant offspring after its kind.

And presently little Redwood, pioneer of the new race, first child of all who ate the food, was crawling about his nursery, smashing furniture, biting like a horse, pinching like a vice, and bawling gigantic baby talk at his “Nanny” and “Mammy” and the rather scared and awe-stricken “Daddy,” who had set this mischief going.

The child was born with good intentions. “Padda be good, be good,” he used to say as the breakables flew before him. “Padda” was his rendering of Pantagruel, the nickname Redwood imposed on him. And Cossar, disregarding certain Ancient Lights that presently led to trouble, did, after a conflict with the local building regulations, get building on a vacant piece of ground adjacent to Redwood’s home, a comfortable well-lit playroom, schoolroom, and nursery for their four boys—sixty feet square about this room was, and forty feet high.

Redwood fell in love with that great nursery as he and Cossar built it, and his interest in curves faded, as he had never dreamt it could fade, before the pressing needs of his son. “There is much,” he said, “in fitting a nursery. Much.

“The walls, the things in it, they will all speak to this new mind of ours, a little more, a little less eloquently, and teach it, or fail to teach it a thousand things.”

“Obviously,” said Cossar, reaching hastily for his hat.

They worked together harmoniously, but Redwood supplied most of the educational theory required ...

They had the walls and woodwork painted with a cheerful vigour; for the most part a slightly warmed white prevailed, but there were bands of bright clean colour to enforce the simple lines of construction. “Clean colours we *must* have,” said Redwood, and in one place had a neat horizontal band of squares, in which crimson and purple, orange and lemon, blues and greens, in many hues and many shades, did themselves honour. These squares the giant children should arrange and rearrange to their pleasure. “Decorations must follow,” said Redwood; “let them first get the range of all the tints, and then this may go away. There is no reason why one should bias them in favour of any particular colour or design.”

Then, "The place must be full of interest," said Redwood. "Interest is food for a child, and blankness torture and starvation. He must have pictures galore." There were no pictures hung about the room for any permanent service, however, but blank frames were provided into which new pictures would come and pass thence into a portfolio so soon as their fresh interest had passed. There was one window that looked down the length of a street, and in addition, for an added interest, Redwood had contrived above the roof of the nursery a camera obscura that watched the Kensington High Street and not a little of the Gardens.

In one corner that most worthy implement, an Abacus, four feet square, a specially strengthened piece of ironmongery with rounded corners, awaited the young giants' incipient computations. There were few woolly lambs and such-like idols, but instead Cossar, without explanation, had brought one day in three four-wheelers a great number of toys (all just too big for the coming children to swallow) that could be piled up, arranged in rows, rolled about, bitten, made to flap and rattle, smacked together, felt over, pulled out, opened, closed, and mauled and experimented with to an interminable extent. There were many bricks of wood in diverse colours, oblong and cuboid, bricks of polished china, bricks of transparent glass and bricks of india-rubber; there were slabs and slates; there were cones, truncated cones, and cylinders; there were oblate and prolate spheroids, balls of varied substances, solid and hollow, many boxes of diverse size and shape, with hinged lids and screw lids and fitting lids, and one or two to catch and lock; there were bands of elastic and leather, and a number of rough and sturdy little objects of a size together that could stand up steadily and suggest the shape of a man. "Give 'em these," said Cossar. "One at a time."

These things Redwood arranged in a locker in one corner. Along one side of the room, at a convenient height for a six-or eight-foot child, there was a blackboard, on which the youngsters might flourish in white and coloured chalk, and near by a sort of drawing block, from which sheet after sheet might be torn, and on which they could draw in charcoal, and a little desk there was, furnished with great carpenter's pencils of varying hardness and a copious supply of paper, on which the boys might first scribble and then draw more neatly. And moreover Redwood gave orders, so far ahead did his imagination go, for specially large tubes of liquid paint and boxes of pastels against the time when they should be needed. He laid in a cask or so of plasticine and modelling clay. "At first he and his tutor shall model together," he said, "and when he is more skilful he shall copy casts and perhaps animals. And that reminds me, I must also have made for him a box of tools!

“Then books. I shall have to look out a lot of books to put in his way, and they’ll have to be big type. Now what sort of books will he need? There is his imagination to be fed. That, after all, is the crown of every education. The crown—as sound habits of mind and conduct are the throne. No imagination at all is brutality; a base imagination is lust and cowardice; but a noble imagination is God walking the earth again. He must dream too of a dainty fairy-land and of all the quaint little things of life, in due time. But he must feed chiefly on the splendid real; he shall have stories of travel through all the world, travels and adventures and how the world was won; he shall have stories of beasts, great books splendidly and clearly done of animals and birds and plants and creeping things, great books about the deeps of the sky and the mystery of the sea; he shall have histories and maps of all the empires the world has seen, pictures and stories of all the tribes and habits and customs of men. And he must have books and pictures to quicken his sense of beauty, subtle Japanese pictures to make him love the subtler beauties of bird and tendril and falling flower, and western pictures too, pictures of gracious men and women, sweet groupings, and broad views of land and sea. He shall have books on the building of houses and palaces; he shall plan rooms and invent cities—

“I think I must give him a little theatre.

“Then there is music!”

Redwood thought that over, and decided that his son might best begin with a very pure-sounding harmonicon of one octave, to which afterwards there could be an extension. “He shall play with this first, sing to it and give names to the notes,” said Redwood, “and afterwards—?”

He stared up at the window-sill overhead and measured the size of the room with his eye.

“They’ll have to build his piano in here,” he said. “Bring it in in pieces.”

He hovered about amidst his preparations, a pensive, dark, little figure. If you could have seen him there he would have looked to you like a ten-inch man amidst common nursery things. A great rug—indeed it was a Turkey carpet—four hundred square feet of it, upon which young Redwood was soon to crawl—stretched to the grill-guarded electric radiator that was to warm the whole place. A man from Cossar’s hung amidst scaffolding overhead, fixing the great frame that was to hold the transitory pictures. A blotting-paper book for plant specimens as big as a house door leant against the wall, and from it projected a gigantic stalk, a leaf edge or so and one flower of chickweed,

all of that gigantic size that was soon to make Urshot famous throughout the botanical world ...

A sort of incredulity came to Redwood as he stood among these things.

“If it really *is* going on—” said Redwood, staring up at the remote ceiling.

From far away came a sound like the bellowing of a Mafficking bull, almost as if in answer.

“It’s going on all right,” said Redwood. “Evidently.”

There followed resounding blows upon a table, followed by a vast crowing shout, “Gooloo! Boozoo! Bzz ...”

“The best thing I can do,” said Redwood, following out some divergent line of thought, “is to teach him myself.”

That beating became more insistent. For a moment it seemed to Redwood that it caught the rhythm of an engine’s throbbing—the engine he could have imagined of some great train of events that bore down upon him. Then a descendant flight of sharper beats broke up that effect, and were repeated.

“Come in,” he cried, perceiving that some one rapped, and the door that was big enough for a cathedral opened slowly a little way. The new winch ceased to creak, and Bensington appeared in the crack, gleaming benevolently under his protruded baldness and over his glasses.

“I’ve ventured round to see,” he whispered in a confidentially furtive manner.

“Come in,” said Redwood, and he did, shutting the door behind him.

He walked forward, hands behind his back, advanced a few steps, and peered up with a bird-like movement at the dimensions about him. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

“Every time I come in,” he said, with a subdued note in his voice, “it strikes me as— ‘*Big*.’”

“Yes,” said Redwood, surveying it all again also, as if in an endeavour to keep hold of the visible impression. “Yes. They’re going to be big too, you know.”

“I know,” said Bensington, with a note that was nearly awe. “*Very* big.”

They looked at one another, almost, as it were, apprehensively.

“Very big indeed,” said Bensington, stroking the bridge of his nose, and with one eye that watched Redwood doubtfully for a confirmatory expression. “All of them, you know—fearfully big. I don’t seem able to imagine—even with this—just how big they’re all going to be.”

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## **CHAPTER THE FIFTH. — THE MINIMIFICENCE OF MR. BENSINGTON.**

### **I.**

It was while the Royal Commission on Boomfood was preparing its report that Herakleophobia really began to demonstrate its capacity for leakage. And the earliness of this second outbreak was the more unfortunate, from the point of view of Cossar at any rate, since the draft report still in existence shows that the Commission had, under the tutelage of that most able member, Doctor Stephen Winkles (F.R.S. M.D. F.R.C.P. D. Sc. J.P. D.L. etc.), already quite made up its mind that accidental leakages were impossible, and was prepared to recommend that to entrust the preparation of Boomfood to a qualified committee (Winkles chiefly), with an entire control over its sale, was quite enough to satisfy all reasonable objections to its free diffusion. This committee was to have an absolute monopoly. And it is, no doubt, to be considered as a part of the irony of life that the first and most alarming of this second series of leakages occurred within fifty yards of a little cottage at Keston occupied during the summer months by Doctor Winkles.

There can be little doubt now that Redwood’s refusal to acquaint Winkles with the composition of Herakleophobia IV. had aroused in that gentleman a novel and intense desire towards analytical chemistry. He was not a very expert manipulator, and for that reason probably he saw fit to do his work not in the excellently equipped laboratories that were at his disposal in London, but without consulting any one, and almost with an air of secrecy, in a rough little garden laboratory at the Keston establishment. He does not seem to have shown either very great energy or very great ability in this quest; indeed one gathers he dropped the inquiry after working at it intermittently for about a month.

This garden laboratory, in which the work was done, was very roughly equipped, supplied by a standpipe tap with water, and draining into a pipe that ran down into a swampy rush-bordered pool under an alder tree in a secluded corner of the common just outside the garden hedge. The pipe was cracked, and the residuum of the Food of the Gods escaped through the crack into a little puddle amidst clumps of rushes, just in time for the spring awakening.

Everything was astir with life in that scummy little corner. There was frog spawn adrift, tremulous with tadpoles just bursting their gelatinous envelopes; there were little pond snails creeping out into life, and under the green skin of the rush stems the larvae of a big Water Beetle were struggling out of their egg cases. I doubt if the reader knows the larva of the beetle called (I know not why) *Dytiscus*. It is a jointed, queer-looking thing, very muscular and sudden in its movements, and given to swimming head downward with its tail out of water; the length of a man's top thumb joint it is, and more—two inches, that is for those who have not eaten the Food—and it has two sharp jaws that meet in front of its head—tubular jaws with sharp points—through which its habit is to suck its victim's blood ...

The first things to get at the drifting grains of the Food were the little tadpoles and the little water snails; the little wriggling tadpoles in particular, once they had the taste of it, took to it with zest. But scarcely did one of them begin to grow into a conspicuous position in that little tadpole world and try a smaller brother or so as an aid to a vegetarian dietary, when nip! one of the Beetle larvae had its curved bloodsucking prongs gripping into his heart, and with that red stream went Herakleophobia IV, in a state of solution, into the being of a new client. The only thing that had a chance with these monsters to get any share of the Food were the rushes and slimy green scum in the water and the seedling weeds in the mud at the bottom. A clean up of the study presently washed a fresh spate of the Food into the puddle, and overflowed it, and carried all this sinister expansion of the struggle for life into the adjacent pool under the roots of the alder...

The first person to discover what was going on was a Mr. Lukey Carrington, a special science teacher under the London Education Board, and, in his leisure, a specialist in fresh-water algae, and he is certainly not to be envied his discovery. He had come down to Keston Common for the day to fill a number of specimen tubes for subsequent examination, and he came, with a dozen or so of corked tubes clanking faintly in his pocket, over the sandy crest and down towards the pool, spiked walking stick in hand. A garden lad standing on the top of the kitchen steps clipping Doctor Winkles' hedge saw him in this unfrequented corner, and found him and his occupation sufficiently inexplicable and interesting to watch him pretty closely.

He saw Mr. Carrington stoop down by the side of the pool, with his hand against the old alder stem, and peer into the water, but of course he could not appreciate the surprise and pleasure with which Mr. Carrington beheld the big unfamiliar-looking blobs and threads of the algal scum at the bottom. There were no tadpoles visible—they had all been killed by that time—and it would seem Mr. Carrington saw nothing at all unusual except the excessive vegetation. He bared his arm to the elbow, leant forward, and dipped deep in pursuit of a specimen. His seeking hand went down. Instantly there flashed out of the cool shadow under the tree roots something—

Flash! It had buried its fangs deep into his arm—a bizarre shape it was, a foot long and more, brown and jointed like a scorpion.

Its ugly apparition and the sharp amazing painfulness of its bite were too much for Mr. Carrington's equilibrium. He felt himself going, and yelled aloud. Over he toppled, face foremost, splash! into the pool.

The boy saw him vanish, and heard the splashing of his struggle in the water. The unfortunate man emerged again into the boy's field of vision, hatless and streaming with water, and screaming!

Never before had the boy heard screams from a man.

This astonishing stranger appeared to be tearing at something on the side of his face. There appeared streaks of blood there. He flung out his arms as if in despair, leapt in the air like a frantic creature, ran violently ten or twelve yards, and then fell and rolled on the ground and over and out of sight of the boy. The lad was down the steps and through the hedge in a trice—happily with the garden shears still in hand. As he came crashing through the gorse bushes, he says he was half minded to turn back, fearing he had to deal with a lunatic, but the possession of the shears reassured him. "I could 'ave jabbed his eyes," he explained, "anyhow." Directly Mr. Carrington caught sight of him, his demeanour became at once that of a sane but desperate man. He struggled to his feet, stumbled, stood up, and came to meet the boy.

"Look!" he cried, "I can't get 'em off!"

And with a qualm of horror the boy saw that, attached to Mr. Carrington's cheek, to his bare arm, and to his thigh, and lashing furiously with their lithe brown muscular bodies, were three of these horrible larvae, their great jaws buried deep in his flesh and sucking for dear life. They had the grip of bulldogs, and Mr. Carrington's efforts to detach the monsters from his face had only served to lacerate the flesh to which it had attached itself, and streak face and neck and coat with living scarlet.

“I’ll cut ‘im,” cried the boy; “old on, Sir.”

And with the zest of his age in such proceedings, he severed one by one the heads from the bodies of Mr. Carrington’s assailants. “Yup,” said the boy with a wincing face as each one fell before him. Even then, so tough and determined was their grip that the severed heads remained for a space, still fiercely biting home and still sucking, with the blood streaming out of their necks behind. But the boy stopped that with a few more slashes of his scissors—in one of which Mr. Carrington was implicated.

“I couldn’t get ‘em off!” repeated Carrington, and stood for a space, swaying and bleeding profusely. He dabbed feeble hands at his injuries and examined the result upon his palms. Then he gave way at the knees and fell headlong in a dead faint at the boy’s feet, between the still leaping bodies of his defeated foes. Very luckily it didn’t occur to the boy to splash water on his face—for there were still more of these horrors under the alder roots—and instead he passed back by the pond and went into the garden with the intention of calling assistance. And there he met the gardener coachman and told him of the whole affair.

When they got back to Mr. Carrington he was sitting up, dazed and weak, but able to warn them against the danger in the pool.

## II.

Such were the circumstances by which the world had its first notification that the Food was loose again. In another week Keston Common was in full operation as what naturalists call a centre of distribution. This time there were no wasps or rats, no earwigs and no nettles, but there were at least three water-spiders, several dragon-fly larvae which presently became dragon-flies, dazzling all Kent with their hovering sapphire bodies, and a nasty gelatinous, scummy growth that swelled over the pond margin, and sent its slimy green masses surging halfway up the garden path to Doctor Winkles’s house. And there began a growth of rushes and equisetum and potamogeton that ended only with the drying of the pond.

It speedily became evident to the public mind that this time there was not simply one centre of distribution, but quite a number of centres. There was one at Ealing—there can be no doubt now—and from that came the plague of flies and red spider; there was one at Sunbury, productive of ferocious great eels, that could come ashore and kill sheep; and there was one in Bloomsbury that gave the world a new strain of cockroaches of a quite terrible sort—an old house it was in Bloomsbury, and much inhabited by undesirable things. Abruptly the world found itself confronted with the Hickleybrow experiences all over again, with all sorts of queer exaggerations of

familiar monsters in the place of the giant hens and rats and wasps. Each centre burst out with its own characteristic local fauna and flora....

We know now that every one of these centres corresponded to one of the patients of Doctor Winkles, but that was by no means apparent at the time. Doctor Winkles was the last person to incur any odium in the matter. There was a panic quite naturally, a passionate indignation, but it was indignation not against Doctor Winkles but against the Food, and not so much against the Food as against the unfortunate Bensington, whom from the very first the popular imagination had insisted upon regarding as the sole and only person responsible for this new thing.

The attempt to lynch him that followed is just one of those explosive events that bulk largely in history and are in reality the least significant of occurrences.

The history of the outbreak is a mystery. The nucleus of the crowd certainly came from an Anti-Boomfood meeting in Hyde Park organised by extremists of the Caterham party, but there seems no one in the world who actually first proposed, no one who ever first hinted a suggestion of the outrage at which so many people assisted. It is a problem for M. Gustave le Bon—a mystery in the psychology of crowds. The fact emerges that about three o'clock on Sunday afternoon a remarkably big and ugly London crowd, entirely out of hand, came rolling down Thursday Street intent on Bensington's exemplary death as a warning to all scientific investigators, and that it came nearer accomplishing its object than any London crowd has ever come since the Hyde Park railings came down in remote middle Victorian times. This crowd came so close to its object indeed, that for the space of an hour or more a word would have settled the unfortunate gentleman's fate.

The first intimation he had of the thing was the noise of the people outside. He went to the window and peered, realising nothing of what impended. For a minute perhaps he watched them seething about the entrance, disposing of an ineffectual dozen of policemen who barred their way, before he fully realised his own importance in the affair. It came upon him in a flash—that that roaring, swaying multitude was after him. He was all alone in the flat—fortunately perhaps—his cousin Jane having gone down to Ealing to have tea with a relation on her mother's side, and he had no more idea of how to behave under such circumstances than he had of the etiquette of the Day of Judgment. He was still dashing about the flat asking his furniture what he should do, turning keys in locks and then unlocking them again, making darts at door and window and bedroom—when the floor clerk came to him.

“There isn't a moment, Sir,” he said. “They've got your number from the board in the hall! They're coming straight up!”

He ran Mr. Bensington out into the passage, already echoing with the approaching tumult from the great staircase, locked the door behind them, and led the way into the opposite flat by means of his duplicate key.

“It’s our only chance now,” he said.

He flung up a window which opened on a ventilating shaft, and showed that the wall was set with iron staples that made the rudest and most perilous of wall ladders to serve as a fire escape from the upper flats. He shoved Mr. Bensington out of the window, showed him how to cling on, and pursued him up the ladder, goading and jabbing his legs with a bunch of keys whenever he desisted from climbing. It seemed to Bensington at times that he must climb that vertical ladder for evermore. Above, the parapet was inaccessibly remote, a mile perhaps, below—He did not care to think of things below.

“Steady on!” cried the clerk, and gripped his ankle. It was quite horrible having his ankle gripped like that, and Mr. Bensington tightened his hold on the iron staple above to a drowning clutch, and gave a faint squeal of terror.

It became evident the clerk had broken a window, and then it seemed he had leapt a vast distance sideways, and there came the noise of a window-frame sliding in its sash. He was bawling things.

Mr. Bensington moved his head round cautiously until he could see the clerk. “Come down six steps,” the clerk commanded.

All this moving about seemed very foolish, but very, very cautiously Mr. Bensington lowered a foot.

“Don’t pull me!” he cried, as the clerk made to help him from the open window.

It seemed to him that to reach the window from the ladder would be a very respectable feat for a flying fox, and it was rather with the idea of a decent suicide than in any hope of accomplishing it that he made the step at last, and quite ruthlessly the clerk pulled him in. “You’ll have to stop here,” said the clerk; “my keys are no good here. It’s an American lock. I’ll get out and slam the door behind me and see if I can find the man of this floor. You’ll be locked in. Don’t go to the window, that’s all. It’s the ugliest crowd I’ve ever seen. If only they think you’re out they’ll probably content themselves by breaking up your stuff—”

“The indicator said In,” said Bensington.

“The devil it did! Well, anyhow, I’d better not be found—”

He vanished with a slam of the door.

Bensington was left to his own initiative again.

It took him under the bed.

There presently he was found by Cossar.

Bensington was almost comatose with terror when he was found, for Cossar had burst the door in with his shoulder by jumping at it across the breadth of the passage.

“Come out of it, Bensington,” he said. “It’s all right. It’s me. We’ve got to get out of this. They’re setting the place on fire. The porters are all clearing out. The servants are gone. It’s lucky I caught the man who knew.

“Look here!”

Bensington, peering from under the bed, became aware of some unaccountable garments on Cossar’s arm, and, of all things, a black bonnet in his hand!

“They’re having a clear out,” said Cossar, “If they don’t set the place on fire they’ll come here. Troops may not be here for an hour yet. Fifty per cent. Hooligans in the crowd, and the more furnished flats they go into the better they’ll like it. Obviously... They mean a clear out. You put this skirt and bonnet on, Bensington, and clear out with me.”

“D’you *mean*—?” began Bensington, protruding a head, tortoise fashion.

“I mean, put ‘em on and come! Obviously,” And with a sudden vehemence he dragged Bensington from under the bed, and began to dress him for his new impersonation of an elderly woman of the people.

He rolled up his trousers and made him kick off his slippers, took off his collar and tie and coat and vest, slipped a black skirt over his head, and put on a red flannel bodice and a body over the same. He made him take off his all too characteristic spectacles, and clapped the bonnet on his head. “You might have been born an old woman,” he said as he tied the strings. Then came the spring-side boots—a terrible wrench for corns—and the shawl, and the disguise was complete. “Up and down,” said Cossar, and Bensington obeyed.

“You’ll do,” said Cossar.

And in this guise it was, stumbling awkwardly over his unaccustomed skirts, shouting womanly imprecations upon his own head in a weird falsetto to sustain his part, and to the roaring note of a crowd bent upon lynching him, that the original discoverer of

Herakleophorbia IV. proceeded down the corridor of Chesterfield Mansions, mingled with that inflamed disorderly multitude, and passed out altogether from the thread of events that constitutes our story.

Never once after that escape did he meddle again with the stupendous development of the Food of the Gods he of all men had done most to begin.

### III.

This little man who started the whole thing passes out of the story, and after a time he passed altogether out of the world of things, visible and tellable. But because he started the whole thing it is seemly to give his exit an intercalary page of attention. One may picture him in his later days as Tunbridge Wells came to know him. For it was at Tunbridge Wells he reappeared after a temporary obscurity, so soon as he fully realised how transitory, how quite exceptional and unmeaning that fury of rioting was. He reappeared under the wing of Cousin Jane, treating himself for nervous shock to the exclusion of all other interests, and totally indifferent, as it seemed, to the battles that were raging then about those new centres of distribution, and about the baby Children of the Food.

He took up his quarters at the Mount Glory Hydrotherapeutic Hotel, where there are quite extraordinary facilities for baths, Carbonated Baths, Creosote Baths, Galvanic and Faradic Treatment, Massage, Pine Baths, Starch and Hemlock Baths, Radium Baths, Light Baths, Heat Baths, Bran and Needle Baths, Tar and Birdsdawn Baths,—all sorts of baths; and he devoted his mind to the development of that system of curative treatment that was still imperfect when he died. And sometimes he would go down in a hired vehicle and a sealskin trimmed coat, and sometimes, when his feet permitted, he would walk to the Pantiles, and there he would sip chalybeate water under the eye of his cousin Jane.

His stooping shoulders, his pink appearance, his beaming glasses, became a “feature” of Tunbridge Wells. No one was the least bit unkind to him, and indeed the place and the Hotel seemed very glad to have the distinction of his presence. Nothing could rob him of that distinction now. And though he preferred not to follow the development of his great invention in the daily papers, yet when he crossed the Lounge of the Hotel or walked down the Pantiles and heard the whisper, “There he is! That’s him!” it was not dissatisfaction that softened his mouth and gleamed for a moment in his eye.

This little figure, this minute little figure, launched the Food of the Gods upon the world! One does not know which is the most amazing, the greatness or the littleness

of these scientific and philosophical men. You figure him there on the Pantiles, in the overcoat trimmed with fur. He stands under that chinaware window where the spring spouts, and holds and sips the glass of chalybeate water in his hand. One bright eye over the gilt rim is fixed, with an expression of inscrutable severity, on Cousin Jane. “Mm,” he says, and sips.

So we make our souvenir, so we focus and photograph this discoverer of ours for the last time, and leave him, a mere dot in our foreground, and pass to the greater picture that has developed about him, to the story of his Food, how the scattered Giant Children grew up day by day into a world that was all too small for them, and how the net of Boomfood Laws and Boomfood Conventions, which the Boomfood Commission was weaving even then, drew closer and closer upon them with every year of their growth, Until—

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## **BOOK II — THE FOOD IN THE VILLAGE.**

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### **CHAPTER THE FIRST. — THE COMING OF THE FOOD.**

#### **I.**

Our theme, which began so compactly in Mr. Bensington’s study, has already spread and branched, until it points this way and that, and henceforth our whole story is one of dissemination. To follow the Food of the Gods further is to trace the ramifications of a perpetually branching tree; in a little while, in the quarter of a lifetime, the Food had trickled and increased from its first spring in the little farm near Hickleybrow until it had spread,—it and the report and shadow of its power,—throughout the world. It spread beyond England very speedily. Soon in America, all over the continent of Europe, in Japan, in Australia, at last all over the world, the thing was working towards

its appointed end. Always it worked slowly, by indirect courses and against resistance. It was bigness insurgent. In spite of prejudice, in spite of law and regulation, in spite of all that obstinate conservatism that lies at the base of the formal order of mankind, the Food of the Gods, once it had been set going, pursued its subtle and invincible progress.

The children of the Food grew steadily through all these years; that was the cardinal fact of the time. But it is the leakages make history. The children who had eaten grew, and soon there were other children growing; and all the best intentions in the world could not stop further leakages and still further leakages. The Food insisted on escaping with the pertinacity of a thing alive. Flour treated with the stuff crumbled in dry weather almost as if by intention into an impalpable powder, and would lift and travel before the lightest breeze. Now it would be some fresh insect won its way to a temporary fatal new development, now some fresh outbreak from the sewers of rats and such-like vermin. For some days the village of Pangbourne in Berkshire fought with giant ants. Three men were bitten and died. There would be a panic, there would be a struggle, and the salient evil would be fought down again, leaving always something behind, in the obscurer things of life—changed for ever. Then again another acute and startling outbreak, a swift upgrowth of monstrous weedy thickets, a drifting dissemination about the world of inhumanly growing thistles, of cockroaches men fought with shot guns, or a plague of mighty flies.

There were some strange and desperate struggles in obscure places. The Food begot heroes in the cause of littleness ...

And men took such happenings into their lives, and met them by the expedients of the moment, and told one another there was “no change in the essential order of things.” After the first great panic, Caterham, in spite of his power of eloquence, became a secondary figure in the political world, remained in men’s minds as the exponent of an extreme view.

Only slowly did he win a way towards a central position in affairs. “There was no change in the essential order of things,”—that eminent leader of modern thought, Doctor Winkles, was very clear upon this,—and the exponents of what was called in those days Progressive Liberalism grew quite sentimental upon the essential insincerity of their progress. Their dreams, it would appear, ran wholly on little nations, little languages, little households, each self-supported on its little farm. A fashion for the small and neat set in. To be big was to be “vulgar,” and dainty, neat, mignon, miniature, “minutely perfect,” became the key-words of critical approval....

Meanwhile, quietly, taking their time as children must, the children of the Food, growing into a world that changed to receive them, gathered strength and stature and knowledge, became individual and purposeful, rose slowly towards the dimensions of their destiny. Presently they seemed a natural part of the world; all these stirrings of bigness seemed a natural part of the world, and men wondered how things had been before their time. There came to men's ears stories of things the giant boys could do, and they said "Wonderful!"—without a spark of wonder. The popular papers would tell of the three sons of Cossar, and how these amazing children would lift great cannons, hurl masses of iron for hundreds of yards, and leap two hundred feet. They were said to be digging a well, deeper than any well or mine that man had ever made, seeking, it was said, for treasures hidden in the earth since ever the earth began.

These Children, said the popular magazines, will level mountains, bridge seas, tunnel your earth to a honeycomb. "Wonderful!" said the little folks, "isn't it? What a lot of conveniences we shall have!" and went about their business as though there was no such thing as the Food of the Gods on earth. And indeed these things were no more than the first hints and promises of the powers of the Children of the Food. It was still no more than child's play with them, no more than the first use of a strength in which no purpose had arisen. They did not know themselves for what they were. They were children—slow-growing children of a new race. The giant strength grew day by day—the giant will had still to grow into purpose and an aim.

Looking at it in a shortened perspective of time, those years of transition have the quality of a single consecutive occurrence; but indeed no one saw the coming of Bigness in the world, as no one in all the world till centuries had passed saw, as one happening, the Decline and Fall of Rome. They who lived in those days were too much among these developments to see them together as a single thing. It seemed even to wise men that the Food was giving the world nothing but a crop of unmanageable, disconnected irrelevancies, that might shake and trouble indeed, but could do no more to the established order and fabric of mankind.

To one observer at least the most wonderful thing throughout that period of accumulating stress is the invincible inertia of the great mass of people, their quiet persistence in all that ignored the enormous presences, the promise of still more enormous things, that grew among them. Just as many a stream will be at its smoothest, will look most tranquil, running deep and strong, at the very verge of a cataract, so all that is most conservative in man seemed settling quietly into a serene ascendancy during these latter days. Reaction became popular: there was talk of the bankruptcy of science, of the dying of Progress, of the advent of the Mandarins,—talk of such things amidst the echoing footsteps of the Children of the Food. The fussy

pointless Revolutions of the old time, a vast crowd of silly little people chasing some silly little monarch and the like, had indeed died out and passed away; but Change had not died out. It was only Change that had changed. The New was coming in its own fashion and beyond the common understanding of the world.

To tell fully of its coming would be to write a great history, but everywhere there was a parallel chain of happenings. To tell therefore of the manner of its coming in one place is to tell something of the whole. It chanced one stray seed of Immensity fell into the pretty, petty village of Cheasing Eyebright in Kent, and from the story of its queer germination there and of the tragic futility that ensued, one may attempt—following one thread, as it were—to show the direction in which the whole great interwoven fabric of the thing rolled off the loom of Time.

## II.

Cheasing Eyebright had of course a Vicar. There are vicars and vicars, and of all sorts I love an innovating vicar—a piebald progressive professional reactionary—the least. But the Vicar of Cheasing Eyebright was one of the least innovating of vicars, a most worthy, plump, ripe, and conservative-minded little man. It is becoming to go back a little in our story to tell of him. He matched his village, and one may figure them best together as they used to be, on the sunset evening when Mrs. Skinner—you will remember her flight!—brought the Food with her all unsuspected into these rustic serenities.

The village was looking its very best just then, under that western light. It lay down along the valley beneath the beechwoods of the Hanger, a beading of thatched and red-tiled cottages—cottages with trellised porches and pyracanthus-lined faces, that clustered closer and closer as the road dropped from the yew trees by the church towards the bridge. The vicarage peeped not too ostentatiously between the trees beyond the inn, an early Georgian front ripened by time, and the spire of the church rose happily in the depression made by the valley in the outline of the hills. A winding stream, a thin intermittency of sky blue and foam, glittered amidst a thick margin of reeds and loosestrife and overhanging willows, along the centre of a sinuous pennant of meadow. The whole prospect had that curiously English quality of ripened cultivation—that look of still completeness—that apes perfection, under the sunset warmth.

And the Vicar too looked mellow. He looked habitually and essentially mellow, as though he had been a mellow baby born into a mellow class, a ripe and juicy little boy. One could see, even before he mentioned it, that he had gone to an ivy-clad public school in its anecdotal, with magnificent traditions, aristocratic associations, and

no chemical laboratories, and proceeded thence to a venerable college in the very ripest Gothic. Few books he had younger than a thousand years; of these, Yarrow and Ellis and good pre-Methodist sermons made the bulk. He was a man of moderate height, a little shortened in appearance by his equatorial dimensions, and a face that had been mellow from the first was now climacterically ripe. The beard of a David hid his redundancy of chin; he wore no watch chain out of refinements and his modest clerical garments were made by a West End tailor.... And he sat with a hand on either shin, blinking at his village in beatific approval. He waved a plump palm towards it. His burthen sang out again. What more could any one desire?

“We are fortunately situated,” he said, putting the thing tamely.

“We are in a fastness of the hills,” he expanded.

He explained himself at length. “We are out of it all.”

For they had been talking, he and his friend, of the Horrors of the Age, of Democracy, and Secular Education, and Sky Scrapers, and Motor Cars, and the American Invasion, the Scrappy Reading of the Public, and the disappearance of any Taste at all.

“We are out of it all,” he repeated, and even as he spoke the footsteps of some one coming smote upon his ear, and he rolled over and regarded her.

You figure the old woman’s steadfastly tremulous advance, the bundle clutched in her gnarled lank hand, her nose (which was her countenance) wrinkled with breathless resolution. You see the poppies nodding fatefully on her bonnet, and the dust-white spring-sided boots beneath her skimpy skirts, pointing with an irrevocable slow alternation east and west. Beneath her arm, a restive captive, waggled and slipped a scarcely valuable umbrella. What was there to tell the Vicar that this grotesque old figure was—so far as his village was concerned at any rate—no less than Fruitful Chance and the Unforeseen, the Hag weak men call Fate. But for us, you understand, no more than Mrs. Skinner.

As she was too much encumbered for a curtsy, she pretended not to see him and his friend at all, and so passed, flip-flop, within three yards of them, onward down towards the village. The Vicar watched her slow transit in silence, and ripened a remark the while....

The incident seemed to him of no importance whatever. Old womankind, *aere perennius*, has carried bundles since the world began. What difference has it made?

“We are out of it all,” said the Vicar. “We live in an atmosphere of simple and permanent things, Birth and Toil, simple seed-time and simple harvest. The Uproar

passes us by.” He was always very great upon what he called the permanent things. “Things change,” he would say, “but Humanity—*aere perennius*.”

Thus the Vicar. He loved a classical quotation subtly misapplied. Below, Mrs. Skinner, inelegant but resolute, had involved herself curiously with Wilmerding’s stile.

### III.

No one knows what the Vicar made of the Giant Puff-Balls.

No doubt he was among the first to discover them. They were scattered at intervals up and down the path between the near down and the village end—a path he frequented daily in his constitutional round. Altogether, of these abnormal fungi there were, from first to last, quite thirty. The Vicar seems to have stared at each severally, and to have prodded most of them with his stick once or twice. One he attempted to measure with his arms, but it burst at his Ixion embrace.

He spoke to several people about them, and said they were “marvellous!” and he related to at least seven different persons the well-known story of the flagstone that was lifted from the cellar floor by a growth of fungi beneath. He looked up his Sowerby to see if it was *Lycoperdon coelatum* or *giganteum*—like all his kind since Gilbert White became famous, he Gilbert-Whited. He cherished a theory that *giganteum* is unfairly named.

One does not know if he observed that those white spheres lay in the very track that old woman of yesterday had followed, or if he noted that the last of the series swelled not a score of yards from the gate of the Caddles’ cottage. If he observed these things, he made no attempt to place his observation on record. His observation in matters botanical was what the inferior sort of scientific people call a “trained observation”—you look for certain definite things and neglect everything else. And he did nothing to link this phenomenon with the remarkable expansion of the Caddles’ baby that had been going on now for some weeks, indeed ever since Caddles walked over one Sunday afternoon a month or more ago to see his mother-in-law and hear Mr. Skinner (since defunct) brag about his management of hens.

### IV.

The growth of the puff-balls following on the expansion of the Caddles’ baby really ought to have opened the Vicar’s eyes. The latter fact had already come right into his arms at the christening—almost over-poweringly....

The youngster bawled with deafening violence when the cold water that sealed its divine inheritance and its right to the name of “Albert Edward Caddles” fell upon its

brow. It was already beyond maternal portorage, and Caddles, staggering indeed, but grinning triumphantly at quantitatively inferior parents, bore it back to the free-sitting occupied by his party.

“I never saw such a child!” said the Vicar. This was the first public intimation that the Caddles’ baby, which had begun its earthly career a little under seven pounds, did after all intend to be a credit to its parents. Very soon it was clear it meant to be not only a credit but a glory. And within a month their glory shone so brightly as to be, in connection with people in the Caddles’ position, improper.

The butcher weighed the infant eleven times. He was a man of few words, and he soon got through with them. The first time he said, “E’s a good un;” the next time he said, “My word!” the third time he said, “*Well*, mum,” and after that he simply blew enormously each time, scratched his head, and looked at his scales with an unprecedented mistrust. Every one came to see the Big Baby—so it was called by universal consent—and most of them said, “E’s a Bouncer,” and almost all remarked to him, “*Did* they?” Miss Fletcher came and said she “never *did*,” which was perfectly true.

Lady Wondershoot, the village tyrant, arrived the day after the third weighing, and inspected the phenomenon narrowly through glasses that filled it with howling terror. “It’s an unusually Big child,” she told its mother, in a loud instructive voice. “You ought to take unusual care of it, Caddles. Of course it won’t go on like this, being bottle fed, but we must do what we can for it. I’ll send you down some more flannel.”

The doctor came and measured the child with a tape, and put the figures in a notebook, and old Mr. Drifthassock, who farmed by Up Marden, brought a manure traveller two miles out of their way to look at it. The traveller asked the child’s age three times over, and said finally that he was blowed. He left it to be inferred how and why he was blowed; apparently it was the child’s size blowed him. He also said it ought to be put into a baby show. And all day long, out of school hours, little children kept coming and saying, “Please, Mrs. Caddles, mum, may we have a look at your baby, please, mum?” until Mrs. Caddles had to put a stop to it. And amidst all these scenes of amazement came Mrs. Skinner, and stood and smiled, standing somewhat in the background, with each sharp elbow in a lank gnarled hand, and smiling, smiling under and about her nose, with a smile of infinite profundity.

“It makes even that old wretch of a grandmother look quite pleasant,” said Lady Wondershoot. “Though I’m sorry she’s come back to the village.”

Of course, as with almost all cottagers' babies, the eleemosynary element had already come in, but the child soon made it clear by colossal bawling, that so far as the filling of its bottle went, it hadn't come in yet nearly enough.

The baby was entitled to a nine days' wonder, and every one wondered happily over its amazing growth for twice that time and more. And then you know, instead of its dropping into the background and giving place to other marvels, it went on growing more than ever!

Lady Wondershoot heard Mrs. Greenfield, her housekeeper, with infinite amazement.

"Caddles downstairs again. No food for the child! My dear Greenfield, it's impossible. The creature eats like a hippopotamus! I'm sure it can't be true."

"I'm sure I hope you're not being imposed upon, my lady," said Mrs. Greenfield.

"It's so difficult to tell with these people," said Lady Wondershoot. "Now I do wish, my good Greenfield, that you'd just go down there yourself this afternoon and see—see it have its bottle. Big as it is, I cannot imagine that it needs more than six pints a day."

"It hasn't no business to, my lady," said Mrs. Greenfield.

The hand of Lady Wondershoot quivered, with that C.O.S. sort of emotion, that suspicious rage that stirs in all true aristocrats, at the thought that possibly the meaner classes are after all—as mean as their betters, and—where the sting lies—scoring points in the game.

But Mrs. Greenfield could observe no evidence of speculation, and the order for an increasing daily supply to the Caddles' nursery was issued. Scarcely had the first instalment gone, when Caddles was back again at the great house in a state abjectly apologetic.

"We took the greates' care of 'em, Mrs. Greenfield, I do assure you, mum, but he's regular bust 'em! They flew with such vilence, mum, that one button broke a pane of the window, mum, and one hit me a regular stinger jest 'ere, mum."

Lady Wondershoot, when she heard that this amazing child had positively burst out of its beautiful charity clothes, decided that she must speak to Caddles herself. He appeared in her presence with his hair hastily wetted and smoothed by hand, breathless, and clinging to his hat brim as though it was a life-belt, and he stumbled at the carpet edge out of sheer distress of mind.

Lady Wondershoot liked bullying Caddles. Caddles was her ideal lower-class person, dishonest, faithful, abject, industrious, and inconceivably incapable of responsibility.

She told him it was a serious matter, the way his child was going on. “It’s ‘is appetite, my ladyship,” said Caddles, with a rising note.

“Check ‘im, my ladyship, you can’t,” said Caddles. “There ‘e lies, my ladyship, and kicks out ‘e does, and ‘owls, that distressin’. We ‘aven’t the ‘eart, my ladyship. If we ‘ad—the neighbours would interfere....”

Lady Wondershoot consulted the parish doctor.

“What I want to know,” said Lady Wondershoot, “is it *right* this child should have such an extraordinary quantity of milk?”

“The proper allowance for a child of that age,” said the parish doctor, “is a pint and a half to two pints in the twenty-four hours. I don’t see that you are called upon to provide more. If you do, it is your own generosity. Of course we might try the legitimate quantity for a few days. But the child, I must admit, seems for some reason to be physiologically different. Possibly what is called a Sport. A case of General Hypertrophy.”

“It isn’t fair to the other parish children,” said Lady Wondershoot. “I am certain we shall have complaints if this goes on.”

“I don’t see that any one can be expected to give more than the recognised allowance. We might insist on its doing with that, or if it wouldn’t, send it as a case into the Infirmary.”

“I suppose,” said Lady Wondershoot, reflecting, “that apart from the size and the appetite, you don’t find anything else abnormal—nothing monstrous?”

“No. No, I don’t. But no doubt if this growth goes on, we shall find grave moral and intellectual deficiencies. One might almost prophesy that from Max Nordau’s law. A most gifted and celebrated philosopher, Lady Wondershoot. He discovered that the abnormal is—abnormal, a most valuable discovery, and well worth bearing in mind. I find it of the utmost help in practice. When I come upon anything abnormal, I say at once, This is abnormal.” His eyes became profound, his voice dropped, his manner verged upon the intimately confidential. He raised one hand stiffly. “And I treat it in that spirit,” he said.

**V.**

“Tut, tut!” said the Vicar to his breakfast things—the day after the coming of Mrs. Skinner. “Tut, tut! what’s this?” and poised his glasses at his paper with a general air of remonstrance.

“Giant wasps! What’s the world coming to? American journalists, I suppose! Hang these Novelties! Giant gooseberries are good enough for me.

“Nonsense!” said the Vicar, and drank off his coffee at a gulp, eyes steadfast on the paper, and smacked his lips incredulously.

“Bosh!” said the Vicar, rejecting the hint altogether.

But the next day there was more of it, and the light came.

Not all at once, however. When he went for his constitutional that day he was still chuckling at the absurd story his paper would have had him believe. Wasps indeed—killing a dog! Incidentally as he passed by the site of that first crop of puff-balls he remarked that the grass was growing very rank there, but he did not connect that in any way with the matter of his amusement. “We should certainly have heard something of it,” he said; “Whitstable can’t be twenty miles from here.”

Beyond he found another puff-ball, one of the second crop, rising like a roc’s egg out of the abnormally coarsened turf.

The thing came upon him in a flash.

He did not take his usual round that morning. Instead he turned aside by the second stile and came round to the Caddles’ cottage. “Where’s that baby?” he demanded, and at the sight of it, “Goodness me!”

He went up the village blessing his heart, and met the doctor full tilt coming down. He grasped his arm. “What does this *mean*?” he said. “Have you seen the paper these last few days?”

The doctor said he had.

“Well, what’s the matter with that child? What’s the matter with everything—wasps, puff-balls, babies, eh? What’s making them grow so big? This is most unexpected. In Kent too! If it was America now—”

“It’s a little difficult to say just what it is,” said the doctor. “So far as I can grasp the symptoms—”

“Yes?”

“It’s Hypertrophy—General Hypertrophy.”

“Hypertrophy?”

“Yes. General—affecting all the bodily structures—all the organism. I may say that in my own mind, between ourselves, I’m very nearly convinced it’s that.... But one has to be careful.”

“Ah,” said the Vicar, a good deal relieved to find the doctor equal to the situation. “But how is it it’s breaking out in this fashion, all over the place?”

“That again,” said the doctor, “is difficult to say.”

“Urshot. Here. It’s a pretty clear case of spreading.”

“Yes,” said the doctor. “Yes. I think so. It has a strong resemblance at any rate to some sort of epidemic. Probably Epidemic Hypertrophy will meet the case.”

“Epidemic!” said the Vicar. “You don’t mean it’s contagious?”

The doctor smiled gently and rubbed one hand against the other. “That I couldn’t say,” he said.

“But—!” cried the Vicar, round-eyed. “If it’s *catching*—it—it affects *us!*”

He made a stride up the road and turned about.

“I’ve just been there,” he cried. “Hadn’t I better—? I’ll go home at once and have a bath and fumigate my clothes.”

The doctor regarded his retreating back for a moment, and then turned about and went towards his own house....

But on the way he reflected that one case had been in the village a month without any one catching the disease, and after a pause of hesitation decided to be as brave as a doctor should be and take the risks like a man.

And indeed he was well advised by his second thoughts. Growth was the last thing that could ever happen to him again. He could have eaten—and the Vicar could have eaten—Herakleophorbia by the truckful. For growth had done with them. Growth had done with these two gentlemen for evermore.

## **VI.**

It was a day or so after this conversation—a day or so, that is, after the burning of the Experimental Farm—that Winkles came to Redwood and showed him an insulting letter. It was an anonymous letter, and an author should respect his character’s secrets. “You are only taking credit for a natural phenomenon,” said the letter, “and trying to advertise yourself by your letter to the *Times*. You and your Boomfood! Let me

tell you, this absurdly named food of yours has only the most accidental connection with those big wasps and rats. The plain fact is there is an epidemic of Hypertrophy—Contagious Hypertrophy—which you have about as much claim to control as you have to control the solar system. The thing is as old as the hills. There was Hypertrophy in the family of Anak. Quite outside your range, at Cheasing Eyebright, at the present time there is a baby—”

“Shaky up and down writing. Old gentleman apparently,” said Redwood. “But it’s odd a baby—”

He read a few lines further, and had an inspiration.

“By Jove!” said he. “That’s my missing Mrs. Skinner!”

He descended upon her suddenly in the afternoon of the following day.

She was engaged in pulling onions in the little garden before her daughter’s cottage when she saw him coming through the garden gate. She stood for a moment “consternated,” as the country folks say, and then folded her arms, and with the little bunch of onions held defensively under her left elbow, awaited his approach. Her mouth opened and shut several times; she mumbled her remaining tooth, and once quite suddenly she curtsied, like the blink of an arc-light.

“I thought I should find you,” said Redwood.

“I thought you might, sir,” she said, without joy.

“Where’s Skinner?”

“E ain’t never written to me, Sir, not once, nor come nigh of me since I came here. Sir.”

“Don’t you know what’s become of him?”

“Him not having written, no, Sir,” and she edged a step towards the left with an imperfect idea of cutting off Redwood from the barn door.

“No one knows what has become of him,” said Redwood.

“I dessay ‘e knows,” said Mrs. Skinner.

“He doesn’t tell.”

“He was always a great one for looking after ‘imself and leaving them that was near and dear to ‘im in trouble, was Skinner. Though clever as could be,” said Mrs. Skinner....

“Where’s this child?” asked Redwood abruptly.

She begged his pardon.

“This child I hear about, the child you’ve been giving our stuff to—the child that weighs two stone.”

Mrs. Skinner’s hands worked, and she dropped the onions. “Reely, Sir,” she protested, “I don’t hardly know, Sir, what you mean. My daughter, Sir, Mrs. Caddles, ‘as a baby, Sir.” And she made an agitated curtsy and tried to look innocently inquiring by tilting her nose to one side.

“You’d better let me see that baby, Mrs. Skinner,” said Redwood.

Mrs. Skinner unmasked an eye at him as she led the way towards the barn. “Of course, Sir, there may ‘ave been a *little*, in a little can of Nicey I give his father to bring over from the farm, or a little perhaps what I happened to bring about with me, so to speak. Me packing in a hurry and all ...”

“Um!” said Redwood, after he had cluckered to the infant for a space. “Oom!”

He told Mrs. Caddles the baby was a very fine child indeed, a thing that was getting well home to her intelligence—and he ignored her altogether after that. Presently she left the barn—through sheer insignificance.

“Now you’ve started him, you’ll have to keep on with him, you know,” he said to Mrs. Skinner.

He turned on her abruptly. “Don’t splash it about *this* time,” he said.

“Splash it about, Sir?”

“Oh! *you* know.”

She indicated knowledge by convulsive gestures.

“You haven’t told these people here? The parents, the squire and so on at the big house, the doctor, no one?”

Mrs. Skinner shook her head.

“I wouldn’t,” said Redwood....

He went to the door of the barn and surveyed the world about him. The door of the barn looked between the end of the cottage and some disused piggeries through a five-barred gate upon the highroad. Beyond was a high, red brick-wall rich with ivy and

wallflower and pennywort, and set along the top with broken glass. Beyond the corner of the wall, a sunlit notice-board amidst green and yellow branches reared itself above the rich tones of the first fallen leaves and announced that "Trespassers in these Woods will be Prosecuted." The dark shadow of a gap in the hedge threw a stretch of barbed wire into relief.

"Um," said Redwood, then in a deeper note, "Oom!"

There came a clatter of horses and the sound of wheels, and Lady Wondershoot's greys came into view. He marked the faces of coachman and footman as the equipage approached. The coachman was a very fine specimen, full and fruity, and he drove with a sort of sacramental dignity. Others might doubt their calling and position in the world, he at any rate was sure—he drove her ladyship. The footman sat beside him with folded arms and a face of inflexible certainties. Then the great lady herself became visible, in a hat and mantle disdainfully inelegant, peering through her glasses. Two young ladies protruded necks and peered also.

The Vicar passing on the other side swept off the hat from his David's brow unheeded....

Redwood remained standing in the doorway for a long time after the carriage had passed, his hands folded behind him. His eyes went to the green, grey upland of down, and into the cloud-curdled sky, and came back to the glass-set wall. He turned upon the cool shadows within, and amidst spots and blurs of colour regarded the giant child amidst that Rembrandtesque gloom, naked except for a swathing of flannel, seated upon a huge truss of straw and playing with its toes.

"I begin to see what we have done," he said.

He mused, and young Caddles and his own child and Cossar's brood mingled in his musing.

He laughed abruptly. "Good Lord!" he said at some passing thought.

He roused himself presently and addressed Mrs. Skinner. "Anyhow he mustn't be tortured by a break in his food. That at least we can prevent. I shall send you a can every six months. That ought to do for him all right."

Mrs. Skinner mumbled something about "if you think so, Sir," and "probably got packed by mistake.... Thought no harm in giving him a little," and so by the aid of various aspen gestures indicated that she understood.

So the child went on growing.

And growing.

“Practically,” said Lady Wondershoot, “he’s eaten up every calf in the place. If I have any more of this sort of thing from that man Caddles—”

## VII.

But even so secluded a place as Cheasing Eyebright could not rest for long in the theory of Hypertrophy—Contagious or not—in view of the growing hubbub about the Food. In a little while there were painful explanations for Mrs. Skinner—explanations that reduced her to speechless mumblings of her remaining tooth—explanations that probed her and ransacked her and exposed her—until at last she was driven to take refuge from a universal convergence of blame in the dignity of inconsolable widowhood. She turned her eye—which she constrained to be watery—upon the angry Lady of the Manor, and wiped suds from her hands.

“You forget, my lady, what I’m bearing up under.”

And she followed up this warning note with a slightly defiant:

“It’s ‘IM I think of, my lady, night *and* day.”

She compressed her lips, and her voice flattened and faltered: “Bein’ et, my lady.”

And having established herself on these grounds, she repeated the affirmation her ladyship had refused before. “I ‘ad no more idea what I was giving the child, my lady, than any one *could* ‘ave....”

Her ladyship turned her mind in more hopeful directions, wiggling Caddles of course tremendously by the way. Emissaries, full of diplomatic threatenings, entered the whirling lives of Bensington and Redwood. They presented themselves as Parish Councillors, stolid and clinging phonographically to prearranged statements. “We hold you responsible, Mister Bensington, for the injury inflicted upon our parish, Sir. We hold you responsible.”

A firm of solicitors, with a snake of a style—Banghurst, Brown, Flapp, Codlin, Brown, Tedder, and Snoxtton, they called themselves, and appeared invariably in the form of a small rufous cunning-looking gentleman with a pointed nose—said vague things about damages, and there was a polished personage, her ladyship’s agent, who came in suddenly upon Redwood one day and asked, “Well, Sir, and what do you propose to do?”

To which Redwood answered that he proposed to discontinue supplying the food for the child, if he or Bensington were bothered any further about the matter. “I give it for

nothing as it is," he said, "and the child will yell your village to ruins before it dies if you don't let it have the stuff. The child's on your hands, and you have to keep it. Lady Wondershoot can't always be Lady Bountiful and Earthly Providence of her parish without sometimes meeting a responsibility, you know."

"The mischief's done," Lady Wondershoot decided when they told her—with expurgations—what Redwood had said.

"The mischief's done," echoed the Vicar.

Though indeed as a matter of fact the mischief was only beginning.

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## **CHAPTER THE SECOND. — THE BRAT GIGANTIC.**

### **I.**

The giant child was ugly—the Vicar would insist. "He always had been ugly—as all excessive things must be." The Vicar's views had carried him out of sight of just judgment in this matter. The child was much subjected to snapshots even in that rustic retirement, and their net testimony is against the Vicar, testifying that the young monster was at first almost pretty, with a copious curl of hair reaching to his brow and a great readiness to smile. Usually Caddles, who was slightly built, stands smiling behind the baby, perspective emphasising his relative smallness.

After the second year the good looks of the child became more subtle and more contestable. He began to grow, as his unfortunate grandfather would no doubt have put it, "rank." He lost colour and developed an increasing effect of being somehow, albeit colossal, yet slight. He was vastly delicate. His eyes and something about his face grew finer—grew, as people say, "interesting." His hair, after one cutting, began to tangle into a mat. "It's the degenerate strain coming out in him," said the parish doctor, marking these things, but just how far he was right in that, and just how far the youngster's lapse from ideal healthfulness was the result of living entirely in a whitewashed barn upon Lady Wondershoot's sense of charity tempered by justice, is open to question.

The photographs of him that present him from three to six show him developing into a round-eyed, flaxen-haired youngster with a truncated nose and a friendly stare. There lurks about his lips that never very remote promise of a smile that all the photographs of the early giant children display. In summer he wears loose garments of ticking tacked together with string; there is usually one of those straw baskets upon his head that workmen use for their tools, and he is barefooted. In one picture he grins broadly and holds a bitten melon in his hand.

The winter pictures are less numerous and satisfactory. He wears huge sabots—no doubt of beechwoods and (as fragments of the inscription “John Stickells, Iping,” show) sacks for socks, and his trousers and jacket are unmistakably cut from the remains of a gaily patterned carpet. Underneath that there were rude swathings of flannel; five or six yards of flannel are tied comforter-fashion about his neck. The thing on his head is probably another sack. He stares, sometimes smiling, sometimes a little ruefully, at the camera. Even when he was only five years old, one sees that half whimsical wrinkling over his soft brown eyes that characterised his face.

He was from the first, the Vicar always declared, a terrible nuisance about the village. He seems to have had a proportionate impulse to play, much curiosity and sociability, and in addition there was a certain craving within him—I grieve to say—for more to eat. In spite of what Mrs. Greenfield called an “*excessively* generous” allowance of food from Lady Wondershoot, he displayed what the doctor perceived at once was the “Criminal Appetite.” It carries out only too completely Lady Wondershoot’s worst experiences of the lower classes—that in spite of an allowance of nourishment inordinately beyond what is known to be the maximum necessity even of an adult human being, the creature was found to steal. And what he stole he ate with an inelegant voracity. His great hand would come over garden walls; he would covet the very bread in the bakers’ carts. Cheeses went from Marlow’s store loft, and never a pig trough was safe from him. Some farmer walking over his field of swedes would find the great spoor of his feet and the evidence of his nibbling hunger—a root picked here, a root picked there, and the holes, with childish cunning, heavily erased. He ate a swede as one devours a radish. He would stand and eat apples from a tree, if no one was about, as normal children eat blackberries from a bush. In one way at any rate this shortness of provisions was good for the peace of Cheasing Eyebright—for many years he ate up every grain very nearly of the Food of the Gods that was given him....

Indisputably the child was troublesome and out of place, “He was always about,” the Vicar used to say. He could not go to school; he could not go to church by virtue of the obvious limitations of its cubical content. There was some attempt to satisfy the spirit of that “most foolish and destructive law”—I quote the Vicar—the Elementary

Education Act of 1870, by getting him to sit outside the open window while instruction was going on within. But his presence there destroyed the discipline of the other children. They were always popping up and peering at him, and every time he spoke they laughed together. His voice was so odd! So they let him stay away.

Nor did they persist in pressing him to come to church, for his vast proportions were of little help to devotion. Yet there they might have had an easier task; there are good reasons for guessing there were the germs of religious feeling somewhere in that big carcass. The music perhaps drew him. He was often in the churchyard on a Sunday morning, picking his way softly among the graves after the congregation had gone in, and he would sit the whole service out beside the porch, listening as one listens outside a hive of bees.

At first he showed a certain want of tact; the people inside would hear his great feet crunch restlessly round their place of worship, or become aware of his dim face peering in through the stained glass, half curious, half envious, and at times some simple hymn would catch him unawares, and he would howl lugubriously in a gigantic attempt at unison. Whereupon little Sloppet, who was organ-blower and vergier and beadle and sexton and bell-ringer on Sundays, besides being postman and chimney-sweep all the week, would go out very briskly and valiantly and send him mournfully away. Sloppet, I am glad to say, felt it—in his more thoughtful moments at any rate. It was like sending a dog home when you start out for a walk, he told me.

But the intellectual and moral training of young Caddles, though fragmentary, was explicit. From the first, Vicar, mother, and all the world, combined to make it clear to him that his giant strength was not for use. It was a misfortune that he had to make the best of. He had to mind what was told him, do what was set him, be careful never to break anything nor hurt anything. Particularly he must not go treading on things or jostling against things or jumping about. He had to salute the gentlefolks respectfully and be grateful for the food and clothing they spared him out of their riches. And he learnt all these things submissively, being by nature and habit a teachable creature and only by food and accident gigantic.

For Lady Wondershoot, in these early days, he displayed the profoundest awe. She found she could talk to him best when she was in short skirts and had her dog-whip, and she gesticulated with that and was always a little contemptuous and shrill. But sometimes the Vicar played master—a minute, middle-aged, rather breathless David pelting a childish Goliath with reproof and reproach and dictatorial command. The monster was now so big that it seems it was impossible for any one to remember he was after all only a child of seven, with all a child's desire for notice and amusement

and fresh experience, with all a child's craving for response, attention and affection, and all a child's capacity for dependence and unrestricted dulness and misery.

The Vicar, walking down the village road some sunlit morning, would encounter an ungainly eighteen feet of the Inexplicable, as fantastic and unpleasant to him as some new form of Dissent, as it padded fitfully along with craning neck, seeking, always seeking the two primary needs of childhood—something to eat and something with which to play.

There would come a look of furtive respect into the creature's eyes and an attempt to touch the matted forelock.

In a limited way the Vicar had an imagination—at any rate, the remains of one—and with young Caddles it took the line of developing the huge possibilities of personal injury such vast muscles must possess. Suppose a sudden madness—! Suppose a mere lapse into disrespect—! However, the truly brave man is not the man who does not feel fear but the man who overcomes it. Every time and always the Vicar got his imagination under. And he used always to address young Caddles stoutly in a good clear service tenor.

“Being a good boy, Albert Edward?”

And the young giant, edging closer to the wall and blushing deeply, would answer, “Yessir—trying.”

“Mind you do,” said the Vicar, and would go past him with at most a slight acceleration of his breathing. And out of respect for his manhood he made it a rule, whatever he might fancy, never to look back at the danger, when once it was passed.

In a fitful manner the Vicar would give young Caddles private tuition. He never taught the monster to read—it was not needed; but he taught him the more important points of the Catechism—his duty to his neighbour for example, and of that Deity who would punish Caddles with extreme vindictiveness if ever he ventured to disobey the Vicar and Lady Wondershoot. The lessons would go on in the Vicar's yard, and passers-by would hear that great cranky childish voice droning out the essential teachings of the Established Church.

“To onner ‘n ‘bey the King and allooer put ‘nthyory under ‘im. To s’bmit meself t’all my gov’ners, teachers, spir’shall pastors an’ masters. To order myself lowly ‘n rev’reantly t’all my betters—”

Presently it became evident that the effect of the growing giant on unaccustomed horses was like that of a camel, and he was told to keep off the highroad, not only near

the shrubbery (where the oafish smile over the wall had exasperated her ladyship extremely), but altogether. That law he never completely obeyed, because of the vast interest the highroad had for him. But it turned what had been his constant resort into a stolen pleasure. He was limited at last almost entirely to old pasture and the Downs.

I do not know what he would have done if it had not been for the Downs. There there were spaces where he might wander for miles, and over these spaces he wandered. He would pick branches from trees and make insane vast nosegays there until he was forbidden, take up sheep and put them in neat rows, from which they immediately wandered (at this he invariably laughed very heartily), until he was forbidden, dig away the turf, great wanton holes, until he was forbidden....

He would wander over the Downs as far as the hill above Wreckstone, but not farther, because there he came upon cultivated land, and the people, by reason of his depredations upon their root-crops, and inspired moreover by a sort of hostile timidity his big unkempt appearance frequently evoked, always came out against him with yapping dogs to drive him away. They would threaten him and lash at him with cart whips. I have heard that they would sometimes fire at him with shot guns. And in the other direction he ranged within sight of Hickleybrow. From above Thursley Hanger he could get a glimpse of the London, Chatham, and Dover railway, but ploughed fields and a suspicious hamlet prevented his nearer access.

And after a time there came boards—great boards with red letters that barred him in every direction. He could not read what the letters said: “Out of Bounds,” but in a little while he understood. He was often to be seen in those days, by the railway passengers, sitting, chin on knees, perched up on the Down hard by the Thursley chalk pits, where afterwards he was set working. The train seemed to inspire a dim emotion of friendliness in him, and sometimes he would wave an enormous hand at it, and sometimes give it a rustic incoherent hail.

“Big,” the peering passenger would say. “One of these Boom children. They say, Sir, quite unable to do anything for itself—little better than an idiot in fact, and a great burden on the locality.”

“Parents quite poor, I’m told.”

“Lives on the charity of the local gentry.”

Every one would stare intelligently at that distant squatting monstrous figure for a space.

“Good thing that was put a stop to,” some spacious thinking mind would suggest.  
“Nice to ‘ave a few thousand of *them* on the rates, eh?”

And usually there was some one wise enough to tell this philosopher: “You’re about Right there, Sir,” in hearty tones.

## II.

He had his bad days.

There was, for example, that trouble with the river.

He made little boats out of whole newspapers, an art he learnt by watching the Spender boy, and he set them sailing down the stream—great paper cocked-hats. When they vanished under the bridge which marks the boundary of the strictly private grounds about Eyebright House, he would give a great shout and run round and across Tormat’s new field—Lord! how Tormat’s pigs did scamper, to be sure, and turn their good fat into lean muscle!—and so to meet his boats by the ford. Right across the nearer lawns these paper boats of his used to go, right in front of Eyebright House, right under Lady Wondershoot’s eyes! Disorganising folded newspapers! A pretty thing!

Gathering enterprise from impunity, he began babyish hydraulic engineering. He delved a huge port for his paper fleets with an old shed door that served him as a spade, and, no one chancing to observe his operations just then, he devised an ingenious canal that incidentally flooded Lady Wondershoot’s ice-house, and finally he dammed the river. He dammed it right across with a few vigorous doorfuls of earth—he must have worked like an avalanche—and down came a most amazing spate through the shrubbery and washed away Miss Spinks and her easel and the most promising water-colour sketch she had ever begun, or, at any rate, it washed away her easel and left her wet to the knees and dismally tucked up in flight to the house, and thence the waters rushed through the kitchen garden, and so by the green door into the lane and down into the riverbed again by Short’s ditch.

Meanwhile, the Vicar, interrupted in conversation with the blacksmith, was amazed to see distressful stranded fish leaping out of a few residual pools, and heaped green weed in the bed of the stream, where ten minutes before there had been eight feet and more of clear cool water.

After that, horrified at his own consequences, young Caddles fled his home for two days and nights. He returned only at the insistent call of hunger, to bear with stoical

calm an amount of violent scolding that was more in proportion to his size than anything else that had ever before fallen to his lot in the Happy Village.

### III.

Immediately after that affair Lady Wondershoot, casting about for exemplary additions to the abuse and fastings she had inflicted, issued a Ukase. She issued it first to her butler, and very suddenly, so that she made him jump. He was clearing away the breakfast things, and she was staring out of the tall window on the terrace where the fawns would come to be fed. "Jobbet," she said, in her most imperial voice—"Jobbet, this Thing must work for its living."

And she made it quite clear not only to Jobbet (which was easy), but to every one else in the village, including young Caddles, that in this matter, as in all things, she meant what she said.

"Keep him employed," said Lady Wondershoot. "That's the tip for Master Caddles."

"It's the Tip, I fancy, for all Humanity," said the Vicar. "The simple duties, the modest round, seed-time and harvest—"

"Exactly," said Lady Wondershoot. "What I always say. Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do. At any rate among the labouring classes. We bring up our under-housemaids on that principle, always. What shall we set him to do?"

That was a little difficult. They thought of many things, and meanwhile they broke him in to labour a bit by using him instead of a horse messenger to carry telegrams and notes when extra speed was needed, and he also carried luggage and packing-cases and things of that sort very conveniently in a big net they found for him. He seemed to like employment, regarding it as a sort of game, and Kinkle, Lady Wondershoot's agent, seeing him shift a rockery for her one day, was struck by the brilliant idea of putting him into her chalk quarry at Thursley Hanger, hard by Hicklebybrow. This idea was carried out, and it seemed they had settled his problem.

He worked in the chalk pit, at first with the zest of a playing child, and afterwards with an effect of habit—delving, loading, doing all the haulage of the trucks, running the full ones down the lines towards the siding, and hauling the empty ones up by the wire of a great windlass—working the entire quarry at last single-handed.

I am told that Kinkle made a very good thing indeed out of him for Lady Wondershoot, consuming as he did scarcely anything but his food, though that never restrained her denunciation of "the Creature" as a gigantic parasite upon her charity....

At that time he used to wear a sort of smock of sacking, trousers of patched leather, and iron-shod sabots. Over his head was sometimes a queer thing—a worn-out beehive straw chair it was, but usually he went bareheaded. He would be moving about the pit with a powerful deliberation, and the Vicar on his constitutional round would get there about midday to find him shamefully eating his vast need of food with his back to all the world.

His food was brought to him every day, a mess of grain in the husk, in a truck—a small railway truck, like one of the trucks he was perpetually filling with chalk, and this load he used to char in an old limekiln and then devour. Sometimes he would mix with it a bag of sugar. Sometimes he would sit licking a lump of such salt as is given to cows, or eating a huge lump of dates, stones and all, such as one sees in London on barrows. For drink he walked to the rivulet beyond the burnt-out site of the Experimental Farm at Hickleybrow and put down his face to the stream. It was from his drinking in that way after eating that the Food of the Gods did at last get loose, spreading first of all in huge weeds from the river-side, then in big frogs, bigger trout and stranding carp, and at last in a fantastic exuberance of vegetation all over the little valley.

And after a year or so the queer monstrous grub things in the field before the blacksmith's grew so big and developed into such frightful skipjacks and cockchafers—motor cockchafers the boys called them—that they drove Lady Wondershoot abroad.

#### IV.

But soon the Food was to enter upon a new phase of its work in him. In spite of the simple instructions of the Vicar—instructions intended to round off the modest natural life befitting a giant peasant, in the most complete and final manner—he began to ask questions, to inquire into things, to *think*. As he grew from boyhood to adolescence it became increasingly evident that his mind had processes of its own—out of the Vicar's control. The Vicar did his best to ignore this distressing phenomenon, but still—he could feel it there.

The young giant's material for thought lay about him. Quite involuntarily, with his spacious views, his constant overlooking of things, he must have seen a good deal of human life, and as it grew clearer to him that he too, save for this clumsy greatness of his, was also human, he must have come to realise more and more just how much was shut against him by his melancholy distinction. The sociable hum of the school, the mystery of religion that was partaken in such finery, and which exhaled so sweet a strain of melody, the jovial chorusing from the Inn, the warmly glowing rooms, candle-lit and fire-lit, into which he peered out of the darkness, or again the shouting

excitement, the vigour of flannelled exercise upon some imperfectly understood issue that centred about the cricket-field—all these things must have cried aloud to his companionable heart. It would seem that as his adolescence crept upon him, he began to take a very considerable interest in the proceedings of lovers, in those preferences and pairings, those close intimacies that are so cardinal in life.

One Sunday, just about that hour when the stars and the bats and the passions of rural life come out, there chanced to be a young couple “kissing each other a bit” in Love Lane, the deep hedged lane that runs out back towards the Upper Lodge. They were giving their little emotions play, as secure in the warm still twilight as any lovers could be. The only conceivable interruption they thought possible must come pacing visibly up the lane; the twelve-foot hedge towards the silent Downs seemed to them an absolute guarantee.

Then suddenly—incredibly—they were lifted and drawn apart.

They discovered themselves held up, each with a finger and thumb under the armpits, and with the perplexed brown eyes of young Caddles scanning their warm flushed faces. They were naturally dumb with the emotions of their situation.

“*Why* do you like doing that?” asked young Caddles.

I gather the embarrassment continued until the swain remembering his manhood, vehemently, with loud shouts, threats, and virile blasphemies, such as became the occasion, bade young Caddles under penalties put them down. Whereupon young Caddles, remembering his manners, did put them down politely and very carefully, and conveniently near for a resumption of their embraces, and having hesitated above them for a while, vanished again into the twilight ...

“But I felt precious silly,” the swain confided to me. “We couldn’t arldly look at one another—bein’ caught like that.

“Kissing we was—you know.

“And the cur’ous thing is, she blamed it all on to me,” said the swain.

“Flew out something outrageous, and wouldn’t ‘ardly speak to me all the way ‘ome....”

The giant was embarking upon investigations, there could be no doubt. His mind, it became manifest, was throwing up questions. He put them to few people as yet, but they troubled him. His mother, one gathers, sometimes came in for cross-examination.

He used to come into the yard behind his mother's cottage, and, after a careful inspection of the ground for hens and chicks, he would sit down slowly with his back against the barn. In a minute the chicks, who liked him, would be pecking all over him at the mossy chalk-mud in the seams of his clothing, and if it was blowing up for wet, Mrs. Caddles' kitten, who never lost her confidence in him, would assume a sinuous form and start scampering into the cottage, up to the kitchen fender, round, out, up his leg, up his body, right up to his shoulder, meditative moment, and then scat! back again, and so on. Sometimes she would stick her claws in his face out of sheer gaiety of heart, but he never dared to touch her because of the uncertain weight of his hand upon a creature so frail. Besides, he rather liked to be tickled. And after a time he would put some clumsy questions to his mother.

"Mother," he would say, "if it's good to work, why doesn't every one work?"

His mother would look up at him and answer, "It's good for the likes of us."

He would meditate, "*Why?*"

And going unanswered, "What's work *for*, mother? Why do I cut chalk and you wash clothes, day after day, while Lady Wondershoot goes about in her carriage, mother, and travels off to those beautiful foreign countries you and I mustn't see, mother?"

"She's a lady," said Mrs. Caddles.

"Oh," said young Caddles, and meditated profoundly.

"If there wasn't gentlefolks to make work for us to do," said Mrs. Caddles, "how should we poor people get a living?"

This had to be digested.

"Mother," he tried again; "if there wasn't any gentlefolks, wouldn't things belong to people like me and you, and if they did—"

"Lord sakes and *drat* the Boy!" Mrs. Caddles would say—she had with the help of a good memory become quite a florid and vigorous individuality since Mrs. Skinner died. "Since your poor dear grandma was took, there's no abiding you. Don't you arst no questions and you won't be told no lies. If once I was to start out answerin' you *serious*, y'r father 'd 'ave to go' and arst some one else for 'is supper—let alone finishing the washin'."

"All right, mother," he would say, after a wondering stare at her. "I didn't mean to worry."

And he would go on thinking.

**V.**

He was thinking too four years after, when the Vicar, now no longer ripe but over-ripe, saw him for the last time of all. You figure the old gentleman visibly a little older now, slacker in his girth, a little coarsened and a little weakened in his thought and speech, with a quivering shakiness in his hand and a quivering shakiness in his convictions, but his eye still bright and merry for all the trouble the Flood had caused his village and himself. He had been frightened at times and disturbed, but was he not alive still and the same still? and fifteen long years—a fair sample of eternity—had turned the trouble into use and wont.

“It was a disturbance, I admit,” he would say, “and things are different—different in many ways. There was a time when a boy could weed, but now a man must go out with axe and crowbar—in some places down by the thickets at least. And it’s a little strange still to us old-fashioned people for all this valley, even what used to be the river bed before they irrigated, to be under wheat—as it is this year—twenty-five feet high. They used the old-fashioned scythe here twenty years ago, and they would bring home the harvest on a wain—rejoicing—in a simple honest fashion. A little simple drunkenness, a little frank love-making, to conclude ... poor dear Lady Wondershoot—she didn’t like these Innovations. Very conservative, poor dear lady! A touch of the eighteenth century about her, I always said. Her language for example ... Bluff vigour ...

“She died comparatively poor. These big weeds got into her garden. She was not one of these gardening women, but she liked her garden in order—things growing where they were planted and as they were planted—under control ... The way things grew was unexpected—upset her ideas ... She didn’t like the perpetual invasion of this young monster—at last she began to fancy he was always gaping at her over her wall ... She didn’t like his being nearly as high as her house ... Jarred with her sense of proportion. Poor dear lady! I had hoped she would last my time. It was the big cockchafers we had for a year or so that decided her. They came from the giant larvae—nasty things as big as rats—in the valley turf ...

“And the ants no doubt weighed with her also.

“Since everything was upset and there was no peace and quietness anywhere now, she said she thought she might just as well be at Monte Carlo as anywhere else. And she went.

“She played pretty boldly, I’m told. Died in a hotel there. Very sad end... Exile... Not—not what one considers meet... A natural leader of our English people... Uprooted. So I...

“Yet after all,” harped the Vicar, “it comes to very little. A nuisance of course. Children cannot run about so freely as they used to do, what with ant bites and so forth. Perhaps it’s as well ... There used to be talk—as though this stuff would revolutionise everything ... But there is something that defies all these forces of the New ... I don’t know of course. I’m not one of your modern philosophers—explain everything with ether and atoms. Evolution. Rubbish like that. What I mean is something the ‘Ologies don’t include. Matter of reason—not understanding. Ripe wisdom. Human nature. *Aere perennius*. ... Call it what you will.”

And so at last it came to the last time.

The Vicar had no intimation of what lay so close upon him. He did his customary walk, over by Farthing Down, as he had done it for more than a score of years, and so to the place whence he would watch young Caddles. He did the rise over by the chalk-pit crest a little puffily—he had long since lost the Muscular Christian stride of early days; but Caddles was not at his work, and then, as he skirted the thicket of giant bracken that was beginning to obscure and overshadow the Hanger, he came upon the monster’s huge form seated on the hill—brooding as it were upon the world. Caddles’ knees were drawn up, his cheek was on his hand, his head a little aslant. He sat with his shoulder towards the Vicar, so that those perplexed eyes could not be seen. He must have been thinking very intently—at any rate he was sitting very still ...

He never turned round. He never knew that the Vicar, who had played so large a part in shaping his life, looked then at him for the very last of innumerable times—did not know even that he was there. (So it is so many partings happen.) The Vicar was struck at the time by the fact that, after all, no one on earth had the slightest idea of what this great monster thought about when he saw fit to rest from his labours. But he was too indolent to follow up that new theme that day; he fell back from its suggestion into his older grooves of thought.

“*Aere-perennius*,” he whispered, walking slowly homeward by a path that no longer ran straight athwart the turf after its former fashion, but wound circuitously to avoid new sprung tussocks of giant grass. “No! nothing is changed. Dimensions are nothing. The simple round, the common way—”

And that night, quite painlessly, and all unknowing, he himself went the common way—out of this Mystery of Change he had spent his life in denying.

They buried him in the churchyard of Cheasing Eyebright, near to the largest yew, and the modest tombstone bearing his epitaph—it ended with: *Ut in Principio, nunc est et semper*—was almost immediately hidden from the eye of man by a spread of giant, grey tasselled grass too stout for scythe or sheep, that came sweeping like a fog over the village out of the germinating moisture of the valley meadows in which the Food of the Gods had been working.

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### **BOOK III. — THE HARVEST OF THE FOOD.**

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#### **CHAPTER THE FIRST. — THE ALTERED WORLD.**

##### **I.**

Change played in its new fashion with the world for twenty years. To most men the new things came little by little and day by day, remarkably enough, but not so abruptly as to overwhelm. But to one man at least the full accumulation of those two decades of the Food's work was to be revealed suddenly and amazingly in one day. For our purpose it is convenient to take him for that one day and to tell something of the things he saw. This man was a convict, a prisoner for life—his crime is no concern of ours—whom the law saw fit to pardon after twenty years. One summer morning this poor wretch, who had left the world a young man of three-and-twenty, found himself thrust out again from the grey simplicity of toil and discipline, that had become his life, into a dazzling freedom. They had put unaccustomed clothes upon him; his hair had been growing for some weeks, and he had parted it now for some days, and there he stood, in a sort of shabby and clumsy newness of body and mind, blinking with his eyes and blinking indeed with his soul, *outside* again, trying to realise one incredible thing, that after all he was again for a little while in the world of life, and for all other incredible

things, totally unprepared. He was so fortunate as to have a brother who cared enough for their distant common memories to come and meet him and clasp his hand—a brother he had left a little lad, and who was now a bearded prosperous man—whose very eyes were unfamiliar. And together he and this stranger from his kindred came down into the town of Dover, saying little to one another and feeling many things.

They sat for a space in a public-house, the one answering the questions of the other about this person and that, reviving queer old points of view, brushing aside endless new aspects and new perspectives, and then it was time to go to the station and take the London train. Their names and the personal things they had to talk of do not matter to our story, but only the changes and all the strangeness that this poor returning soul found in the once familiar world.

In Dover itself he remarked little except the goodness of beer from pewter—never before had there been such a draught of beer, and it brought tears of gratitude to his eyes. “Beer’s as good as ever,” said he, believing it infinitely better....

It was only as the train rattled them past Folkestone that he could look out beyond his more immediate emotions, to see what had happened to the world. He peered out of the window. “It’s sunny,” he said for the twelfth time. “I couldn’t ha’ had better weather.” And then for the first time it dawned upon him that there were novel disproportions in the world. “Lord sakes,” he cried, sitting up and looking animated for the first time, “but them’s mortal great thissels growing out there on the bank by that broom. If so be they *be* thissels? Or ‘ave I been forgetting?” But they were thistles, and what he took for tall bushes of broom was the new grass, and amidst these things a company of British soldiers—red-coated as ever—was skirmishing in accordance with the directions of the drill book that had been partially revised after the Boer War. Then whack! into a tunnel, and then into Sandling Junction, which was now embedded and dark—its lamps were all alight—in a great thicket of rhododendron that had crept out of some adjacent gardens and grown enormously up the valley. There was a train of trucks on the Sandgate siding piled high with rhododendron logs, and here it was the returning citizen heard first of Boomfood.

As they sped out into a country again that seemed absolutely unchanged, the two brothers were hard at their explanations. The one was full of eager, dull questions; the other had never thought, had never troubled to see the thing as a single fact, and he was allusive and difficult to follow. “It’s this here Boomfood stuff,” he said, touching his bottom rock of knowledge. “Don’t you know? ‘Aven’t they told you—any of ‘em?”

Boomfood! You know—Boomfood. What all the election's about. Scientific sort of stuff. 'Asn't no one ever told you?"

He thought prison had made his brother a fearful duffer not to know that.

They made wide shots at each other by way of question and answer. Between these scraps of talk were intervals of window-gazing. At first the man's interest in things was vague and general. His imagination had been busy with what old so-and-so would say, how so-and-so would look, how he would say to all and sundry certain things that would present his "putting away" in a mitigated light. This Boomfood came in at first as it were a thing in an odd paragraph of the newspapers, then as a source of intellectual difficulty with his brother. But it came to him presently that Boomfood was persistently coming in upon any topic he began.

In those days the world was a patchwork of transition, so that this great new fact came to him in a series of shocks of contrast. The process of change had not been uniform; it had spread from one centre of distribution here and another centre there. The country was in patches: great areas where the Food was still to come, and areas where it was already in the soil and in the air, sporadic and contagious. It was a bold new motif creeping in among ancient and venerable airs.

The contrast was very vivid indeed along the line from Dover to London at that time. For a space they traversed just such a country-side as he had known since his childhood, the small oblongs of field, hedge-lined, of a size for pigmy horses to plough, the little roads three cart-widths wide, the elms and oaks and poplars dotting these fields about, little thickets of willow beside the streams; ricks of hay no higher than a giant's knees, dolls' cottages with diamond panes, brickfields, and straggling village streets, the larger houses of the petty great, flower-grown railway banks, garden-set stations, and all the little things of the vanished nineteenth century still holding out against Immensity. Here and there would be a patch of wind-sown, wind-tattered giant thistle defying the axe; here and there a ten-foot puff-ball or the ashen stems of some burnt-out patch of monster grass; but that was all there was to hint at the coming of the Food.

For a couple of score of miles there was nothing else to foreshadow in any way the strange bigness of the wheat and of the weeds that were hidden from him not a dozen miles from his route just over the hills in the Cheasing Eyebright valley. And then presently the traces of the Food would begin. The first striking thing was the great new viaduct at Tonbridge, where the swamp of the choked Medway (due to a giant variety of *Chara*) began in those days. Then again the little country, and then, as the petty

multitudinous immensity of London spread out under its haze, the traces of man's fight to keep out greatness became abundant and incessant.

In that south-eastern region of London at that time, and all about where Cossar and his children lived, the Food had become mysteriously insurgent at a hundred points; the little life went on amidst daily portents that only the deliberation of their increase, the slow parallel growth of usage to their presence, had robbed of their warning. But this returning citizen peered out to see for the first time the facts of the Food strange and predominant, scarred and blackened areas, big unsightly defences and preparations, barracks and arsenals that this subtle, persistent influence had forced into the life of men.

Here, on an ampler scale, the experience of the first Experimental Farm had been repeated time and again. It had been in the inferior and accidental things of life—under foot and in waste places, irregularly and irrelevantly—that the coming of a new force and new issues had first declared itself. There were great evil-smelling yards and enclosures where some invincible jungle of weed furnished fuel for gigantic machinery (little cockneys came to stare at its clangorous oiliness and tip the men a sixpence); there were roads and tracks for big motors and vehicles—roads made of the interwoven fibres of hypertrophied hemp; there were towers containing steam sirens that could yell at once and warn the world against any new insurgence of vermin, or, what was queerer, venerable church towers conspicuously fitted with a mechanical scream. There were little red-painted refuge huts and garrison shelters, each with its 300-yard rifle range, where the riflemen practised daily with soft-nosed ammunition at targets in the shape of monstrous rats.

Six times since the day of the Skinners there had been outbreaks of giant rats—each time from the south-west London sewers, and now they were as much an accepted fact there as tigers in the delta by Calcutta....

The man's brother had bought a paper in a heedless sort of way at Sandling, and at last this chanced to catch the eye of the released man. He opened the unfamiliar sheets—they seemed to him to be smaller, more numerous, and different in type from the papers of the times before—and he found himself confronted with innumerable pictures about things so strange as to be uninteresting, and with tall columns of printed matter whose headings, for the most part, were as unmeaning as though they had been written in a foreign tongue—"Great Speech by Mr. Caterham"; "The Boomfood Laws."

"Who's this here Caterham?" he asked, in an attempt to make conversation.

“*He’s* all right,” said his brother.

“Ah! Sort of politician, eh?”

“Goin’ to turn out the Government. Jolly well time he did.”

“Ah!” He reflected. “I suppose all the lot / used to know—Chamberlain, Rosebery—all that lot—*What?*”

His brother had grasped his wrist and pointed out of the window.

“That’s the Cossars!” The eyes of the released prisoner followed the finger’s direction and saw—

“My Gawd!” he cried, for the first time really overcome with amazement. The paper dropped into final forgottenness between his feet. Through the trees he could see very distinctly, standing in an easy attitude, the legs wide apart and the hand grasping a ball as if about to throw it, a gigantic human figure a good forty feet high. The figure glittered in the sunlight, clad in a suit of woven white metal and belted with a broad belt of steel. For a moment it focussed all attention, and then the eye was wrested to another more distant Giant who stood prepared to catch, and it became apparent that the whole area of that great bay in the hills just north of Sevenoaks had been scarred to gigantic ends.

A hugely banked entrenchment overhung the chalk pit, in which stood the house, a monstrous squat Egyptian shape that Cossar had built for his sons when the Giant Nursery had served its turn, and behind was a great dark shed that might have covered a cathedral, in which a spluttering incandescence came and went, and from out of which came a Titanic hammering to beat upon the ear. Then the attention leapt back to the giant as the great ball of iron-bound timber soared up out of his hand.

The two men stood up and stared. The ball seemed as big as a cask.

“Caught!” cried the man from prison, as a tree blotted out the thrower.

The train looked on these things only for the fraction of a minute and then passed behind trees into the Chislehurst tunnel. “My Gawd!” said the man from prison again, as the darkness closed about them. “Why! that chap was as ‘igh as a ‘ouse.”

“That’s them young Cossars,” said his brother, jerking his head allusively—“what all this trouble’s about....”

They emerged again to discover more siren-surmounted towers, more red huts, and then the clustering villas of the outer suburbs. The art of bill-sticking had lost nothing

in the interval, and from countless tall hoardings, from house ends, from palings, and a hundred such points of vantage came the polychromatic appeals of the great Boomfood election. "Caterham," "Boomfood," and "Jack the Giant-killer" again and again and again, and monstrous caricatures and distortions—a hundred varieties of misrepresentations of those great and shining figures they had passed so nearly only a few minutes before....