It was our affectation to be a little detached from the main stream of undergraduate life. We worked pretty hard, but by virtue of our beer, our socialism and suchlike heterodoxy, held ourselves to be differentiated from the swatting reading man. None of us, except Baxter, who was a rowing blue, a rather abnormal blue with an appetite for ideas, took games seriously enough to train, and on the other hand we intimated contempt for the rather mediocre, deliberately humorous, consciously gentlemanly and consciously wild undergraduate men who made up the mass of Cambridge life. After the manner of youth we were altogether too hard on our contemporaries. We battered our caps and tore our gowns lest they should seem new, and we despised these others extremely for doing exactly the same things; we had an idea of ourselves and resented beyond measure a similar weakness in these our brothers.

There was a type, or at least there seemed to us to be a type—I'm a little doubtful at times now whether after all we didn't create it—for which Hatherleigh invented the nickname the “Pinky Dinkys,” intending thereby both contempt and abhorrence in almost equal measure. The Pinky Dinky summarised all that we particularly did not want to be, and also, I now perceive, much of what we were and all that we secretly dreaded becoming.

But it is hard to convey the Pinky Dinky idea, for all that it meant so much to us. We spent one evening at least during that reading party upon the Pinky Dinky; we sat about our one fire after a walk in the rain—it was our only wet day—smoked our excessively virile pipes, and elaborated the natural history of the Pinky Dinky. We improvised a sort of Pinky Dinky litany, and Hatherleigh supplied deep notes for the responses.

“The Pinky Dinky extracts a good deal of amusement from life,” said some one.

“Damned prig!” said Hatherleigh.

“The Pinky Dinky arises in the Union and treats the question with a light gay touch. He makes the weird ones mad. But sometimes he cannot go on because of the amusement he extracts.”

“I want to shy books at the giggling swine,” said Hatherleigh.

“The Pinky Dinky says suddenly while he is making the tea, 'We're all being frightfully funny. It's time for you to say something now.'”

“The Pinky Dinky shakes his head and says: 'I'm afraid I shall never be a responsible being.' And he really IS frivolous.”

“Frivolous but not vulgar,” said Esmeer.

“Pinky Dinkys are chaps who've had their buds nipped,” said Hatherleigh. “They're Plebs and they know it. They haven't the Guts to get hold of things. And so they worry up all those silly little jokes of theirs to carry it off.”...

We tried bad ones for a time, viciously flavoured.

Pinky Dinkys are due to over-production of the type that ought to keep outfitters' shops. Pinky Dinkys would like to keep outfitters' shops with whimsy 'scriptions on the boxes and make your bill out funny, and not be snobs to customers, no!—not even if they had titles.”

“Every Pinky Dinky's people are rather good people, and better than most Pinky Dinky's people. But he does not put on side.”

“Pinky Dinkys become playful at the sight of women.”

“'Croquet's my game,' said the Pinky Dinky, and felt a man condescended.”

“But what the devil do they think they're up to, anyhow?” roared old Hatherleigh suddenly, dropping plump into bottomless despair.

We felt we had still failed to get at the core of the mystery of the Pinky Dinky.

We tried over things about his religion. “The Pinky Dinky goes to King's Chapel, and sits and feels in the dusk. Solemn things! Oh HUSH! He wouldn't tell you—”

“He COULDN'T tell you.”

“Religion is so sacred to him he never talks about it, never reads about it, never thinks about it. Just feels!”

“But in his heart of hearts, oh! ever so deep, the Pinky Dinky has a doubt—”

Some one protested.

“Not a vulgar doubt,” Esmeer went on, “but a kind of hesitation whether the Ancient of Days is really exactly what one would call good form.... There's a lot of horrid coarseness got into the world somehow. SOMEBODY put it there.... And anyhow there's no particular reason why a man should be seen about with Him. He's jolly Awful of course and all that—”

“The Pinky Dinky for all his fun and levity has a clean mind.”

“A thoroughly clean mind. Not like Esmeer's—the Pig!”

“If once he began to think about sex, how could he be comfortable at croquet?”

“It's their Damned Modesty,” said Hatherleigh suddenly, “that's what's the matter with the Pinky Dinky. It's Mental Cowardice dressed up as a virtue and taking the poor dears in. Cambridge is soaked with it; it's some confounded local bacillus. Like the thing that gives a flavour to Havana cigars. He comes up here to be made into a man and a ruler of the people, and he thinks it shows a nice disposition not to take on the job! How the Devil is a great Empire to be run with men like him?”

“All his little jokes and things,” said Esmeer regarding his feet on the fender, “it's just a nervous sniggering—because he's afraid.... Oxford's no better.”

“What's he afraid of?” said I.

“God knows!” exploded Hatherleigh and stared at the fire.

“LIFE!” said Esmeer. “And so in a way are we,” he added, and made a thoughtful silence for a time.

“I say,” began Carter, who was doing the Natural Science Tripos, “what is the adult form of the Pinky Dinky?”

But there we were checked by our ignorance of the world.

“What is the adult form of any of us?” asked Benton, voicing the thought that had arrested our flow.

3

I do not remember that we ever lifted our criticism to the dons and the organisation of the University. I think we took them for granted. When I look back at my youth I am always astonished by the multitude of things that we took for granted. It seemed to us that Cambridge was in the order of things, for all the world like having eyebrows or a vermiform appendix. Now with the larger scepticism of middle age I can entertain very fundamental doubts about these old universities. Indeed I had a scheme—

I do not see what harm I can do now by laying bare the purpose of the political combinations I was trying to effect.

My educational scheme was indeed the starting-point of all the big project of conscious public reconstruction at which I aimed. I wanted to build up a new educational machine altogether for the governing class out of a consolidated system of special public service schools. I meant to get to work upon this whatever office I was given in the new government. I could have begun my plan from the Admiralty or

the War Office quite as easily as from the Education Office. I am firmly convinced it is hopeless to think of reforming the old public schools and universities to meet the needs of a modern state, they send their roots too deep and far, the cost would exceed any good that could possibly be effected, and so I have sought a way round this invincible obstacle. I do think it would be quite practicable to side-track, as the Americans say, the whole system by creating hardworking, hard-living, modern and scientific boys' schools, first for the Royal Navy and then for the public service generally, and as they grew, opening them to the public without any absolute obligation to subsequent service. Simultaneously with this it would not be impossible to develop a new college system with strong faculties in modern philosophy, modern history, European literature and criticism, physical and biological science, education and sociology.

We could in fact create a new liberal education in this way, and cut the umbilicus of the classical languages for good and all. I should have set this going, and trusted it to correct or kill the old public schools and the Oxford and Cambridge tradition altogether. I had men in my mind to begin the work, and I should have found others. I should have aimed at making a hard-trained, capable, intellectually active, proud type of man. Everything else would have been made subservient to that. I should have kept my grip on the men through their vacation, and somehow or other I would have contrived a young woman to match them. I think I could have seen to it effectually enough that they didn't get at croquet and tennis with the vicarage daughters and discover sex in the Peeping Tom fashion I did, and that they realised quite early in life that it isn't really virile to reek of tobacco. I should have had military manoeuvres, training ships, aeroplane work, mountaineering and so forth, in the place of the solemn trivialities of games, and I should have fed and housed my men clean and very hard—where there wasn't any audit ale, no credit tradesmen, and plenty of high pressure douches....

I have revisited Cambridge and Oxford time after time since I came down, and so far as the Empire goes, I want to get clear of those two places....

Always I renew my old feelings, a physical oppression, a sense of lowness and dampness almost exactly like the feeling of an underground room where paper moulders and leaves the wall, a feeling of ineradicable contagion in the Gothic buildings, in the narrow ditch-like rivers, in those roads and roads of stuffy little villas. Those little villas have destroyed all the good of the old monastic system and none of its evil....

Some of the most charming people in the world live in them, but their collective effect is below the quality of any individual among them. Cambridge is a world of subdued tones, of excessively subtle humours, of prim conduct and free thinking; it fears the Parent, but it has no fear of God; it offers amidst surroundings that vary between disguises and antiquarian charm the inflammation of literature's purple draught; one hears there a peculiar thin scandal like no other scandal in the world—a covetous scandal—so that I am always reminded of Ibsen in Cambridge. In Cambridge and the plays of Ibsen alone does it seem appropriate for the heroine before the great crisis of life to "enter, take off her overshoes, and put her wet umbrella upon the writing desk."...

We have to make a new Academic mind for modern needs, and the last thing to make it out of, I am convinced, is the old Academic mind. One might as soon try to fake the old VICTORY at Portsmouth into a line of battleship again. Besides which the old Academic mind, like those old bathless, damp Gothic colleges, is much too delightful in its peculiar and distinctive way to damage by futile patching.

My heart warms to a sense of affectionate absurdity as I recall dear old Codger, surely the most "unleaderly" of men. No more than from the old Schoolmen, his kindred, could one get from him a School for Princes. Yet apart from his teaching he was as curious and adorable as a good Netsuke. Until quite recently he was a power in Cambridge, he could make and bar and destroy, and in a way he has become the quintessence of Cambridge in my thoughts.

I see him on his way to the morning's lecture, with his plump childish face, his round innocent eyes, his absurdly non-prehensile fat hand carrying his cap, his grey trousers braced up much too high, his feet a trifle inturned, and going across the great court with a queer tripping pace that seemed cultivated even to my naive undergraduate eye. Or I see him lecturing. He lectured walking up and down between the desks, talking in a fluting rapid voice, and with the utmost lucidity. If he could not walk up and down he could not lecture. His mind and voice had precisely the fluid quality of some clear subtle liquid; one felt it could flow round anything and overcome nothing. And its nimble eddies were wonderful! Or again I recall him drinking port with little muscular movements in his neck and cheek and chin and his brows knit—very judicial, very concentrated, preparing to say the apt just thing; it was the last thing he would have told a lie about.

When I think of Codger I am reminded of an inscription I saw on some occasion in Regent's Park above two eyes scarcely more limpidly innocent than his—"Born in the Menagerie." Never once since Codger began to display the early promise of

scholarship at the age of eight or more, had he been outside the bars. His utmost travel had been to lecture here and lecture there. His student phase had culminated in papers of quite exceptional brilliance, and he had gone on to lecture with a cheerful combination of wit and mannerism that had made him a success from the beginning. He has lectured ever since. He lectures still. Year by year he has become plumper, more rubicund and more and more of an item for the intelligent visitor to see. Even in my time he was pointed out to people as part of our innumerable enrichments, and obviously he knew it. He has become now almost the leading Character in a little donnish world of much too intensely appreciated Characters.

He boasted he took no exercise, and also of his knowledge of port wine. Of other wines he confessed quite frankly he had no “special knowledge.” Beyond these things he had little pride except that he claimed to have read every novel by a woman writer that had ever entered the Union Library. This, however, he held to be remarkable rather than ennobling, and such boasts as he made of it were tinged with playfulness. Certainly he had a scholar's knowledge of the works of Miss Marie Corelli, Miss Braddon, Miss Elizabeth Glyn and Madame Sarah Grand that would have astonished and flattered those ladies enormously, and he loved nothing so much in his hours of relaxation as to propound and answer difficult questions upon their books. Tusher of King's was his ineffectual rival in this field, their bouts were memorable and rarely other than glorious for Codger; but then Tusher spread himself too much, he also undertook to rehearse whole pages out of Bradshaw, and tell you with all the changes how to get from any station to any station in Great Britain by the nearest and cheapest routes....

Codger lodged with a little deaf innocent old lady, Mrs. Araminta Mergle, who was understood to be herself a very redoubtable Character in the Gyp-Bedder class; about her he related quietly absurd anecdotes. He displayed a marvellous invention in ascribing to her plausible expressions of opinion entirely identical in import with those of the Oxford and Harvard Pragmatists, against whom he waged a fierce obscure war....

It was Codger's function to teach me philosophy, philosophy! the intimate wisdom of things. He dealt in a variety of Hegelian stuff like nothing else in the world, but marvellously consistent with itself. It was a wonderful web he spun out of that queer big active childish brain that had never lusted nor hated nor grieved nor feared nor passionately loved,—a web of iridescent threads. He had luminous final theories about Love and Death and Immortality, odd matters they seemed for him to think about! and all his woven thoughts lay across my perception of the realities of things,

as flimsy and irrelevant and clever and beautiful, oh!—as a dew-wet spider's web slung in the morning sunshine across the black mouth of a gun....

4

All through those years of development I perceive now there must have been growing in me, slowly, irregularly, assimilating to itself all the phrases and forms of patriotism, diverting my religious impulses, utilising my esthetic tendencies, my dominating idea, the statesman's idea, that idea of social service which is the protagonist of my story, that real though complex passion for Making, making widely and greatly, cities, national order, civilisation, whose interplay with all those other factors in life I have set out to present. It was growing in me—as one's bones grow, no man intending it.

I have tried to show how, quite early in my life, the fact of disorderliness, the conception of social life as being a multitudinous confusion out of hand, came to me. One always of course simplifies these things in the telling, but I do not think I ever saw the world at large in any other terms. I never at any stage entertained the idea which sustained my mother, and which sustains so many people in the world,—the idea that the universe, whatever superficial discords it may present, is as a matter of fact “all right,” is being steered to definite ends by a serene and unquestionable God. My mother thought that Order prevailed, and that disorder was just incidental and foredoomed rebellion; I feel and have always felt that order rebels against and struggles against disorder, that order has an up-hill job, in gardens, experiments, suburbs, everything alike; from the very beginnings of my experience I discovered hostility to order, a constant escaping from control.

The current of living and contemporary ideas in which my mind was presently swimming made all in the same direction; in place of my mother's attentive, meticulous but occasionally extremely irascible Providence, the talk was all of the Struggle for Existence and the survival not of the Best—that was nonsense, but of the fittest to survive.

The attempts to rehabilitate Faith in the form of the Individualist's LAISSEZ FAIRE never won upon me. I disliked Herbert Spencer all my life until I read his autobiography, and then I laughed a little and loved him. I remember as early as the City Merchants' days how Britten and I scoffed at that pompous question-begging word “Evolution,” having, so to speak, found it out. Evolution, some illuminating talker had remarked at the Britten lunch table, had led not only to man, but to the liver-fluke and skunk, obviously it might lead anywhere; order came into things only through the struggling mind of man. That lit things wonderfully for us. When I went up to Cambridge I was perfectly clear that life was a various and splendid disorder of forces

that the spirit of man sets itself to tame. I have never since fallen away from that persuasion.

I do not think I was exceptionally precocious in reaching these conclusions and a sort of religious finality for myself by eighteen or nineteen. I know men and women vary very much in these matters, just as children do in learning to talk. Some will chatter at eighteen months and some will hardly speak until three, and the thing has very little to do with their subsequent mental quality. So it is with young people; some will begin their religious, their social, their sexual interests at fourteen, some not until far on in the twenties. Britten and I belonged to one of the precocious types, and Cossington very probably to another. It wasn't that there was anything priggish about any of us; we should have been prigs to have concealed our spontaneous interests and ape the theoretical boy.

The world of man centred for my imagination in London, it still centres there; the real and present world, that is to say, as distinguished from the wonder-lands of atomic and microscopic science and the stars and future time. I had travelled scarcely at all, I had never crossed the Channel, but I had read copiously and I had formed a very good working idea of this round globe with its mountains and wildernesses and forests and all the sorts and conditions of human life that were scattered over its surface. It was all alive, I felt, and changing every day; how it was changing, and the changes men might bring about, fascinated my mind beyond measure.

I used to find a charm in old maps that showed The World as Known to the Ancients, and I wish I could now without any suspicion of self-deception write down compactly the world as it was known to me at nineteen. So far as extension went it was, I fancy, very like the world I know now at forty-two; I had practically all the mountains and seas, boundaries and races, products and possibilities that I have now. But its intension was very different. All the interval has been increasing and deepening my social knowledge, replacing crude and second-hand impressions by felt and realised distinctions.

In 1895—that was my last year with Britten, for I went up to Cambridge in September—my vision of the world had much the same relation to the vision I have to-day that an ill-drawn daub of a mask has to the direct vision of a human face. Britten and I looked at our world and saw—what did we see? Forms and colours side by side that we had no suspicion were interdependent. We had no conception of the roots of things nor of the reaction of things. It did not seem to us, for example, that business had anything to do with government, or that money and means affected the heroic issues of war. There were no wagons in our war game, and where there were guns,

there it was assumed the ammunition was gathered together. Finance again was a sealed book to us; we did not so much connect it with the broad aspects of human affairs as regard it as a sort of intrusive nuisance to be earnestly ignored by all right-minded men. We had no conception of the quality of politics, nor how "interests" came into such affairs; we believed men were swayed by purely intellectual convictions and were either right or wrong, honest or dishonest (in which case they deserved to be shot), good or bad. We knew nothing of mental inertia, and could imagine the opinion of a whole nation changed by one lucid and convincing exposition. We were capable of the most incongruous transfers from the scroll of history to our own times, we could suppose Brixton ravaged and Hampstead burnt in civil wars for the succession to the throne, or Cheapside a lane of death and the front of the Mansion House set about with guillotines in the course of an accurately transposed French Revolution. We rebuilt London by Act of Parliament, and once in a mood of hygienic enterprise we transferred its population EN MASSE to the North Downs by an order of the Local Government Board. We thought nothing of throwing religious organisations out of employment or superseding all the newspapers by freely distributed bulletins. We could contemplate the possibility of laws abolishing whole classes; we were equal to such a dream as the peaceful and orderly proclamation of Communism from the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral, after the passing of a simply worded bill,—a close and not unnaturally an exciting division carrying the third reading. I remember quite distinctly evolving that vision. We were then fully fifteen and we were perfectly serious about it. We were not fools; it was simply that as yet we had gathered no experience at all of the limits and powers of legislation and conscious collective intention....

I think this statement does my boyhood justice, and yet I have my doubts. It is so hard now to say what one understood and what one did not understand. It isn't only that every day changed one's general outlook, but also that a boy fluctuates between phases of quite adult understanding and phases of tawdrily magnificent puerility. Sometimes I myself was in those tumbrils that went along Cheapside to the Mansion House, a Sydney Cartonesque figure, a white defeated Mirabean; sometimes it was I who sat judging and condemning and ruling (sleeping in my clothes and feeding very simply) the soul and autocrat of the Provisional Government, which occupied, of all inconvenient places! the General Post Office at St. Martin's-le-Grand!...

I cannot trace the development of my ideas at Cambridge, but I believe the mere physical fact of going two hours' journey away from London gave that place for the first time an effect of unity in my imagination. I got outside London. It became tangible instead of being a frame almost as universal as sea and sky.

At Cambridge my ideas ceased to live in a duologue; in exchange for Britten, with whom, however, I corresponded lengthily, stylishly and self-consciously for some years, I had now a set of congenial friends. I got talk with some of the younger dons, I learnt to speak in the Union, and in my little set we were all pretty busily sharpening each other's wits and correcting each other's interpretations. Cambridge made politics personal and actual. At City Merchants' we had had no sense of effective contact; we boasted, it is true, an under secretary and a colonial governor among our old boys, but they were never real to us; such distinguished sons as returned to visit the old school were allusive and pleasant in the best Pinky Dinky style, and pretended to be in earnest about nothing but our football and cricket, to mourn the abolition of "water," and find a shuddering personal interest in the ancient swishing block. At Cambridge I felt for the first time that I touched the thing that was going on. Real living statesmen came down to debate in the Union, the older dons had been their college intimates, their sons and nephews expounded them to us and made them real to us. They invited us to entertain ideas; I found myself for the first time in my life expected to read and think and discuss, my secret vice had become a virtue.

That combination-room world is at last larger and more populous and various than the world of schoolmasters. The Shoesmiths and Naylors who had been the aristocracy of City Merchants' fell into their place in my mind; they became an undistinguished mass on the more athletic side of Pinky Dinkyism, and their hostility to ideas and to the expression of ideas ceased to limit and trouble me. The brighter men of each generation stay up; these others go down to propagate their tradition, as the fathers of families, as mediocre professional men, as assistant masters in schools. Cambridge which perfects them is by the nature of things least oppressed by them,—except when it comes to a vote in Convocation.

We were still in those days under the shadow of the great Victorians. I never saw Gladstone (as I never set eyes on the old Queen), but he had resigned office only a year before I went up to Trinity, and the Combination Rooms were full of personal gossip about him and Disraeli and the other big figures of the gladiatorial stage of Parlimentary history, talk that leaked copiously into such sets as mine. The ceiling of our guest chamber at Trinity was glorious with the arms of Sir William Harcourt, whose Death Duties had seemed at first like a socialist dawn. Mr. Evesham we asked to come to the Union every year, Masters, Chamberlain and the old Duke of Devonshire; they did not come indeed, but their polite refusals brought us all, as it were, within personal touch of them. One heard of cabinet councils and meetings at country houses. Some of us, pursuing such interests, went so far as to read political memoirs and the novels of Disraeli and Mrs. Humphry Ward. From gossip, example and the

illustrated newspapers one learnt something of the way in which parties were split, coalitions formed, how permanent officials worked and controlled their ministers, how measures were brought forward and projects modified.

And while I was getting the great leading figures on the political stage, who had been presented to me in my schooldays not so much as men as the pantomimic monsters of political caricature, while I was getting them reduced in my imagination to the stature of humanity, and their motives to the quality of impulses like my own, I was also acquiring in my Tripos work a constantly developing and enriching conception of the world of men as a complex of economic, intellectual and moral processes....

5

Socialism is an intellectual Proteus, but to the men of my generation it came as the revolt of the workers. Rodbertus we never heard of and the Fabian Society we did not understand; Marx and Morris, the Chicago Anarchists, JUSTICE and Social Democratic Federation (as it was then) presented socialism to our minds. Hatherleigh was the leading exponent of the new doctrines in Trinity, and the figure upon his wall of a huge-muscled, black-haired toiler swaggering sledgehammer in hand across a revolutionary barricade, seemed the quintessence of what he had to expound. Landlord and capitalist had robbed and enslaved the workers, and were driving them quite automatically to inevitable insurrection. They would arise and the capitalist system would flee and vanish like the mists before the morning, like the dews before the sunrise, giving place in the most simple and obvious manner to an era of Right and Justice and Virtue and Well Being, and in short a Perfectly Splendid Time.

I had already discussed this sort of socialism under the guidance of Britten, before I went up to Cambridge. It was all mixed up with ideas about freedom and natural virtue and a great scorn for kings, titles, wealth and officials, and it was symbolised by the red ties we wore. Our simple verdict on existing arrangements was that they were “all wrong.” The rich were robbers and knew it, kings and princes were usurpers and knew it, religious teachers were impostors in league with power, the economic system was an elaborate plot on the part of the few to expropriate the many. We went about feeling scornful of all the current forms of life, forms that esteemed themselves solid, that were, we knew, no more than shapes painted on a curtain that was presently to be torn aside....

It was Hatherleigh's poster and his capacity for overstating things, I think, that first qualified my simple revolutionary enthusiasm. Perhaps also I had met with Fabian publications, but if I did I forget the circumstances. And no doubt my innate constructiveness with its practical corollary of an analytical treatment of the material

supplied, was bound to push me on beyond this melodramatic interpretation of human affairs.

I compared that Working Man of the poster with any sort of working man I knew. I perceived that the latter was not going to change, and indeed could not under any stimulus whatever be expected to change, into the former. It crept into my mind as slowly and surely as the dawn creeps into a room that the former was not, as I had at first rather glibly assumed, an "ideal," but a complete misrepresentation of the quality and possibilities of things.

I do not know now whether it was during my school-days or at Cambridge that I first began not merely to see the world as a great contrast of rich and poor, but to feel the massive effect of that multitudinous majority of people who toil continually, who are for ever anxious about ways and means, who are restricted, ill clothed, ill fed and ill housed, who have limited outlooks and continually suffer misadventures, hardships and distresses through the want of money. My lot had fallen upon the fringe of the possessing minority; if I did not know the want of necessities I knew shabbiness, and the world that let me go on to a university education intimated very plainly that there was not a thing beyond the primary needs that my stimulated imagination might demand that it would not be an effort for me to secure. A certain aggressive radicalism against the ruling and propertied classes followed almost naturally from my circumstances. It did not at first connect itself at all with the perception of a planless disorder in human affairs that had been forced upon me by the atmosphere of my upbringing, nor did it link me in sympathy with any of the profounder realities of poverty. It was a personal independent thing. The dingier people one saw in the back streets and lower quarters of Bromstead and Penge, the drift of dirty children, ragged old women, street loafers, grimy workers that made the social background of London, the stories one heard of privation and sweating, only joined up very slowly with the general propositions I was making about life. We could become splendidly eloquent about the social revolution and the triumph of the Proletariat after the Class war, and it was only by a sort of inspiration that it came to me that my bedder, a garrulous old thing with a dusty black bonnet over one eye and an ostentatiously clean apron outside the dark mysteries that clothed her, or the cheeky little ruffians who yelled papers about the streets, were really material to such questions.

Directly any of us young socialists of Trinity found ourselves in immediate contact with servants or cadgers or gyps or bedders or plumbers or navvies or cabmen or railway porters we became unconsciously and unthinkingly aristocrats. Our voices altered, our gestures altered. We behaved just as all the other men, rich or poor, swatters or sportsmen or Pinky Dinkys, behaved, and exactly as we were expected to behave. On

the whole it is a population of poor quality round about Cambridge, rather stunted and spiritless and very difficult to idealise. That theoretical Working Man of ours!—if we felt the clash at all we explained it, I suppose, by assuming that he came from another part of the country; Esmeer, I remember, who lived somewhere in the Fens, was very eloquent about the Cornish fishermen, and Hatherleigh, who was a Hampshire man, assured us we ought to know the Scottish miner. My private fancy was for the Lancashire operative because of his co-operative societies, and because what Lancashire thinks to-day England thinks to-morrow.... And also I had never been in Lancashire.

By little increments of realisation it was that the profounder verities of the problem of socialism came to me. It helped me very much that I had to go down to the Potteries several times to discuss my future with my uncle and guardian; I walked about and saw Bursley Wakes and much of the human aspects of organised industrialism at close quarters for the first time. The picture of a splendid Working Man cheated out of his innate glorious possibilities, and presently to arise and dash this scoundrelly and scandalous system of private ownership to fragments, began to give place to a limitless spectacle of inefficiency, to a conception of millions of people not organised as they should be, not educated as they should be, not simply prevented from but incapable of nearly every sort of beauty, mostly kindly and well meaning, mostly incompetent, mostly obstinate, and easily humbugged and easily diverted. Even the tragic and inspiring idea of Marx, that the poor were nearing a limit of painful experience, and awakening to a sense of intolerable wrongs, began to develop into the more appalling conception that the poor were simply in a witless uncomfortable inconclusive way—"muddling along"; that they wanted nothing very definitely nor very urgently, that mean fears enslaved them and mean satisfactions decoyed them, that they took the very gift of life itself with a spiritless lassitude, hoarding it, being rather anxious not to lose it than to use it in any way whatever.

The complete development of that realisation was the work of many years. I had only the first intimations at Cambridge. But I did have intimations. Most acutely do I remember the doubts that followed the visit of Chris Robinson. Chris Robinson was heralded by such heroic anticipations, and he was so entirely what we had not anticipated.

Hatherleigh got him to come, arranged a sort of meeting for him at Redmayne's rooms in King's, and was very proud and proprietorial. It failed to stir Cambridge at all profoundly. Beyond a futile attempt to screw up Hatherleigh made by some inexpert duffers who used nails instead of screws and gimlets, there was no attempt to rag. Next day Chris Robinson went and spoke at Bennett Hall in Newnham College, and

left Cambridge in the evening amidst the cheers of twenty men or so. Socialism was at such a low ebb politically in those days that it didn't even rouse men to opposition.

And there sat Chris under that flamboyant and heroic Worker of the poster, a little wrinkled grey-bearded apologetic man in ready-made clothes, with watchful innocent brown eyes and a persistent and invincible air of being out of his element. He sat with his stout boots tucked up under his chair, and clung to a teacup and saucer and looked away from us into the fire, and we all sat about on tables and chair-arms and windowsills and boxes and anywhere except upon chairs after the manner of young men. The only other chair whose seat was occupied was the one containing his knitted woollen comforter and his picturesque old beach-photographer's hat. We were all shy and didn't know how to take hold of him now we had got him, and, which was disconcertingly unanticipated, he was manifestly having the same difficulty with us. We had expected to be gripped.

“I'll not be knowing what to say to these Chaps,” he repeated with a north-country quality in his speech.

We made reassuring noises.

The Ambassador of the Workers stirred his tea earnestly through an uncomfortable pause.

“I'd best tell 'em something of how things are in Lancashire, what with the new machines and all that,” he speculated at last with red reflections in his thoughtful eyes.

We had an inexcusable dread that perhaps he would make a mess of the meeting.

But when he was no longer in the unaccustomed meshes of refined conversation, but speaking with an audience before him, he became a different man. He declared he would explain to us just exactly what socialism was, and went on at once to an impassioned contrast of social conditions. “You young men,” he said “come from homes of luxury; every need you feel is supplied—”

We sat and stood and sprawled about him, occupying every inch of Redmayne's floor space except the hearthrug-platform, and we listened to him and thought him over. He was the voice of wrongs that made us indignant and eager. We forgot for a time that he had been shy and seemed not a little incompetent, his provincial accent became a beauty of his earnest speech, we were carried away by his indignations. We looked with shining eyes at one another and at the various dons who had dropped in and were striving to maintain a front of judicious severity. We felt more and more that social

injustice must cease, and cease forthwith. We felt we could not sleep upon it. At the end we clapped and murmured our applause and wanted badly to cheer.

Then like a lancet stuck into a bladder came the heckling. Denson, that indolent, liberal-minded sceptic, did most of the questioning. He lay contorted in a chair, with his ugly head very low, his legs crossed and his left boot very high, and he pointed his remarks with a long thin hand and occasionally adjusted the unstable glasses that hid his watery eyes. “I don't want to carp,” he began. “The present system, I admit, stands condemned. Every present system always HAS stood condemned in the minds of intelligent men. But where it seems to me you get thin, is just where everybody has been thin, and that's when you come to the remedy.”

“Socialism,” said Chris Robinson, as if it answered everything, and Hatherleigh said “Hear! Hear!” very resolutely.

“I suppose I OUGHT to take that as an answer,” said Denson, getting his shoulder-blades well down to the seat of his chair; “but I don't. I don't, you know. It's rather a shame to cross-examine you after this fine address of yours”—Chris Robinson on the hearthrug made acquiescent and inviting noises—“but the real question remains how exactly are you going to end all these wrongs? There are the administrative questions. If you abolish the private owner, I admit you abolish a very complex and clumsy way of getting businesses run, land controlled and things in general administered, but you don't get rid of the need of administration, you know.”

“Democracy,” said Chris Robinson.

“Organised somehow,” said Denson. “And it's just the How perplexes me. I can quite easily imagine a socialist state administered in a sort of scrambling tumult that would be worse than anything we have got now.

“Nothing could be worse than things are now,” said Chris Robinson. “I have seen little children—”

“I submit life on an ill-provisioned raft, for example, could easily be worse—or life in a beleagured town.”

Murmurs.

They wrangled for some time, and it had the effect upon me of coming out from the glow of a good matinee performance into the cold daylight of late afternoon. Chris Robinson did not shine in conflict with Denson; he was an orator and not a dialectician, and he missed Denson's points and displayed a disposition to plunge

into untimely pathos and indignation. And Denson hit me curiously hard with one of his shafts. “Suppose,” he said, “you found yourself prime minister—”

I looked at Chris Robinson, bright-eyed and his hair a little ruffled and his whole being rhetorical, and measured him against the huge machine of government muddled and mysterious. Oh! but I was perplexed!

And then we took him back to Hatherleigh's rooms and drank beer and smoked about him while he nursed his knee with hairy wristed hands that protruded from his flannel shirt, and drank lemonade under the cartoon of that emancipated Worker, and we had a great discursive talk with him.

“Eh! you should see our big meetings up north?” he said.

Denson had ruffled him and worried him a good deal, and ever and again he came back to that discussion. “It's all very easy for your learned men to sit and pick holes,” he said, “while the children suffer and die. They don't pick holes up north. They mean business.”

He talked, and that was the most interesting part of it all, of his going to work in a factory when he was twelve—“when you Chaps were all with your mammies “—and how he had educated himself of nights until he would fall asleep at his reading.

“It's made many of us keen for all our lives,” he remarked, “all that clemming for education. Why! I longed all through one winter to read a bit of Darwin. I must know about this Darwin if I die for it, I said. And I could no' get the book.”

Hatherleigh made an enthusiastic noise and drank beer at him with round eyes over the mug.

“Well, anyhow I wasted no time on Greek and Latin,” said Chris Robinson. “And one learns to go straight at a thing without splitting straws. One gets hold of the Elementals.”

(Well, did they? That was the gist of my perplexity.)

“One doesn't quibble,” he said, returning to his rankling memory of Denson, “while men decay and starve.”

“But suppose,” I said, suddenly dropping into opposition, “the alternative is to risk a worse disaster—or do something patently futile.”

“I don't follow that,” said Chris Robinson. “We don't propose anything futile, so far as I can see.”

The prevailing force in my undergraduate days was not Socialism but Kiplingism. Our set was quite exceptional in its socialistic professions. And we were all, you must understand, very distinctly Imperialists also, and professed a vivid sense of the “White Man's Burden.”

It is a little difficult now to get back to the feelings of that period; Kipling has since been so mercilessly and exhaustively mocked, criticised and torn to shreds;—never was a man so violently exalted and then, himself assisting, so relentlessly called down. But in the middle nineties this spectacled and moustached little figure with its heavy chin and its general effect of vehement gesticulation, its wild shouts of boyish enthusiasm for effective force, its lyric delight in the sounds and colours, in the very odours of empire, its wonderful discovery of machinery and cotton waste and the under officer and the engineer, and “shop” as a poetic dialect, became almost a national symbol. He got hold of us wonderfully, he filled us with tinkling and haunting quotations, he stirred Britten and myself to futile imitations, he coloured the very idiom of our conversation. He rose to his climax with his “Recessional,” while I was still an undergraduate.

What did he give me exactly?

He helped to broaden my geographical sense immensely, and he provided phrases for just that desire for discipline and devotion and organised effort the Socialism of our time failed to express, that the current socialist movement still fails, I think, to express. The sort of thing that follows, for example, tore something out of my inmost nature and gave it a shape, and I took it back from him shaped and let much of the rest of him, the tumult and the bullying, the hysteria and the impatience, the incoherence and inconsistency, go uncriticised for the sake of it:—

“Keep ye the Law—be swift in all obedience—Clear the land of evil, drive the road and bridge the ford, Make ye sure to each his own That he reap where he hath sown; By the peace among Our peoples let men know we serve the Lord!”

And then again, and for all our later criticism, this sticks in my mind, sticks there now as quintessential wisdom:

“The 'eathen in 'is blindness bows down to wood an' stone;

'E don't obey no orders unless they is 'is own;

'E keeps 'is side-arms awful: 'e leaves 'em all about

An' then comes up the regiment an' pokes the 'eathen out.

All along o' dirtiness, all along o' mess,

All along o' doin' things rather-more-or-less,

All along of abby-nay, kul, an' hazar-ho,

Mind you keep your rifle an' yourself jus' so!"

It is after all a secondary matter that Kipling, not having been born and brought up in Bromstead and Penge, and the war in South Africa being yet in the womb of time, could quite honestly entertain the now remarkable delusion that England had her side-arms at that time kept anything but "awful." He learnt better, and we all learnt with him in the dark years of exasperating and humiliating struggle that followed, and I do not see that we fellow learners are justified in turning resentfully upon him for a common ignorance and assumption....

South Africa seems always painted on the back cloth of my Cambridge memories. How immense those disasters seemed at the time, disasters our facile English world has long since contrived in any edifying or profitable sense to forget! How we thrilled to the shouting newspaper sellers as the first false flush of victory gave place to the realisation of defeat. Far away there our army showed itself human, mortal and human in the sight of all the world, the pleasant officers we had imagined would change to wonderful heroes at the first crackling of rifles, remained the pleasant, rather incompetent men they had always been, failing to imagine, failing to plan and co-operate, failing to grip. And the common soldiers, too, they were just what our streets and country-side had made them, no sudden magic came out of the war bugles for them. Neither splendid nor disgraceful were they,—just ill-trained and fairly plucky and wonderfully good-tempered men—paying for it. And how it lowered our vitality all that first winter to hear of Nicholson's Nek, and then presently close upon one another, to realise the bloody waste of Magersfontein, the shattering retreat from Stormberg, Colenso—Colenso, that blundering battle, with White, as it seemed, in Ladysmith near the point of surrender! and so through the long unfolding catalogue of bleak disillusionments, of aching, unconcealed anxiety lest worse should follow. To advance upon your enemy singing about his lack of cleanliness and method went out of fashion altogether! The dirty retrogressive Boer vanished from our scheme of illusion.

All through my middle Cambridge period, the guns boomed and the rifles crackled away there on the veldt, and the horsemen rode and the tale of accidents and blundering went on. Men, mules, horses, stores and money poured into South Africa, and the convalescent wounded streamed home. I see it in my memory as if I had looked at it through a window instead of through the pages of the illustrated papers; I recall as if I had been there the wide open spaces, the ragged hillsides, the open order attacks of helmeted men in khaki, the scarce visible smoke of the guns, the wrecked trains in great lonely places, the burnt isolated farms, and at last the blockhouses and the fences of barbed wire uncoiling and spreading for endless miles across the desert, netting the elusive enemy until at last, though he broke the meshes again and again, we had him in the toils. If one's attention strayed in the lecture-room it wandered to those battle-fields.

And that imagined panorama of war unfolds to an accompaniment of yelling newsboys in the narrow old Cambridge streets, of the flicker of papers hastily bought and torn open in the twilight, of the doubtful reception of doubtful victories, and the insensate rejoicings at last that seemed to some of us more shameful than defeats....

7

A book that stands out among these memories, that stimulated me immensely so that I forced it upon my companions, half in the spirit of propaganda and half to test it by their comments, was Meredith's ONE OF OUR CONQUERORS. It is one of the books that have made me. In that I got a supplement and corrective of Kipling. It was the first detached and adverse criticism of the Englishman I had ever encountered. It must have been published already nine or ten years when I read it. The country had paid no heed to it, had gone on to the expensive lessons of the War because of the dull aversion our people feel for all such intimations, and so I could read it as a book justified. The war endorsed its every word for me, underlined each warning indication of the gigantic dangers that gathered against our system across the narrow seas. It discovered Europe to me, as watching and critical.

But while I could respond to all its criticisms of my country's intellectual indolence, of my country's want of training and discipline and moral courage, I remember that the idea that on the continent there were other peoples going ahead of us, mentally alert while we fumbled, disciplined while we slouched, aggressive and preparing to bring our Imperial pride to a reckoning, was extremely novel and distasteful to me. It set me worrying of nights. It put all my projects for social and political reconstruction upon a new uncomfortable footing. It made them no longer merely desirable but urgent. Instead of pride and the love of making one might own to a baser motive. Under

Kipling's sway I had a little forgotten the continent of Europe, treated it as a mere envious echo to our own world-wide display. I began now to have a disturbing sense as it were of busy searchlights over the horizon....

One consequence of the patriotic chagrin Meredith produced in me was an attempt to belittle his merit. “It isn't a good novel, anyhow,” I said.

The charge I brought against it was, I remember, a lack of unity. It professed to be a study of the English situation in the early nineties, but it was all deflected, I said, and all the interest was confused by the story of Victor Radnor's fight with society to vindicate the woman he had loved and never married. Now in the retrospect and with a mind full of bitter enlightenment, I can do Meredith justice, and admit the conflict was not only essential but cardinal in his picture, that the terrible inflexibility of the rich aunts and the still more terrible claim of Mrs. Burman Radnor, the “infernal punctilio,” and Dudley Sowerby's limitations, were the central substance of that inalertness the book set itself to assail. So many things have been brought together in my mind that were once remotely separated. A people that will not valiantly face and understand and admit love and passion can understand nothing whatever. But in those days what is now just obvious truth to me was altogether outside my range of comprehension....

8

As I seek to recapitulate the interlacing growth of my apprehension of the world, as I flounder among the half-remembered developments that found me a crude schoolboy and left me a man, there comes out, as if it stood for all the rest, my first holiday abroad. That did not happen until I was twenty-two. I was a fellow of Trinity, and the Peace of Vereeniging had just been signed.

I went with a man named Willersley, a man some years senior to myself, who had just missed a fellowship and the higher division of the Civil Service, and who had become an enthusiastic member of the London School Board, upon which the cumulative vote and the support of the “advanced” people had placed him. He had, like myself, a small independent income that relieved him of any necessity to earn a living, and he had a kindred craving for social theorising and some form of social service. He had sought my acquaintance after reading a paper of mine (begotten by the visit of Chris Robinson) on the limits of pure democracy. It had marched with some thoughts of his own.

We went by train to Spiez on the Lake of Thun, then up the Gemmi, and thence with one or two halts and digressions and a little modest climbing we crossed over by the

Antrona pass (on which we were benighted) into Italy, and by way of Domo D'ossola and the Santa Maria Maggiore valley to Cannobio, and thence up the lake to Locarno (where, as I shall tell, we stayed some eventful days) and so up the Val Maggia and over to Airolo and home.

As I write of that long tramp of ours, something of its freshness and enlargement returns to me. I feel again the faint pleasant excitement of the boat train, the trampling procession of people with hand baggage and laden porters along the platform of the Folkestone pier, the scarcely perceptible swaying of the moored boat beneath our feet. Then, very obvious and simple, the little emotion of standing out from the homeland and seeing the long white Kentish cliffs recede. One walked about the boat doing one's best not to feel absurdly adventurous, and presently a movement of people directed one's attention to a white lighthouse on a cliff to the east of us, coming up suddenly; and then one turned to scan the little different French coast villages, and then, sliding by in a pale sunshine came a long wooden pier with oddly dressed children upon it, and the clustering town of Boulogne.

One took it all with the outward calm that became a young man of nearly three and twenty, but one was alive to one's finger-tips with pleasing little stimulations. The custom house examination excited one, the strangeness of a babble in a foreign tongue; one found the French of City Merchants' and Cambridge a shy and viscous flow, and then one was standing in the train as it went slowly through the rail-laid street to Boulogne Ville, and one looked out at the world in French, porters in blouses, workmen in enormous purple trousers, police officers in peaked caps instead of helmets and romantically cloaked, big carts, all on two wheels instead of four, green shuttered casements instead of sash windows, and great numbers of neatly dressed women in economical mourning.

“Oh! there's a priest!” one said, and was betrayed into suchlike artless cries.

It was a real other world, with different government and different methods, and in the night one was roused from uneasy slumbers and sat blinking and surly, wrapped up in one's couverture and with one's oreiller all awry, to encounter a new social phenomenon, the German official, so different in manner from the British; and when one woke again after that one had come to Bale, and out one tumbled to get coffee in Switzerland....

I have been over that route dozens of times since, but it still revives a certain lingering youthfulness, a certain sense of cheerful release in me.

I remember that I and Willersley became very sociological as we ran on to Spiez, and made all sorts of generalisations from the steeply sloping fields on the hillsides, and from the people we saw on platforms and from little differences in the way things were done.

The clean prosperity of Bale and Switzerland, the big clean stations, filled me with patriotic misgivings, as I thought of the vast dirtiness of London, the mean dirtiness of Cambridgeshire. It came to me that perhaps my scheme of international values was all wrong, that quite stupendous possibilities and challenges for us and our empire might be developing here—and I recalled Meredith's Skepsey in France with a new understanding.

Willersley had dressed himself in a world-worn Norfolk suit of greenish grey tweeds that ended unfamiliarly at his rather impending, spectacled, intellectual visage. I didn't, I remember, like the contrast of him with the drilled Swiss and Germans about us. Convict coloured stockings and vast hobnail boots finished him below, and all his luggage was a borrowed rucksac that he had tied askew. He did not want to shave in the train, but I made him at one of the Swiss stations—I dislike these Oxford slovenlinesses—and then confound him! he cut himself and bled....

Next morning we were breathing a thin exhilarating air that seemed to have washed our very veins to an incredible cleanliness, and eating hard-boiled eggs in a vast clear space of rime-edged rocks, snow-mottled, above a blue-gashed glacier. All about us the monstrous rock surfaces rose towards the shining peaks above, and there were winding moraines from which the ice had receded, and then dark clustering fir trees far below.

I had an extraordinary feeling of having come out of things, of being outside.

“But this is the round world!” I said, with a sense of never having perceived it before; “this is the round world!”

9

That holiday was full of big comprehensive effects; the first view of the Rhone valley and the distant Valaisian Alps, for example, which we saw from the shoulder of the mountain above the Gemmi, and the early summer dawn breaking over Italy as we moved from our night's crouching and munched bread and chocolate and stretched our stiff limbs among the tumbled and precipitous rocks that hung over Lake Cingolo, and surveyed the winding tiring rocky track going down and down to Antronapiano.

And our thoughts were as comprehensive as our impressions. Willersley's mind abounded in historical matter; he had an inaccurate abundant habit of topographical reference; he made me see and trace and see again the Roman Empire sweep up these winding valleys, and the coming of the first great Peace among the warring tribes of men....

In the retrospect each of us seems to have been talking about our outlook almost continually. Each of us, you see, was full of the same question, very near and altogether predominant to us, the question: “What am I going to do with my life?” He saw it almost as importantly as I, but from a different angle, because his choice was largely made and mine still hung in the balance.

“I feel we might do so many things,” I said, “and everything that calls one, calls one away from something else.”

Willersley agreed without any modest disavowals.

“We have got to think out,” he said, “just what we are and what we are up to. We've got to do that now. And then—it's one of those questions it is inadvisable to reopen subsequently.”

He beamed at me through his glasses. The sententious use of long words was a playful habit with him, that and a slight deliberate humour, habits occasional Extension Lecturing was doing very much to intensify.

“You've made your decision?”

He nodded with a peculiar forward movement of his head.

“How would you put it?”

“Social Service—education. Whatever else matters or doesn't matter, it seems to me there is one thing we MUST have and increase, and that is the number of people who can think a little—and have”—he beamed again—“an adequate sense of causation.”

“You're sure it's worth while.”

“For me—certainly. I don't discuss that any more.”

“I don't limit myself too narrowly,” he added. “After all, the work is all one. We who know, we who feel, are building the great modern state, joining wall to wall and way to way, the new great England rising out of the decaying old... we are the real statesmen—I like that use of 'statesmen.'...”

“Yes,” I said with many doubts. “Yes, of course....”

Willersley is middle-aged now, with silver in his hair and a deepening benevolence in his always amiable face, and he has very fairly kept his word. He has lived for social service and to do vast masses of useful, undistinguished, fertilising work. Think of the days of arid administrative plodding and of contention still more arid and unrewarded, that he must have spent! His little affectations of gesture and manner, imitative affectations for the most part, have increased, and the humorous beam and the humorous intonations have become a thing he puts on every morning like an old coat. His devotion is mingled with a considerable whimsicality, and they say he is easily flattered by subordinates and easily offended into opposition by colleagues; he has made mistakes at times and followed wrong courses, still there he is, a flat contradiction to all the ordinary doctrine of motives, a man who has foregone any chances of wealth and profit, foregone any easier paths to distinction, foregone marriage and parentage, in order to serve the community. He does it without any fee or reward except his personal self-satisfaction in doing this work, and he does it without any hope of future joys and punishments, for he is an implacable Rationalist. No doubt he idealises himself a little, and dreams of recognition. No doubt he gets his pleasure from a sense of power, from the spending and husbanding of large sums of public money, and from the inevitable proprietorship he must feel in the fair, fine, well-ordered schools he has done so much to develop. “But for me,” he can say, “there would have been a Job about those diagrams, and that subject or this would have been less ably taught.”...

The fact remains that for him the rewards have been adequate, if not to content at any rate to keep him working. Of course he covets the notice of the world he has served, as a lover covets the notice of his mistress. Of course he thinks somewhere, somewhen, he will get credit. Only last year I heard some men talking of him, and they were noting, with little mean smiles, how he had shown himself self-conscious while there was talk of some honorary degree-giving or other; it would, I have no doubt, please him greatly if his work were to flower into a crimson gown in some Academic parterre. Why shouldn't it? But that is incidental vanity at the worst; he goes on anyhow. Most men don't.

But we had our walk twenty years and more ago now. He was oldish even then as a young man, just as he is oldish still in middle age. Long may his industrious elderliness flourish for the good of the world! He lectured a little in conversation then; he lectures more now and listens less, toilsomely disentangling what you already understand, giving you in detail the data you know; these are things like callosities that come from a man's work.

Our long three weeks' talk comes back to me as a memory of ideas and determinations slowly growing, all mixed up with a smell of wood smoke and pine woods and huge precipices and remote gleams of snow-fields and the sound of cascading torrents rushing through deep gorges far below. It is mixed, too, with gossips with waitresses and fellow travellers, with my first essays in colloquial German and Italian, with disputes about the way to take, and other things that I will tell of in another section. But the white passion of human service was our dominant theme. Not simply perhaps nor altogether unselfishly, but quite honestly, and with at least a frequent self-forgetfulness, did we want to do fine and noble things, to help in their developing, to lessen misery, to broaden and exalt life. It is very hard—perhaps it is impossible—to present in a page or two the substance and quality of nearly a month's conversation, conversation that is casual and discursive in form, that ranges carelessly from triviality to immensity, and yet is constantly resuming a constructive process, as workmen on a wall loiter and jest and go and come back, and all the while build.

We got it more and more definite that the core of our purpose beneath all its varied aspects must needs be order and discipline. “Muddle,” said I, “is the enemy.” That remains my belief to this day. Clearness and order, light and foresight, these things I know for Good. It was muddle had just given us all the still freshly painful disasters and humiliations of the war, muddle that gives us the visibly sprawling disorder of our cities and industrial country-side, muddle that gives us the waste of life, the limitations, wretchedness and unemployment of the poor. Muddle! I remember myself quoting Kipling—

“All along o' dirtiness, all along o' mess,

All along o' doin' things rather-more-or-less.”

“We build the state,” we said over and over again. “That is what we are for—servants of the new reorganisation!”

We planned half in earnest and half Utopianising, a League of Social Service.

We talked of the splendid world of men that might grow out of such unpaid and ill-paid work as we were setting our faces to do. We spoke of the intricate difficulties, the monstrous passive resistances, the hostilities to such a development as we conceived our work subserved, and we spoke with that underlying confidence in the invincibility of the causes we adopted that is natural to young and scarcely tried men.

We talked much of the detailed life of politics so far as it was known to us, and there Willersley was more experienced and far better informed than I; we discussed possible combinations and possible developments, and the chances of some great constructive movement coming from the heart-searchings the Boer war had occasioned. We would sink to gossip—even at the Suetonius level. Willersley would decline towards illuminating anecdotes that I capped more or less loosely from my private reading. We were particularly wise, I remember, upon the management of newspapers, because about that we knew nothing whatever. We perceived that great things were to be done through newspapers. We talked of swaying opinion and moving great classes to massive action.

Men are egotistical even in devotion. All our splendid projects were thickset with the first personal pronoun. We both could write, and all that we said in general terms was reflected in the particular in our minds; it was ourselves we saw, and no others, writing and speaking that moving word. We had already produced manuscript and passed the initiations of proof reading; I had been a frequent speaker in the Union, and Willersley was an active man on the School Board. Our feet were already on the lower rungs that led up and up. He was six and twenty, and I twenty-two. We intimated our individual careers in terms of bold expectation. I had prophetic glimpses of walls and hoardings clamorous with “Vote for Remington,” and Willersley no doubt saw himself chairman of this committee and that, saying a few slightly ironical words after the declaration of the poll, and then sitting friendly beside me on the government benches. There was nothing impossible in such dreams. Why not the Board of Education for him? My preference at that time wavered between the Local Government Board—I had great ideas about town-planning, about revisions of municipal areas and re-organised internal transit—and the War Office. I swayed strongly towards the latter as the journey progressed. My educational bias came later.

The swelling ambitions that have tramped over Alpine passes! How many of them, like mine, have come almost within sight of realisation before they failed?

There were times when we posed like young gods (of unassuming exterior), and times when we were full of the absurdest little solicitudes about our prospects. There were times when one surveyed the whole world of men as if it was a little thing at one's feet, and by way of contrast I remember once lying in bed—it must have been during this holiday, though I cannot for the life of me fix where—and speculating whether perhaps some day I might not be a K. C. B., Sir Richard Remington, K. C. B., M. P.

But the big style prevailed….

We could not tell from minute to minute whether we were planning for a world of solid reality, or telling ourselves fairy tales about this prospect of life. So much seemed possible, and everything we could think of so improbable. There were lapses when it seemed to me I could never be anything but just the entirely unimportant and undistinguished young man I was for ever and ever. I couldn't even think of myself as five and thirty.

Once I remember Willersley going over a list of failures, and why they had failed—but young men in the twenties do not know much about failures.

10

Willersley and I professed ourselves Socialists, but by this time I knew my Rodbertus as well as my Marx, and there was much in our socialism that would have shocked Chris Robinson as much as anything in life could have shocked him. Socialism as a simple democratic cry we had done with for ever. We were socialists because Individualism for us meant muddle, meant a crowd of separated, undisciplined little people all obstinately and ignorantly doing things jarringly, each one in his own way. “Each,” I said quoting words of my father's that rose apt in my memory, “snarling from his own little bit of property, like a dog tied to a cart's tail.”

“Essentially,” said Willersley, “essentially we're for conscription, in peace and war alike. The man who owns property is a public official and has to behave as such. That's the gist of socialism as I understand it.”

“Or be dismissed from his post,” I said, “and replaced by some better sort of official. A man's none the less an official because he's irresponsible. What he does with his property affects people just the same. Private! No one is really private but an outlaw....”

Order and devotion were the very essence of our socialism, and a splendid collective vigour and happiness its end. We projected an ideal state, an organised state as confident and powerful as modern science, as balanced and beautiful as a body, as beneficent as sunshine, the organised state that should end muddle for ever; it ruled all our ideals and gave form to all our ambitions.

Every man was to be definitely related to that, to have his predominant duty to that. Such was the England renewed we had in mind, and how to serve that end, to subdue undisciplined worker and undisciplined wealth to it, and make the Scientific Commonweal, King, was the continuing substance of our intercourse.

11

Every day the wine of the mountains was stronger in our blood, and the flush of our youth deeper. We would go in the morning sunlight along some narrow Alpine mule-path shouting large suggestions for national reorganisation, and weighing considerations as lightly as though the world was wax in our hands. “Great England,” we said in effect, over and over again, “and we will be among the makers! England renewed! The country has been warned; it has learnt its lesson. The disasters and anxieties of the war have sunk in. England has become serious.... Oh! there are big things before us to do; big enduring things!”

One evening we walked up to the loggia of a little pilgrimage church, I forget its name, that stands out on a conical hill at the head of a winding stair above the town of Locarno. Down below the houses clustered amidst a confusion of heat-bitten greenery. I had been sitting silently on the parapet, looking across to the purple mountain masses where Switzerland passes into Italy, and the drift of our talk seemed suddenly to gather to a head.

I broke into speech, giving form to the thoughts that had been accumulating. My words have long since passed out of my memory, the phrases of familiar expression have altered for me, but the substance remains as clear as ever. I said how we were in our measure emperors and kings, men undriven, free to do as we pleased with life; we classed among the happy ones, our bread and common necessities were given us for nothing, we had abilities,—it wasn't modesty but cowardice to behave as if we hadn't—and Fortune watched us to see what we might do with opportunity and the world.

“There are so many things to do, you see,” began Willersley, in his judicial lecturer's voice.

“So many things we may do,” I interrupted, “with all these years before us.... We're exceptional men. It's our place, our duty, to do things.”

“Here anyhow,” I said, answering the faint amusement of his face; “I've got no modesty. Everything conspires to set me up. Why should I run about like all those grubby little beasts down there, seeking nothing but mean little vanities and indulgencies—and then take credit for modesty? I KNOW I am capable. I KNOW I have imagination. Modesty! I know if I don't attempt the very biggest things in life I am a damned shirk. The very biggest! Somebody has to attempt them. I feel like a loaded gun that is only a little perplexed because it has to find out just where to aim itself....”

The lake and the frontier villages, a white puff of steam on the distant railway to Luino, the busy boats and steamers trailing triangular wakes of foam, the long vista eastward

towards battlemented Bellinzona, the vast mountain distances, now tinged with sunset light, behind this nearer landscape, and the southward waters with remote coast towns shining dimly, waters that merged at last in a luminous golden haze, made a broad panoramic spectacle. It was as if one surveyed the world,—and it was like the games I used to set out upon my nursery floor. I was exalted by it; I felt larger than men. So kings should feel.

That sense of largeness came to me then, and it has come to me since, again and again, a splendid intimation or a splendid vanity. Once, I remember, when I looked at Genoa from the mountain crest behind the town and saw that multitudinous place in all its beauty of width and abundance and clustering human effort, and once as I was steaming past the brown low hills of Staten Island towards the towering vigour and clamorous vitality of New York City, that mood rose to its quintessence. And once it came to me, as I shall tell, on Dover cliffs. And a hundred times when I have thought of England as our country might be, with no wretched poor, no wretched rich, a nation armed and ordered, trained and purposeful amidst its vales and rivers, that emotion of collective ends and collective purposes has returned to me. I felt as great as humanity. For a brief moment I was humanity, looking at the world I had made and had still to make....

12

And mingled with these dreams of power and patriotic service there was another series of a different quality and a different colour, like the antagonistic colour of a shot silk. The white life and the red life, contrasted and interchanged, passing swiftly at a turn from one to another, and refusing ever to mingle peacefully one with the other. I was asking myself openly and distinctly: what are you going to do for the world? What are you going to do with yourself? and with an increasing strength and persistence Nature in spite of my averted attention was asking me in penetrating undertones: what are you going to do about this other fundamental matter, the beauty of girls and women and your desire for them?

I have told of my sisterless youth and the narrow circumstances of my upbringing. It made all women-kind mysterious to me. If it had not been for my Staffordshire cousins I do not think I should have known any girls at all until I was twenty. Of Staffordshire I will tell a little later. But I can remember still how through all those ripening years, the thought of women's beauty, their magic presence in the world beside me and the unknown, untried reactions of their intercourse, grew upon me and grew, as a strange presence grows in a room when one is occupied by other things. I busied myself and pretended to be wholly occupied, and there the woman stood, full half of life

neglected, and it seemed to my averted mind sometimes that she was there clad and dignified and divine, and sometimes Aphrodite shining and commanding, and sometimes that Venus who stoops and allures.

This travel abroad seemed to have released a multitude of things in my mind; the clear air, the beauty of the sunshine, the very blue of the glaciers made me feel my body and quickened all those disregarded dreams. I saw the sheathed beauty of women's forms all about me, in the cheerful waitresses at the inns, in the pedestrians one encountered in the tracks, in the chance fellow travellers at the hotel tables. "Confound it!" said I, and talked all the more zealously of that greater England that was calling us.

I remember that we passed two Germans, an old man and a tall fair girl, father and daughter, who were walking down from Saas. She came swinging and shining towards us, easy and strong. I worshipped her as she approached.

"Gut Tag!" said Willersley, removing his hat.

"Morgen!" said the old man, saluting.

I stared stockishly at the girl, who passed with an indifferent face.

That sticks in my mind as a picture remains in a room, it has kept there bright and fresh as a thing seen yesterday, for twenty years....

I flirted hesitatingly once or twice with comely serving girls, and was a little ashamed lest Willersley should detect the keen interest I took in them, and then as we came over the pass from Santa Maria Maggiore to Cannobio, my secret preoccupation took me by surprise and flooded me and broke down my pretences.

The women in that valley are very beautiful—women vary from valley to valley in the Alps and are plain and squat here and divinities five miles away—and as we came down we passed a group of five or six of them resting by the wayside. Their burthens were beside them, and one like Ceres held a reaping hook in her brown hand. She watched us approaching and smiled faintly, her eyes at mine.

There was some greeting, and two of them laughed together.

We passed.

"Glorious girls they were," said Willersley, and suddenly an immense sense of boredom enveloped me. I saw myself striding on down that winding road, talking of politics and parties and bills of parliament and all sorts of dessicated things. That road

seemed to me to wind on for ever down to dust and infinite dreariness. I knew it for a way of death. Reality was behind us.

Willersley set himself to draw a sociological moral. “I'm not so sure,” he said in a voice of intense discriminations, “after all, that agricultural work isn't good for women.”

“Damn agricultural work!” I said, and broke out into a vigorous cursing of all I held dear. “Fettered things we are!” I cried. “I wonder why I stand it!”

“Stand what?”

“Why don't I go back and make love to those girls and let the world and you and everything go hang? Deep breasts and rounded limbs—and we poor emasculated devils go tramping by with the blood of youth in us!...”

“I'm not quite sure, Remington,” said Willersley, looking at me with a deliberately quaint expression over his glasses, “that picturesque scenery is altogether good for your morals.”

That fever was still in my blood when we came to Locarno.

13

Along the hot and dusty lower road between the Orrido of Traffiume and Cannobio Willersley had developed his first blister. And partly because of that and partly because there was a bag at the station that gave us the refreshment of clean linen and partly because of the lazy lower air into which we had come, we decided upon three or four days' sojourn in the Empress Hotel.

We dined that night at a table-d'hote, and I found myself next to an Englishwoman who began a conversation that was resumed presently in the hotel lounge. She was a woman of perhaps thirty-three or thirty-four, slenderly built, with a warm reddish skin and very abundant fair golden hair, the wife of a petulant-looking heavy-faced man of perhaps fifty-three, who smoked a cigar and dozed over his coffee and presently went to bed. “He always goes to bed like that,” she confided startlingly. “He sleeps after all his meals. I never knew such a man to sleep.”

Then she returned to our talk, whatever it was.

We had begun at the dinner table with itineraries and the usual topographical talk, and she had envied our pedestrian travel. “My husband doesn't walk,” she said. “His heart is weak and he cannot manage the hills.”

There was something friendly and adventurous in her manner; she conveyed she liked me, and when presently Willersley drifted off to write letters our talk sank at once to easy confidential undertones. I felt enterprising, and indeed it is easy to be daring with people one has never seen before and may never see again. I said I loved beautiful scenery and all beautiful things, and the pointing note in my voice made her laugh. She told me I had bold eyes, and so far as I can remember I said she made them bold. “Blue they are,” she remarked, smiling archly. “I like blue eyes.” Then I think we compared ages, and she said she was the Woman of Thirty, “George Moore's Woman of Thirty.”

I had not read George Moore at the time, but I pretended to understand.

That, I think, was our limit that evening. She went to bed, smiling good-night quite prettily down the big staircase, and I and Willersley went out to smoke in the garden. My head was full of her, and I found it necessary to talk about her. So I made her a problem in sociology. “Who the deuce are these people?” I said, “and how do they get a living? They seem to have plenty of money. He strikes me as being—Willersley, what is a drysalter? I think he's a retired drysalter.”

Willersley theorised while I thought of the woman and that provocative quality of dash she had displayed. The next day at lunch she and I met like old friends. A huge mass of private thinking during the interval had been added to our effect upon one another. We talked for a time of insignificant things.

“What do you do,” she asked rather quickly, “after lunch? Take a siesta?”

“Sometimes,” I said, and hung for a moment eye to eye.

We hadn't a doubt of each other, but my heart was beating like a steamer propeller when it lifts out of the water.

“Do you get a view from your room?” she asked after a pause.

“It's on the third floor, Number seventeen, near the staircase. My friend's next door.”

She began to talk of books. She was interested in Christian Science, she said, and spoke of a book. I forget altogether what that book was called, though I remember to this day with the utmost exactness the purplish magenta of its cover. She said she would lend it to me and hesitated.

Willersley wanted to go for an expedition across the lake that afternoon, but I refused. He made some other proposals that I rejected abruptly. “I shall write in my room,” I said.

“Why not write down here?”

“I shall write in my room,” I snarled like a thwarted animal, and he looked at me curiously. “Very well,” he said; “then I'll make some notes and think about that order of ours out under the magnolias.”

I hovered about the lounge for a time buying postcards and feverishly restless, watching the movements of the other people. Finally I went up to my room and sat down by the windows, staring out. There came a little tap at the unlocked door and in an instant, like the go of a taut bowstring, I was up and had it open.

“Here is that book,” she said, and we hesitated.

“COME IN!” I whispered, trembling from head to foot.

“You're just a boy,” she said in a low tone.

I did not feel a bit like a lover, I felt like a burglar with the safe-door nearly opened. “Come in,” I said almost impatiently, for anyone might be in the passage, and I gripped her wrist and drew her towards me.

“What do you mean?” she answered with a faint smile on her lips, and awkward and yielding.

I shut the door behind her, still holding her with one hand, then turned upon her—she was laughing nervously—and without a word drew her to me and kissed her. And I remember that as I kissed her she made a little noise almost like the purring miaow with which a cat will greet one and her face, close to mine, became solemn and tender.

She was suddenly a different being from the discontented wife who had tapped a moment since on my door, a woman transfigured....

That evening I came down to dinner a monster of pride, for behold! I was a man. I felt myself the most wonderful and unprecedented of adventurers. It was hard to believe that any one in the world before had done as much. My mistress and I met smiling, we carried things off admirably, and it seemed to me that Willersley was the dullest old dog in the world. I wanted to give him advice. I wanted to give him derisive pokes. After dinner and coffee in the lounge I was too excited and hilarious to go to bed, I made him come with me down to the cafe under the arches by the pier, and there drank beer and talked extravagant nonsense about everything under the sun, in order not to talk about the happenings of the afternoon. All the time something shouted within me: “I am a man! I am a man!”...

“What shall we do to-morrow?” said he.

“I'm for loafing,” I said. “Let's row in the morning and spend to-morrow afternoon just as we did to-day.”

“They say the church behind the town is worth seeing.”

“We'll go up about sunset; that's the best time for it. We can start about five.”

We heard music, and went further along the arcade to discover a place where girls in operatic Swiss peasant costume were singing and dancing on a creaking, protesting little stage. I eyed their generous display of pink neck and arm with the seasoned eye of a man who has lived in the world. Life was perfectly simple and easy, I felt, if one took it the right way.

Next day Willersley wanted to go on, but I delayed. Altogether I kept him back four days. Then abruptly my mood changed, and we decided to start early the following morning. I remember, though a little indistinctly, the feeling of my last talk with that woman whose surname, odd as it may seem, either I never learnt or I have forgotten. (Her christian name was Milly.) She was tired and rather low-spirited, and disposed to be sentimental, and for the first time in our intercourse I found myself liking her for the sake of her own personality. There was something kindly and generous appearing behind the veil of naive and uncontrolled sensuality she had worn. There was a curious quality of motherliness in her attitude to me that something in my nature answered and approved. She didn't pretend to keep it up that she had yielded to my initiative. “I've done you no harm,” she said a little doubtfully, an odd note for a man's victim! And, “we've had a good time. You have liked me, haven't you?”

She interested me in her lonely dissatisfied life; she was childless and had no hope of children, and her husband was the only son of a rich meat salesman, very mean, a mighty smoker—“he reeks of it,” she said, “always”—and interested in nothing but golf, billiards (which he played very badly), pigeon shooting, convivial Free Masonry and Stock Exchange punting. Mostly they drifted about the Riviera. Her mother had contrived her marriage when she was eighteen. They were the first samples I ever encountered of the great multitude of functionless property owners which encumbers modern civilisation—but at the time I didn't think much of that aspect of them....

I tell all this business as it happened without comment, because I have no comment to make. It was all strange to me, strange rather than wonderful, and, it may be, some dream of beauty died for ever in those furtive meetings; it happened to me, and I could scarcely have been more irresponsible in the matter or controlled events less if I had been suddenly pushed over a cliff into water. I swam, of course—finding myself in it.

Things tested me, and I reacted, as I have told. The bloom of my innocence, if ever there had been such a thing, was gone. And here is the remarkable thing about it; at the time and for some days I was over-weeningly proud; I have never been so proud before or since; I felt I had been promoted to virility; I was unable to conceal my exultation from Willersley. It was a mood of shining shameless ungracious self-approval. As he and I went along in the cool morning sunshine by the rice fields in the throat of the Val Maggia a silence fell between us.

“You know?” I said abruptly,—“about that woman?”

Willersley did not answer for a moment. He looked at me over the corner of his spectacles.

“Things went pretty far?” he asked.

“Oh! all the way!” and I had a twinge of fatuous pride in my unpremeditated achievement.

“She came to your room?”

I nodded.

“I heard her. I heard her whispering.... The whispering and rustling and so on. I was in my room yesterday.... Any one might have heard you.”

I went on with my head in the air.

“You might have been caught, and that would have meant endless trouble. You might have incurred all sorts of consequences. What did you know about her?... We have wasted four days in that hot close place. When we found that League of Social Service we were talking about,” he said with a determined eye upon me, “chastity will be first among the virtues prescribed.”

“I shall form a rival league,” I said a little damped. “I'm hanged if I give up a single desire in me until I know why.”

He lifted his chin and stared before him through his glasses at nothing. “There are some things,” he said, “that a man who means to work—to do great public services—MUST turn his back upon. I'm not discussing the rights or wrongs of this sort of thing. It happens to be the conditions we work under. It will probably always be so. If you want to experiment in that way, if you want even to discuss it,—out you go from political life. You must know that's so.... You're a strange man, Remington, with a kind of kink in you. You've a sort of force. You might happen to do immense things.... Only—”

He stopped. He had said all that he had forced himself to say.

“I mean to take myself as I am,” I said. “I'm going to get experience for humanity out of all my talents—and bury nothing.”

Willersley twisted his face to its humorous expression. “I doubt if sexual proclivities,” he said drily, “come within the scope of the parable.”

I let that go for a little while. Then I broke out. “Sex!” said I, “is a fundamental thing in life. We went through all this at Trinity. I'm going to look at it, experience it, think about it—and get it square with the rest of life. Career and Politics must take their chances of that. It's part of the general English slackness that they won't look this in the face. Gods! what a muffled time we're coming out of! Sex means breeding, and breeding is a necessary function in a nation. The Romans broke up upon that. The Americans fade out amidst their successes. Eugenics—”

“THAT wasn't Eugenics,” said Willersley.

“It was a woman,” I said after a little interval, feeling oddly that I had failed altogether to answer him, and yet had a strong dumb case against him.

BOOK THE SECOND: MARGARET

CHAPTER THE FIRST ~~ MARGARET IN STAFFORDSHIRE

1

I must go back a little way with my story. In the previous book I have described the kind of education that happens to a man of my class nowadays, and it has been convenient to leap a phase in my experience that I must now set out at length. I want to tell in this second hook how I came to marry, and to do that I must give something of the atmosphere in which I first met my wife and some intimations of the forces that went to her making. I met her in Staffordshire while I was staying with that uncle of whom I have already spoken, the uncle who sold my father's houses and settled my mother in Penge. Margaret was twenty then and I was twenty-two.

It was just before the walking tour in Switzerland that opened up so much of the world to me. I saw her once, for an afternoon, and circumstances so threw her up in relief that I formed a very vivid memory of her. She was in the sharpest contrast with the industrial world about her; she impressed me as a dainty blue flower might do, come upon suddenly on a clinker heap. She remained in my mind at once a perplexing interrogation and a symbol....

But first I must tell of my Staffordshire cousins and the world that served as a foil for her.

2

I first went to stay with my cousins when I was an awkward youth of sixteen, wearing deep mourning for my mother. My uncle wanted to talk things over with me, he said, and if he could, to persuade me to go into business instead of going up to Cambridge.

I remember that visit on account of all sorts of novel things, but chiefly, I think, because it was the first time I encountered anything that deserves to be spoken of as wealth. For the first time in my life I had to do with people who seemed to have endless supplies of money, unlimited good clothes, numerous servants; whose daily life was made up of things that I had hitherto considered to be treats or exceptional extravagances. My cousins of eighteen and nineteen took cabs, for instance, with the utmost freedom, and travelled first-class in the local trains that run up and down the district of the Five Towns with an entire unconsciousness of the magnificence, as it seemed to me, of such a proceeding.

The family occupied a large villa in Newcastle, with big lawns before it and behind, a shrubbery with quite a lot of shrubs, a coach house and stable, and subordinate dwelling-places for the gardener and the coachman. Every bedroom contained a gas heater and a canopied brass bedstead, and had a little bathroom attached equipped with the porcelain baths and fittings my uncle manufactured, bright and sanitary and stamped with his name, and the house was furnished throughout with chairs and tables in bright shining wood, soft and prevalently red Turkish carpets, cosy corners, curtained archways, gold-framed landscapes, overmantels, a dining-room sideboard like a palace with a large Tantalus, and electric light fittings of a gay and expensive quality. There was a fine billiard-room on the ground floor with three comfortable sofas and a rotating bookcase containing an excellent collection of the English and American humorists from THREE MEN IN A BOAT to the penultimate Mark Twain. There was also a conservatory opening out of the dining-room, to which the gardener brought potted flowers in their season....

My aunt was a little woman with a scared look and a cap that would get over one eye, not very like my mother, and nearly eight years her junior; she was very much concerned with keeping everything nice, and unmercifully bullied by my two cousins, who took after their father and followed the imaginations of their own hearts. They were tall, dark, warmly flushed girls handsome rather than pretty. Gertrude, the eldest and tallest, had eyes that were almost black; Sibyl was of a stouter build, and her eyes, of which she was shamelessly proud, were dark blue. Sibyl's hair waved, and Gertrude's was severely straight. They treated me on my first visit with all the contempt of the adolescent girl for a boy a little younger and infinitely less expert in the business of life than herself. They were very busy with the writings of notes and certain mysterious goings and comings of their own, and left me very much to my own devices. Their speech in my presence was full of unfathomable allusions. They were the sort of girls who will talk over and through an uninitiated stranger with the pleasantest sense of superiority.

I met them at breakfast and at lunch and at the half-past six o'clock high tea that formed the third chief meal of the day. I heard them rattling off the compositions of Chaminade and Moskowski, with great decision and effect, and hovered on the edge of tennis foursomes where it was manifest to the dullest intelligence that my presence was unnecessary. Then I went off to find some readable book in the place, but apart from miscellaneous popular novels, some veterinary works, a number of comic books, old bound volumes of THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS and a large, popular illustrated History of England, there was very little to be found. My aunt talked to me in a casual feeble way, chiefly about my mother's last illness. The two had seen very little of each other for many years; she made no secret of it that the ineligible qualities of my father were the cause of the estrangement. The only other society in the house during the day was an old and rather decayed Skye terrier in constant conflict with what were no doubt imaginary fleas. I took myself off for a series of walks, and acquired a considerable knowledge of the scenery and topography of the Potteries.

It puzzled my aunt that I did not go westward, where it was country-side and often quite pretty, with hedgerows and fields and copses and flowers. But always I went eastward, where in a long valley industrialism smokes and sprawls. That was the stuff to which I turned by nature, to the human effort, and the accumulation and jar of men's activities. And in such a country as that valley social and economic relations were simple and manifest. Instead of the limitless confusion of London's population, in which no man can trace any but the most slender correlation between rich and poor, in which everyone seems disconnected and adrift from everyone, you can see here the works, the potbank or the ironworks or what not, and here close at hand the

congested, meanly-housed workers, and at a little distance a small middle-class quarter, and again remoter, the big house of the employer. It was like a very simplified diagram—after the untraceable confusion of London.

I prowled alone, curious and interested, through shabby back streets of mean little homes; I followed canals, sometimes canals of mysteriously heated waters with ghostly wisps of steam rising against blackened walls or a distant prospect of dustbin-fed vegetable gardens, I saw the women pouring out from the potbanks, heard the hooters summoning the toilers to work, lost my way upon slag heaps as big as the hills of the south country, dodged trains at manifestly dangerous level crossings, and surveyed across dark intervening spaces, the flaming uproar, the gnome-like activities of iron foundries. I heard talk of strikes and rumours of strikes, and learnt from the columns of some obscure labour paper I bought one day, of the horrors of the lead poisoning that was in those days one of the normal risks of certain sorts of pottery workers. Then back I came, by the ugly groaning and clanging steam train of that period, to my uncle's house and lavish abundance of money and more or less furtive flirtations and the tinkle of Moskowski and Chaminade. It was, I say, diagrammatic. One saw the expropriator and the expropriated—as if Marx had arranged the picture. It was as jumbled and far more dingy and disastrous than any of the confusions of building and development that had surrounded my youth at Bromstead and Penge, but it had a novel quality of being explicable. I found great virtue in the word “exploitation.”

There stuck in my mind as if it was symbolical of the whole thing the twisted figure of a man, whose face had been horribly scalded—I can't describe how, except that one eye was just expressionless white—and he ground at an organ bearing a card which told in weak and bitterly satirical phrasing that he had been scalded by the hot water from the tuyeres of the blast furnace of Lord Pandram's works. He had been scalded and quite inadequately compensated and dismissed. And Lord Pandram was worth half a million.

That upturned sightless white eye of his took possession of my imagination. I don't think that even then I was swayed by any crude melodramatic conception of injustice. I was quite prepared to believe the card wasn't a punctiliously accurate statement of fact, and that a case could be made out for Lord Pandram. Still there in the muddy gutter, painfully and dreadfully, was the man, and he was smashed and scalded and wretched, and he ground his dismal hurdygurdy with a weary arm, calling upon Heaven and the passer-by for help, for help and some sort of righting—one could not imagine quite what. There he was as a fact, as a by-product of the system that heaped

my cousins with trinkets and provided the comic novels and the abundant cigars and spacious billiard-room of my uncle's house. I couldn't disconnect him and them.

My uncle on his part did nothing to conceal the state of war that existed between himself and his workers, and the mingled contempt and animosity he felt from them.

3

Prosperity had overtaken my uncle. So quite naturally he believed that every man who was not as prosperous as he was had only himself to blame. He was rich and he had left school and gone into his father's business at fifteen, and that seemed to him the proper age at which everyone's education should terminate. He was very anxious to dissuade me from going up to Cambridge, and we argued intermittently through all my visit.

I had remembered him as a big and buoyant man, striding destructively about the nursery floor of my childhood, and saluting my existence by slaps, loud laughter, and questions about half herrings and half eggs subtly framed to puzzle and confuse my mind. I didn't see him for some years until my father's death, and then he seemed rather smaller, though still a fair size, yellow instead of red and much less radiantly aggressive. This altered effect was due not so much to my own changed perspectives, I fancy, as to the facts that he was suffering for continuous cigar smoking, and being taken in hand by his adolescent daughters who had just returned from school.

During my first visit there was a perpetual series of—the only word is rows, between them and him. Up to the age of fifteen or thereabouts, he had maintained his ascendancy over them by simple old-fashioned physical chastisement. Then after an interlude of a year it had dawned upon them that power had mysteriously departed from him. He had tried stopping their pocket money, but they found their mother financially amenable; besides which it was fundamental to my uncle's attitude that he should give them money freely. Not to do so would seem like admitting a difficulty in making it. So that after he had stopped their allowances for the fourth time Sybil and Gertrude were prepared to face beggary without a qualm. It had been his pride to give them the largest allowance of any girls at the school, not even excepting the granddaughter of Fladden the Borax King, and his soul recoiled from this discipline as it had never recoiled from the ruder method of the earlier phase. Both girls had developed to a high pitch in their mutual recriminations a gift for damaging retort, and he found it an altogether deadlier thing than the power of the raised voice that had always cowed my aunt. Whenever he became heated with them, they frowned as if involuntarily, drew in their breath sharply, said: “Daddy, you really must not say—” and

corrected his pronunciation. Then, at a great advantage, they resumed the discussion....

My uncle's views about Cambridge, however, were perfectly clear and definite. It was waste of time and money. It was all damned foolery. Did they make a man a better business man? Not a bit of it. He gave instances. It spoilt a man for business by giving him “false ideas.” Some men said that at college a man formed useful friendships. What use were friendships to a business man? He might get to know lords, but, as my uncle pointed out, a lord's requirements in his line of faience were little greater than a common man's. If college introduced him to hotel proprietors there might be something in it. Perhaps it helped a man into Parliament, Parliament still being a confused retrogressive corner in the world where lawyers and suchlike sheltered themselves from the onslaughts of common-sense behind a fog of Latin and Greek and twaddle and tosh; but I wasn't the sort to go into Parliament, unless I meant to be a lawyer. Did I mean to be a lawyer? It cost no end of money, and was full of uncertainties, and there were no judges nor great solicitors among my relations. “Young chaps think they get on by themselves,” said my uncle. “It isn't so. Not unless they take their coats off. I took mine off before I was your age by nigh a year.”

We were at cross purposes from the outset, because I did not think men lived to make money; and I was obtuse to the hints he was throwing out at the possibilities of his own potbank, not willfully obtuse, but just failing to penetrate his meaning. Whatever City Merchants had or had not done for me, Flack, Topham and old Gates had certainly barred my mistaking the profitable production and sale of lavatory basins and bathroom fittings for the highest good. It was only upon reflection that it dawned upon me that the splendid chance for a young fellow with my uncle, “me, having no son of my own,” was anything but an illustration for comparison with my own chosen career.

I still remember very distinctly my uncle's talk,—he loved to speak “reet Staffordshire”—his rather flabby face with the mottled complexion that told of crude ill-regulated appetites, his clumsy gestures—he kept emphasising his points by prodding at me with his finger—the ill-worn, costly, grey tweed clothes, the watch chain of plain solid gold, and soft felt hat thrust back from his head. He tackled me first in the garden after lunch, and then tried to raise me to enthusiasm by taking me to his potbank and showing me its organisation, from the dusty grinding mills in which whitened men worked and coughed, through the highly ventilated glazing room in which strangely masked girls looked ashamed of themselves,—“They'll risk death, the fools, to show their faces to a man,” said my uncle, quite audibly—to the firing kilns

and the glazing kilns, and so round the whole place to the railway siding and the gratifying spectacle of three trucks laden with executed orders.

Then we went up a creaking outside staircase to his little office, and he showed off before me for a while, with one or two subordinates and the telephone.

“None of your Gas,” he said, “all this. It's Real every bit of it. Hard cash and hard glaze.”

“Yes,” I said, with memories of a carelessly read pamphlet in my mind, and without any satirical intention, “I suppose you MUST use lead in your glazes?”

Whereupon I found I had tapped the ruling grievance of my uncle's life. He hated leadless glazes more than he hated anything, except the benevolent people who had organised the agitation for their use. “Leadless glazes ain't only fit for buns,” he said. “Let me tell you, my boy—”

He began in a voice of bland persuasiveness that presently warmed to anger, to explain the whole matter. I hadn't the rights of the matter at all. Firstly, there was practically no such thing as lead poisoning. Secondly, not everyone was liable to lead poisoning, and it would be quite easy to pick out the susceptible types—as soon as they had it—and put them to other work. Thirdly, the evil effects of lead poisoning were much exaggerated. Fourthly, and this was in a particularly confidential undertone, many of the people liked to get lead poisoning, especially the women, because it caused abortion. I might not believe it, but he knew it for a fact. Fifthly, the work-people simply would not learn the gravity of the danger, and would eat with unwashed hands, and incur all sorts of risks, so that as my uncle put it: “the fools deserve what they get.” Sixthly, he and several associated firms had organised a simple and generous insurance scheme against lead-poisoning risks. Seventhly, he never wearied in rational (as distinguished from excessive, futile and expensive) precautions against the disease. Eighthly, in the ill-equipped shops of his minor competitors lead poisoning was a frequent and virulent evil, and people had generalised from these exceptional cases. The small shops, he hazarded, looking out of the cracked and dirty window at distant chimneys, might be advantageously closed....

“But what's the good of talking?” said my uncle, getting off the table on which he had been sitting. “Seems to me there'll come a time when a master will get fined if he don't run round the works blowing his girls noses for them. That's about what it'll come to.”

He walked to the black mantelpiece and stood on the threadbare rug, and urged me not to be misled by the stories of prejudiced and interested enemies of our national industries.

“They'll get a strike one of these days, of employers, and then we'll see a bit,” he said. “They'll drive Capital abroad and then they'll whistle to get it back again.”...

He led the way down the shaky wooden steps and cheered up to tell me of his way of checking his coal consumption. He exchanged a ferocious greeting with one or two workpeople, and so we came out of the factory gates into the ugly narrow streets, paved with a peculiarly hard diapered brick of an unpleasing inky-blue colour, and bordered with the mean and squalid homes of his workers. Doors stood open and showed grimy interiors, and dirty ill-clad children played in the kennel.

We passed a sickly-looking girl with a sallow face, who dragged her limbs and peered at us dimly with painful eyes. She stood back, as partly blinded people will do, to allow us to pass, although there was plenty of room for us.

I glanced back at her.

“THAT'S ploombism,” said my uncle casually.

“What?” said I.

“Ploombism. And the other day I saw a fool of a girl, and what d'you think? She'd got a basin that hadn't been fired, a cracked piece of biscuit it was, up on the shelf over her head, just all over glaze, killing glaze, man, and she was putting up her hand if you please, and eating her dinner out of it. Got her dinner in it!

“Eating her dinner out of it,” he repeated in loud and bitter tones, and punched me hard in the ribs.

“And then they comes to THAT—and grumbles. And the fools up in Westminster want you to put in fans here and fans there—the Longton fools have.... And then eating their dinners out of it all the time!”...

At high tea that night—my uncle was still holding out against evening dinner—Sibyl and Gertrude made what was evidently a concerted demand for a motor-car.

“You've got your mother's brougham,” he said, “that's good enough for you.” But he seemed shaken by the fact that some Burslem rival was launching out with the new invention. “He spoils his girls,” he remarked. “He's a fool,” and became thoughtful.

Afterwards he asked me to come to him into his study; it was a room with a writing-desk and full of pieces of earthenware and suchlike litter, and we had our great row about Cambridge.

“Have you thought things over, Dick?” he said.

“I think I'll go to Trinity, Uncle,” I said firmly. “I want to go to Trinity. It is a great college.”

He was manifestly chagrined. “You're a fool,” he said.

I made no answer.

“You're a damned fool,” he said. “But I suppose you've got to do it. You could have come here—That don't matter, though, now... You'll have your time and spend your money, and be a poor half-starved clergyman, mucking about with the women all the day and afraid to have one of your own ever, or you'll be a schoolmaster or some such fool for the rest of your life. Or some newspaper chap. That's what you'll get from Cambridge. I'm half a mind not to let you. Eh? More than half a mind....”

“You've got to do the thing you can,” he said, after a pause, “and likely it's what you're fitted for.”

4

I paid several short visits to Staffordshire during my Cambridge days, and always these relations of mine produced the same effect of hardness. My uncle's thoughts had neither atmosphere nor mystery. He lived in a different universe from the dreams of scientific construction that filled my mind. He could as easily have understood Chinese poetry. His motives were made up of intense rivalries with other men of his class and kind, a few vindictive hates springing from real and fancied slights, a habit of acquisition that had become a second nature, a keen love both of efficiency and display in his own affairs. He seemed to me to have no sense of the state, no sense and much less any love of beauty, no charity and no sort of religious feeling whatever. He had strong bodily appetites, he ate and drank freely, smoked a great deal, and occasionally was carried off by his passions for a “bit of a spree” to Birmingham or Liverpool or Manchester. The indulgences of these occasions were usually followed by a period of reaction, when he was urgent for the suppression of nudity in the local Art Gallery and a harsh and forcible elevation of the superficial morals of the valley. And he spoke of the ladies who ministered to the delights of his jolly-dog period, when he spoke of them at all, by the unprintable feminine equivalent. My aunt he treated with a kindly contempt and considerable financial generosity, but his daughters tore his

heart; he was so proud of them, so glad to find them money to spend, so resolved to own them, so instinctively jealous of every man who came near them.

My uncle has been the clue to a great number of men for me. He was an illuminating extreme. I have learnt what not to expect from them through him, and to comprehend resentments and dangerous sudden antagonisms I should have found incomprehensible in their more complex forms, if I had not first seen them in him in their feral state.

With his soft felt hat at the back of his head, his rather heavy, rather mottled face, his rationally thick boots and slouching tweed-clad form, a little round-shouldered and very obstinate looking, he strolls through all my speculations sucking his teeth audibly, and occasionally throwing out a shrewd aphorism, the intractable unavoidable ore of the new civilisation.

Essentially he was simple. Generally speaking, he hated and despised in equal measure whatever seemed to suggest that he personally was not the most perfect human being conceivable. He hated all education after fifteen because he had had no education after fifteen, he hated all people who did not have high tea until he himself under duress gave up high tea, he hated every game except football, which he had played and could judge, he hated all people who spoke foreign languages because he knew no language but Staffordshire, he hated all foreigners because he was English, and all foreign ways because they were not his ways. Also he hated particularly, and in this order, Londoner's, Yorkshiremen, Scotch, Welch and Irish, because they were not "reet Staffordshire," and he hated all other Staffordshire men as insufficiently "reet." He wanted to have all his own women inviolate, and to fancy he had a call upon every other woman in the world. He wanted to have the best cigars and the best brandy in the world to consume or give away magnificently, and every one else to have inferior ones. (His billiard table was an extra large size, specially made and very inconvenient.) And he hated Trade Unions because they interfered with his autocratic direction of his works, and his workpeople because they were not obedient and untiring mechanisms to do his bidding. He was, in fact, a very naive, vigorous human being. He was about as much civilised, about as much tamed to the ideas of collective action and mutual consideration as a Central African negro.

There are hordes of such men as he throughout all the modern industrial world. You will find the same type with the slightest modifications in the Pas de Calais or Rhenish Prussia or New Jersey or North Italy. No doubt you would find it in New Japan. These men have raised themselves up from the general mass of untrained, uncultured, poorish people in a hard industrious selfish struggle. To drive others they have had

first to drive themselves. They have never yet had occasion nor leisure to think of the state or social life as a whole, and as for dreams or beauty, it was a condition of survival that they should ignore such cravings. All the distinctive qualities of my uncle can be thought of as dictated by his conditions; his success and harshness, the extravagances that expressed his pride in making money, the uncongenial luxury that sprang from rivalry, and his self-reliance, his contempt for broad views, his contempt for everything that he could not understand.

His daughters were the inevitable children of his life. Queer girls they were! Curiously "spirited" as people phrase it, and curiously limited. During my Cambridge days I went down to Staffordshire several times. My uncle, though he still resented my refusal to go into his business, was also in his odd way proud of me. I was his nephew and poor relation, and yet there I was, a young gentleman learning all sorts of unremunerative things in the grandest manner, "Latin and mook," while the sons of his neighhours, not nephews merely, but sons, stayed unpolished in their native town. Every time I went down I found extensive changes and altered relations, and before I had settled down to them off I went again. I don't think I was one person to them; I was a series of visitors. There is a gulf of ages between a gaunt schoolboy of sixteen in unbecoming mourning and two vividly self-conscious girls of eighteen and nineteen, but a Cambridge "man" of two and twenty with a first and good tennis and a growing social experience, is a fair contemporary for two girls of twenty-three and twenty-four.

A motor-car appeared, I think in my second visit, a bottle-green affair that opened behind, had dark purple cushions, and was controlled mysteriously by a man in shiny black costume and a flat cap. The high tea had been shifted to seven and rechristened dinner, but my uncle would not dress nor consent to have wine; and after one painful experiment, I gathered, and a scene, he put his foot down and prohibited any but high-necked dresses.

"Daddy's perfectly impossible," Sybil told me.

The foot had descended vehemently! "My own daughters!" he had said, "dressed up like—"—and had arrested himself and fumbled and decided to say—"actresses, and showin' their fat arms for every fool to stare at!" Nor would he have any people invited to dinner. He didn't, he had explained, want strangers poking about in his house when he came home tired. So such calling as occurred went on during his absence in the afternoon.

One of the peculiarities of the life of these ascendant families of the industrial class to which wealth has come, is its tremendous insulations. There were no customs of intercourse in the Five Towns. All the isolated prosperities of the district sprang from

economising, hard driven homes, in which there was neither time nor means for hospitality. Social intercourse centred very largely upon the church or chapel, and the chapels were better at bringing people together than the Establishment to which my cousins belonged. Their chief outlet to the wider world lay therefore through the acquaintances they had formed at school, and through two much less prosperous families of relations who lived at Longton and Hanley. A number of gossiping friendships with old school mates were “kept up,” and my cousins would “spend the afternoon” or even spend the day with these; such occasions led to other encounters and interlaced with the furtive correspondences and snatched meetings that formed the emotional thread of their lives. When the billiard table had been new, my uncle had taken to asking in a few approved friends for an occasional game, but mostly the billiard-room was for glory and the girls. Both of them played very well. They never, so far as I know, dined out, and when at last after bitter domestic conflicts they began to go to dances, they went with the quavering connivance of my aunt, and changed into ball frocks at friends' houses on the way. There was a tennis club that formed a convenient afternoon rendezvous, and I recall that in the period of my earlier visits the young bloods of the district found much satisfaction in taking girls for drives in dog-carts and suchlike high-wheeled vehicles, a disposition that died in tangled tandems at the apparition of motor-car's.

My aunt and uncle had conceived no plans in life for their daughters at all. In the undifferentiated industrial community from which they had sprung, girls got married somehow, and it did not occur to them that the concentration of property that had made them wealthy, had cut their children off from the general social sea in which their own awkward meeting had occurred, without necessarily opening any other world in exchange. My uncle was too much occupied with the works and his business affairs and his private vices to philosophise about his girls; he wanted them just to keep girls, preferably about sixteen, and to be a sort of animated flowers and make home bright and be given things. He was irritated that they would not remain at this, and still more irritated that they failed to suppress altogether their natural interest in young men. The tandems would be steered by weird and devious routes to evade the bare chance of his bloodshot eye. My aunt seemed to have no ideas whatever about what was likely to happen to her children. She had indeed no ideas about anything; she took her husband and the days as they came.

I can see now the pathetic difficulty of my cousins' position in life; the absence of any guidance or instruction or provision for their development. They supplemented the silences of home by the conversation of schoolfellows and the suggestions of popular fiction. They had to make what they could out of life with such hints as these. The

church was far too modest to offer them any advice. It was obtruded upon my mind upon my first visit that they were both carrying on correspondences and having little furtive passings and seeings and meetings with the mysterious owners of certain initials, S. and L. K., and, if I remember rightly, “the R. N.” brothers and cousins, I suppose, of their friends. The same thing was going on, with a certain intensification, at my next visit, excepting only that the initials were different. But when I came again their methods were maturer or I was no longer a negligible quantity, and the notes and the initials were no longer flaunted quite so openly in my face.

My cousins had worked it out from the indications of their universe that the end of life is to have a “good time.” They used the phrase. That and the drives in dog-carts were only the first of endless points of resemblance between them and the commoner sort of American girl. When some years ago I paid my first and only visit to America I seemed to recover my cousins' atmosphere as soon as I entered the train at Euston. There were three girls in my compartment supplied with huge decorated cases of sweets, and being seen off by a company of friends, noisily arch and eager about the “steamer letters” they would get at Liverpool; they were the very soul-sisters of my cousins. The chief elements of a good time, as my cousins judged it, as these countless thousands of rich young women judge it, are a petty eventfulness, laughter, and to feel that you are looking well and attracting attention. Shopping is one of its leading joys. You buy things, clothes and trinkets for yourself and presents for your friends. Presents always seemed to be flying about in that circle; flowers and boxes of sweets were common currency. My cousins were always getting and giving, my uncle caressed them with parcels and cheques. They kissed him and he exuded sovereigns as a stroked APHIS exudes honey. It was like the new language of the Academy of Lagado to me, and I never learnt how to express myself in it, for nature and training make me feel encumbered to receive presents and embarrassed in giving them. But then, like my father, I hate and distrust possessions.

Of the quality of their private imagination I never learnt anything; I suppose it followed the lines of the fiction they read and was romantic and sentimental. So far as marriage went, the married state seemed at once very attractive and dreadfully serious to them, composed in equal measure of becoming important and becoming old. I don't know what they thought about children. I doubt if they thought about them at all. It was very secret if they did.

As for the poor and dingy people all about them, my cousins were always ready to take part in a Charitable Bazaar. They were unaware of any economic correlation of their own prosperity and that circumambient poverty, and they knew of Trade Unions simply as disagreeable external things that upset my uncle's temper. They knew of

nothing wrong in social life at all except that there were “Agitators.” It surprised them a little, I think, that Agitators were not more drastically put down. But they had a sort of instinctive dread of social discussion as of something that might breach the happiness of their ignorance....

5

My cousins did more than illustrate Marx for me; they also undertook a stage of my emotional education. Their method in that as in everything else was extremely simple, but it took my inexperience by surprise.

It must have been on my third visit that Sybil took me in hand. Hitherto I seemed to have seen her only in profile, but now she became almost completely full face, manifestly regarded me with those violet eyes of hers. She passed me things I needed at breakfast—it was the first morning of my visit—before I asked for them.

When young men are looked at by pretty cousins, they become intensely aware of those cousins. It seemed to me that I had always admired Sybil's eyes very greatly, and that there was something in her temperament congenial to mine. It was odd I had not noted it on my previous visits.

We walked round the garden somewhen that morning, and talked about Cambridge. She asked quite a lot of questions about my work and my ambitions. She said she had always felt sure I was clever.

The conversation languished a little, and we picked some flowers for the house. Then she asked if I could run. I conceded her various starts and we raced up and down the middle garden path. Then, a little breathless, we went into the new twenty-five guinea summer-house at the end of the herbaceous border.

We sat side by side, pleasantly hidden from the house, and she became anxious about her hair, which was slightly and prettily disarranged, and asked me to help her with the adjustment of a hairpin. I had never in my life been so near the soft curly hair and the dainty eyebrow and eyelid and warm soft cheek of a girl, and I was stirred—

It stirs me now to recall it.

I became a battleground of impulses and inhibitions.

“Thank you,” said my cousin, and moved a little away from me.

She began to talk about friendship, and lost her thread and forgot the little electric stress between us in a rather meandering analysis of her principal girl friends.

But afterwards she resumed her purpose.

I went to bed that night with one proposition overshadowing everything else in my mind, namely, that kissing my cousin Sybil was a difficult, but not impossible, achievement. I do not recall any shadow of a doubt whether on the whole it was worth doing. The thing had come into my existence, disturbing and interrupting its flow exactly as a fever does. Sybil had infected me with herself.

The next day matters came to a crisis in the little upstairs sitting-room which had been assigned me as a study during my visit. I was working up there, or rather trying to work in spite of the outrageous capering of some very primitive elements in my brain, when she came up to me, under a transparent pretext of looking for a book.

I turned round and then got up at the sight of her. I quite forget what our conversation was about, but I know she led me to believe I might kiss her. Then when I attempted to do so she averted her face.

“How COULD you?” she said; “I didn't mean that!”

That remained the state of our relations for two days. I developed a growing irritation with and resentment against cousin Sybil, combined with an intense desire to get that kiss for which I hungered and thirsted. Cousin Sybil went about in the happy persuasion that I was madly in love with her, and her game, so far as she was concerned, was played and won. It wasn't until I had fretted for two days that I realised that I was being used for the commonest form of excitement possible to a commonplace girl; that dozens perhaps of young men had played the part of Tantalus at cousin Sybil's lips. I walked about my room at nights, damning her and calling her by terms which on the whole she rather deserved, while Sybil went to sleep pitying “poor old Dick!”

“Damn it!” I said, “I WILL be equal with you.”

But I never did equalise the disadvantage, and perhaps it's as well, for I fancy that sort of revenge cuts both people too much for a rational man to seek it....

“Why are men so silly?” said cousin Sybil next morning, wriggling back with down-bent head to release herself from what should have been a compelling embrace.

“Confound it!” I said with a flash of clear vision. “You STARTED this game.”

“Oh!”

She stood back against a hedge of roses, a little flushed and excited and interested, and ready for the delightful defensive if I should renew my attack.

“Beastly hot for scuffling,” I said, white with anger. “I don't know whether I'm so keen on kissing you, Sybil, after all. I just thought you wanted me to.”

I could have whipped her, and my voice stung more than my words.

Our eyes met; a real hatred in hers leaping up to meet mine.

“Let's play tennis,” I said, after a moment's pause.

“No,” she answered shortly, “I'm going indoors.”

“Very well.”

And that ended the affair with Sybil.

I was still in the full glare of this disillusionment when Gertrude awoke from some preoccupation to an interest in my existence. She developed a disposition to touch my hand by accident, and let her fingers rest in contact with it for a moment,—she had pleasant soft hands;—she began to drift into summer houses with me, to let her arm rest trustfully against mine, to ask questions about Cambridge. They were much the same questions that Sybil had asked. But I controlled myself and maintained a profile of intelligent and entirely civil indifference to her blandishments.

What Gertrude made of it came out one evening in some talk—I forget about what—with Sybil.

“Oh, Dick!” said Gertrude a little impatiently, “Dick's Pi.”

And I never disillusioned her by any subsequent levity from this theory of my innate and virginal piety.

6

It was against this harsh and crude Staffordshire background that I think I must have seen Margaret for the first time. I say I think because it is quite possible that we had passed each other in the streets of Cambridge, no doubt with that affectation of mutual disregard which was once customary between undergraduates and Newnham girls. But if that was so I had noted nothing of the slender graciousness that shone out so pleasingly against the bleaker midland surroundings.

She was a younger schoolfellow of my cousins', and the step-daughter of Seddon, a prominent solicitor of Burslem. She was not only not in my cousins' generation but not in their set, she was one of a small hardworking group who kept immaculate note-books, and did as much as is humanly possible of that insensate pile of written work that the Girls' Public School movement has inflicted upon school-girls. She really

learnt French and German admirably and thoroughly, she got as far in mathematics as an unflinching industry can carry any one with no great natural aptitude, and she went up to Bennett Hall, Newnham, after the usual conflict with her family, to work for the History Tripos.

There in her third year she made herself thoroughly ill through overwork, so ill that she had to give up Newnham altogether and go abroad with her stepmother. She made herself ill, as so many girls do in those university colleges, through the badness of her home and school training. She thought study must needs be a hard straining of the mind. She worried her work, she gave herself no leisure to see it as a whole, she felt herself not making headway and she cut her games and exercise in order to increase her hours of toil, and worked into the night. She carried a knack of laborious thoroughness into the blind alleys and inessentials of her subject. It didn't need the badness of the food for which Bennett Hall is celebrated and the remarkable dietary of nocturnal cocoa, cakes and soft biscuits with which the girls have supplemented it, to ensure her collapse. Her mother brought her home, fretting and distressed, and then finding her hopelessly unhappy at home, took her and her half-brother, a rather ailing youngster of ten who died three years later, for a journey to Italy.

Italy did much to assuage Margaret's chagrin. I think all three of them had a very good time there. At home Mr. Seddon, her step-father, played the part of a well-meaning blight by reason of the moods that arose from nervous dyspepsia. They went to Florence, equipped with various introductions and much sound advice from sympathetic Cambridge friends, and having acquired an ease in Italy there, went on to Siena, Orvieto, and at last Rome. They returned, if I remember rightly, by Pisa, Genoa, Milan and Paris. Six months or more they had had abroad, and now Margaret was back in Burslem, in health again and consciously a very civilised person.

New ideas were abroad, it was Maytime and a spring of abundant flowers—daffodils were particularly good that year—and Mrs. Seddon celebrated her return by giving an afternoon reception at short notice, with the clear intention of letting every one out into the garden if the weather held.

The Seddons had a big old farmhouse modified to modern ideas of comfort on the road out towards Misterton, with an orchard that had been rather pleasantly subdued from use to ornament. It had rich blossoming cherry and apple trees. Large patches of grass full of nodding yellow trumpets had been left amidst the not too precisely mown grass, which was as it were grass path with an occasional lapse into lawn or glade. And Margaret, hatless, with the fair hair above her thin, delicately pink face very simply done, came to meet our rather too consciously dressed party,—we had come in the

motor four strong, with my aunt in grey silk. Margaret wore a soft flowing flowered blue dress of diaphanous material, all unconnected with the fashion and tied with pretty ribbons, like a slenderer, unbountiful Primavera.

It was one of those May days that ape the light and heat of summer, and I remember disconnectedly quite a number of brightly lit figures and groups walking about, and a white gate between orchard and garden and a large lawn with an oak tree and a red Georgian house with a verandah and open French windows, through which the tea drinking had come out upon the moss-edged flagstones even as Mrs. Seddon had planned.

The party was almost entirely feminine except for a little curate with a large head, a good voice and a radiant manner, who was obviously attracted by Margaret, and two or three young husbands still sufficiently addicted to their wives to accompany them. One of them I recall as a quite romantic figure with abundant blond curly hair on which was poised a grey felt hat encircled by a refined black band. He wore, moreover, a loose rich shot silk tie of red and purple, a long frock coat, grey trousers and brown shoes, and presently he removed his hat and carried it in one hand. There were two tennis-playing youths besides myself. There was also one father with three daughters in anxious control, a father of the old school scarcely half broken in, reluctant, rebellious and consciously and conscientiously "reet Staffordshire." The daughters were all alert to suppress the possible plungings, the undesirable humorous impulses of this almost feral guest. They nipped his very gestures in the bud. The rest of the people were mainly mothers with daughters—daughters of all ages, and a scattering of aunts, and there was a tendency to clotting, parties kept together and regarded parties suspiciously. Mr. Seddon was in hiding, I think, all the time, though not formally absent.

Matters centred upon the tea in the long room of the French windows, where four trim maids went to and fro busily between the house and the clumps of people seated or standing before it; and tennis and croquet were intermittently visible and audible beyond a bank of rockwork rich with the spikes and cups and bells of high spring.

Mrs. Seddon presided at the tea urn, and Margaret partly assisted and partly talked to me and my cousin Sibyl—Gertrude had found a disused and faded initial and was partnering him at tennis in a state of gentle revival—while their mother exercised a divided chaperonage from a seat near Mrs. Seddon. The little curate, stirring a partially empty cup of tea, mingled with our party, and preluded, I remember, every observation he made by a vigorous resumption of stirring.

We talked of Cambridge, and Margaret kept us to it. The curate was a Selwyn man and had taken a pass degree in theology, but Margaret had come to Gaylord's lecturers in Trinity for a term before her breakdown, and understood these differences. She had the eagerness of an exile to hear the old familiar names of places and personalities. We capped familiar anecdotes and were enthusiastic about Kings' Chapel and the Backs, and the curate, addressing himself more particularly to Sibyl, told a long confused story illustrative of his disposition to reckless devilry (of a pure-minded kindly sort) about upsetting two canoes quite needlessly on the way to Grantchester.

I can still see Margaret as I saw her that afternoon, see her fresh fair face, with the little obliquity of the upper lip, and her brow always slightly knitted, and her manner as of one breathlessly shy but determined. She had rather open blue eyes, and she spoke in an even musical voice with the gentlest of stresses and the ghost of a lisp. And it was true, she gathered, that Cambridge still existed. “I went to Grantchester,” she said, “last year, and had tea under the apple-blossom. I didn't think then I should have to come down.” (It was that started the curate upon his anecdote.)

“I've seen a lot of pictures, and learnt a lot about them—at the Pitti and the Brera,—the Brera is wonderful—wonderful places,—but it isn't like real study,” she was saying presently.... “We bought bales of photographs,” she said.

I thought the bales a little out of keeping.

But fair-haired and quite simply and yet graciously and fancifully dressed, talking of art and beautiful things and a beautiful land, and with so much manifest regret for learning denied, she seemed a different kind of being altogether from my smart, hard, high-coloured, black-haired and resolutely hatted cousin; she seemed translucent beside Gertrude. Even the little twist and droop of her slender body was a grace to me.

I liked her from the moment I saw her, and set myself to interest and please her as well as I knew how.

We recalled a case of ragging that had rustled the shrubs of Newnham, and then Chris Robinson's visit—he had given a talk to Bennett Hall also—and our impression of him.

“He disappointed me, too,” said Margaret.

I was moved to tell Margaret something of my own views in the matter of social progress, and she listened—oh! with a kind of urged attention, and her brow a little more knitted, very earnestly. The little curate desisted from the appendices and refuse heaps and general debris of his story, and made himself look very alert and intelligent.

“We did a lot of that when I was up in the eighties,” he said. “I'm glad Imperialism hasn't swamped you fellows altogether.”

Gertrude, looking bright and confident, came to join our talk from the shrubbery; the initial, a little flushed and evidently in a state of refreshed relationship, came with her, and a cheerful lady in pink and more particularly distinguished by a pink bonnet joined our little group. Gertrude had been sipping admiration and was not disposed to play a passive part in the talk.

“Socialism!” she cried, catching the word. “It's well Pa isn't here. He has Fits when people talk of socialism. Fits!”

The initial laughed in a general kind of way.

The curate said there was socialism AND socialism, and looked at Margaret to gauge whether he had been too bold in this utterance. But she was all, he perceived, for broad-mindness, and he stirred himself (and incidentally his tea) to still more liberality of expression. He said the state of the poor was appalling, simply appalling; that there were times when he wanted to shatter the whole system, “only,” he said, turning to me appealingly, “What have we got to put in its place?”

“The thing that exists is always the more evident alternative,” I said.

The little curate looked at it for a moment. “Precisely,” he said explosively, and turned stirring and with his head a little on one side, to hear what Margaret was saying.

Margaret was saying, with a swift blush and an effect of daring, that she had no doubt she was a socialist.

“And wearing a gold chain!” said Gertrude, “And drinking out of eggshell! I like that!”

I came to Margaret's rescue. “It doesn't follow that because one's a socialist one ought to dress in sackcloth and ashes.”

The initial coloured deeply, and having secured my attention by prodding me slightly with the wrist of the hand that held his teacup, cleared his throat and suggested that “one ought to be consistent.”

I perceived we were embarked upon a discussion of the elements. We began an interesting little wrangle one of those crude discussions of general ideas that are dear to the heart of youth. I and Margaret supported one another as socialists, Gertrude and Sybil and the initial maintained an anti-socialist position, the curate attempted a cross-bench position with an air of intending to come down upon us presently with a casting vote. He reminded us of a number of useful principles too often overlooked in

argument, that in a big question like this there was much to be said on both sides, that if every one did his or her duty to every one about them there would be no difficulty with social problems at all, that over and above all enactments we needed moral changes in people themselves. My cousin Gertrude was a difficult controversialist to manage, being unconscious of inconsistency in statement and absolutely impervious to reply. Her standpoint was essentially materialistic; she didn't see why she shouldn't have a good time because other people didn't; they would have a good time, she was sure, if she didn't. She said that if we did give up everything we had to other people, they wouldn't very likely know what to do with it. She asked if we were so fond of work-people, why we didn't go and live among them, and expressed the inflexible persuasion that if we HAD socialism, everything would be just the same again in ten years' time. She also threw upon us the imputation of ingratitude for a beautiful world by saying that so far as she was concerned she didn't want to upset everything. She was contented with things as they were, thank you.

The discussion led in some way that I don't in the least recall now, and possibly by abrupt transitions, to a croquet foursome in which Margaret involved the curate without involving herself, and then stood beside me on the edge of the lawn while the others played. We watched silently for a moment.

“I HATE that sort of view,” she said suddenly in a confidential undertone, with her delicate pink flush returning.

“It's want of imagination,” I said.

“To think we are just to enjoy ourselves,” she went on; “just to go on dressing and playing and having meals and spending money!” She seemed to be referring not simply to my cousins, but to the whole world of industry and property about us. “But what is one to do?” she asked. “I do wish I had not had to come down. It's all so pointless here. There seems to be nothing going forward, no ideas, no dreams. No one here seems to feel quite what I feel, the sort of need there is for MEANING in things. I hate things without meaning.”

“Don't you do—local work?”

“I suppose I shall. I suppose I must find something. Do you think—if one were to attempt some sort of propaganda?”

“Could you—?” I began a little doubtfully.

“I suppose I couldn't,” she answered, after a thoughtful moment. “I suppose it would come to nothing. And yet I feel there is so much to be done for the world, so much one ought to be doing.... I want to do something for the world.”

I can see her now as she stood there with her brows nearly frowning, her blue eyes looking before her, her mouth almost petulant. “One feels that there are so many things going on—out of one's reach,” she said.

I went back in the motor-car with my mind full of her, the quality of delicate discontent, the suggestion of exile. Even a kind of weakness in her was sympathetic. She told tremendously against her background. She was, I say, like a protesting blue flower upon a cinder heap. It is curious, too, how she connects and mingles with the furious quarrel I had with my uncle that very evening. That came absurdly. Indirectly Margaret was responsible. My mind was running on ideas she had revived and questions she had set clamouring, and quite inadvertently in my attempt to find solutions I talked so as to outrage his profoundest feelings....

7

What a preposterous shindy that was!

I sat with him in the smoking-room, propounding what I considered to be the most indisputable and non-contentious propositions conceivable—until, to my infinite amazement, he exploded and called me a “damned young puppy.”

It was seismic.

“Tremendously interesting time,” I said, “just in the beginning of making a civilisation.”

“Ah!” he said, with an averted face, and nodded, leaning forward over his cigar.

I had not the remotest thought of annoying him.

“Monstrous muddle of things we have got,” I said, “jumbled streets, ugly population, ugly factories—”

“You'd do a sight better if you had to do with it,” said my uncle, regarding me askance.

“Not me. But a world that had a collective plan and knew where it meant to be going would do a sight better, anyhow. We're all swimming in a flood of ill-calculated chances—”

“You'll be making out I organised that business down there—by chance—next,” said my uncle, his voice thick with challenge.

I went on as though I was back in Trinity.

“There's a lot of chance in the making of all great businesses,” I said.

My uncle remarked that that showed how much I knew about businesses. If chance made businesses, why was it that he always succeeded and grew while those fools Ackroyd and Sons always took second place? He showed a disposition to tell the glorious history of how once Ackroyd's overshadowed him, and how now he could buy up Ackroyd's three times over. But I wanted to get out what was in my mind.

“Oh!” I said, “as between man and man and business and business, some of course get the pull by this quality or that—but it's forces quite outside the individual case that make the big part of any success under modern conditions. YOU never invented pottery, nor any process in pottery that matters a rap in your works; it wasn't YOUR foresight that joined all England up with railways and made it possible to organise production on an altogether different scale. You really at the utmost can't take credit for much more than being the sort of man who happened to fit what happened to be the requirements of the time, and who happened to be in a position to take advantage of them—”

It was then my uncle cried out and called me a damned young puppy, and became involved in some unexpected trouble of his own.

I woke up as it were from my analysis of the situation to discover him bent over a splendid spittoon, cursing incoherently, retching a little, and spitting out the end of his cigar which he had bitten off in his last attempt at self-control, and withal fully prepared as soon as he had cleared for action to give me just all that he considered to be the contents of his mind upon the condition of mine.

Well, why shouldn't I talk my mind to him? He'd never had an outside view of himself for years, and I resolved to stand up to him. We went at it hammer and tongs! It became clear that he supposed me to be a Socialist, a zealous, embittered hater of all ownership—and also an educated man of the vilest, most pretentiously superior description. His principal grievance was that I thought I knew everything; to that he recurred again and again....

We had been maintaining an armed truce with each other since my resolve to go up to Cambridge, and now we had out all that had accumulated between us. There had been stupendous accumulations....

The particular things we said and did in that bawling encounter matter nothing at all in this story. I can't now estimate how near we came to fisticuffs. It ended with my

saying, after a pungent reminder of benefits conferred and remembered, that I didn't want to stay another hour in his house. I went upstairs, in a state of puerile fury, to pack and go off to the Railway Hotel, while he, with ironical civility, telephoned for a cab.

“Good riddance!” shouted my uncle, seeing me off into the night.

On the face of it our row was preposterous, but the underlying reality of our quarrel was the essential antagonism, it seemed to me, in all human affairs, the antagonism between ideas and the established method, that is to say, between ideas and the rule of thumb. The world I hate is the rule-of-thumb world, the thing I and my kind of people exist for primarily is to battle with that, to annoy it, disarrange it, reconstruct it. We question everything, disturb anything that cannot give a clear justification to our questioning, because we believe inherently that our sense of disorder implies the possibility of a better order. Of course we are detestable. My uncle was of that other vaster mass who accept everything for the thing it seems to be, hate enquiry and analysis as a tramp hates washing, dread and resist change, oppose experiment, despise science. The world is our battleground; and all history, all literature that matters, all science, deals with this conflict of the thing that is and the speculative “if” that will destroy it.

But that is why I did not see Margaret Seddon again for five years.

CHAPTER THE SECOND ~~ MARGARET IN LONDON

1

I was twenty-seven when I met Margaret again, and the intervening five years had been years of vigorous activity for me, if not of very remarkable growth. When I saw her again, I could count myself a grown man. I think, indeed, I counted myself more completely grown than I was. At any rate, by all ordinary standards, I had “got on” very well, and my ideas, if they had not changed very greatly, had become much more definite and my ambitions clearer and bolder.

I had long since abandoned my fellowship and come to London. I had published two books that had been talked about, written several articles, and established a regular relationship with the WEEKLY REVIEW and the EVENING GAZETTE. I was a member of the Eighty Club and learning to adapt the style of the Cambridge Union to larger uses.

The London world had opened out to me very readily. I had developed a pleasant variety of social connections. I had made the acquaintance of Mr. Evesham, who had been attracted by my NEW RULER, and who talked about it and me, and so did a very great deal to make a way for me into the company of prominent and amusing people. I dined out quite frequently. The glitter and interest of good London dinner parties became a common experience. I liked the sort of conversation one got at them extremely, the little glow of duologues burning up into more general discussions, the closing-in of the men after the going of the women, the sage, substantial masculine gossiping, the later resumption of effective talk with some pleasant woman, graciously at her best. I had a wide range of houses; Cambridge had linked me to one or two correlated sets of artistic and literary people, and my books and Mr. Evesham and opened to me the big vague world of "society." I wasn't aggressive nor particularly snobbish nor troublesome, sometimes I talked well, and if I had nothing interesting to say I said as little as possible, and I had a youthful gravity of manner that was liked by hostesses. And the other side of my nature that first flared through the cover of restraints at Locarno, that too had had opportunity to develop along the line London renders practicable. I had had my experiences and secrets and adventures among that fringe of ill-mated or erratic or discredited women the London world possesses. The thing had long ago ceased to be a matter of magic or mystery, and had become a question of appetites and excitement, and among other things the excitement of not being found out.

I write rather doubtfully of my growing during this period. Indeed I find it hard to judge whether I can say that I grew at all in any real sense of the word, between three and twenty and twenty-seven. It seems to me now to have been rather a phase of realisation and clarification. All the broad lines of my thought were laid down, I am sure, by the date of my Locarno adventure, but in those five years I discussed things over and over again with myself and others, filled out with concrete fact forms I had at first apprehended sketchily and conversationally, measured my powers against my ideals and the forces in the world about me. It was evident that many men no better than myself and with no greater advantages than mine had raised themselves to influential and even decisive positions in the worlds of politics and thought. I was gathering the confidence and knowledge necessary to attack the world in the large manner; I found I could write, and that people would let me write if I chose, as one having authority and not as the scribes. Socially and politically and intellectually I knew myself for an honest man, and that quite without any deliberation on my part this showed and made things easy for me. People trusted my good faith from the

beginning—for all that I came from nowhere and had no better position than any adventurer.

But the growth process was arrested, I was nothing bigger at twenty-seven than at twenty-two, however much saner and stronger, and any one looking closely into my mind during that period might well have imagined growth finished altogether. It is particularly evident to me now that I came no nearer to any understanding of women during that time. That Locarno affair was infinitely more to me than I had supposed. It ended something—nipped something in the bud perhaps—took me at a stride from a vague, fine, ignorant, closed world of emotion to intrigue and a perfectly definite and limited sensuality. It ended my youth, and for a time it prevented my manhood. I had never yet even peeped at the sweetest, profoundest thing in the world, the heart and meaning of a girl, or dreamt with any quality of reality of a wife or any such thing as a friend among womanhood. My vague anticipation of such things in life had vanished altogether. I turned away from their possibility. It seemed to me I knew what had to be known about womankind. I wanted to work hard, to get on to a position in which I could develop and forward my constructive projects. Women, I thought, had nothing to do with that. It seemed clear I could not marry for some years; I was attractive to certain types of women, I had vanity enough to give me an agreeable confidence in love-making, and I went about seeking a convenient mistress quite deliberately, some one who should serve my purpose and say in the end, like that kindly first mistress of mine, “I've done you no harm,” and so release me. It seemed the only wise way of disposing of urgencies that might otherwise entangle and wreck the career I was intent upon.

I don't apologise for, or defend my mental and moral phases. So it was I appraised life and prepared to take it, and so it is a thousand ambitious men see it to-day....

For the rest these five years were a period of definition. My political conceptions were perfectly plain and honest. I had one constant desire ruling my thoughts. I meant to leave England and the empire better ordered than I found it, to organise and discipline, to build up a constructive and controlling State out of my world's confusions. We had, I saw, to suffuse education with public intention, to develop a new better-living generation with a collectivist habit of thought, to link now chaotic activities in every human affair, and particularly to catch that escaped, world-making, world-ruining, dangerous thing, industrial and financial enterprise, and bring it back to the service of the general good. I had then the precise image that still serves me as a symbol for all I wish to bring about, the image of an engineer building a lock in a swelling torrent—with water pressure as his only source of power. My thoughts and acts were habitually turned to that enterprise; it gave shape and direction to all my

life. The problem that most engaged my mind during those years was the practical and personal problem of just where to apply myself to serve this almost innate purpose. How was I, a child of this confusion, struggling upward through the confusion, to take hold of things? Somewhere between politics and literature my grip must needs be found, but where? Always I seem to have been looking for that in those opening years, and disregarding everything else to discover it.