

THE JILTING OF JANE

As I sit writing in my study, I can hear our Jane bumping her way downstairs with a brush and dustpan. She used in the old days to sing hymn tunes, or the British national song for the time being, to these instruments; but latterly she has been silent and even careful over her work. Time was when I prayed with fervour for such silence, and my wife with sighs for such care, but now they have come we are not so glad as we might have anticipated we should be. Indeed, I would rejoice secretly, though it may be unmanly weakness to admit it, even to hear Jane sing “Daisy,” or by the fracture of any plate but one of Euphemia’s best green ones, to learn that the period of brooding has come to an end.

Yet how we longed to hear the last of Jane’s young man before we heard the last of him! Jane was always very free with her conversation to my wife, and discoursed admirably in the kitchen on a variety of topics—so well, indeed, that I sometimes left my study door open—our house is a small one—to partake of it. But after William came, it was always William, nothing but William; William this and William that; and when we ³⁹⁴thought William was worked out and exhausted altogether, then William all over again. The engagement lasted altogether three years; yet how she got introduced to William, and so became thus saturated with him, was always a secret. For my part, I believe it was at the street corner where the Rev. Barnabas Baux used to hold an open-air service after evensong on Sundays. Young Cupids were wont to flit like moths round the paraffin flare of that centre of High Church hymn-singing. I fancy she stood singing hymns there, out of memory and her imagination, instead of coming home to get supper, and William came up beside her and said, “Hello!” “Hello yourself!” she said; and, etiquette being satisfied, they proceeded to talk together.

As Euphemia has a reprehensible way of letting her servants talk to her, she soon heard of him. “He is *such* a respectable young man, ma’am,” said Jane, “you don’t know.” Ignoring the slur cast on her acquaintance, my wife inquired further about this William.

“He is second porter at Maynard’s, the draper’s,” said Jane, “and gets eighteen shillings—nearly a pound—a week, m’m; and when the head porter leaves he will be head porter. His relatives are quite superior people, m’m. Not labouring people at all. His father was a greengrosher, m’m, and had a chumor, and he was bankrup’ twice. And one of his sisters is in a ³⁹⁵Home for the Dying. It will be a very good match for me, m’m,” said Jane, “me being an orphan girl.”

“Then you are engaged to him?” asked my wife.

“Not engaged, ma’am; but he is saving money to buy a ring—hammyfist.”

“Well, Jane, when you are properly engaged to him you may ask him round here on Sunday afternoons, and have tea with him in the kitchen.” For my Euphemia has a motherly conception of her duty towards her maid-servants. And presently the amethystine ring was being worn about the house, even with ostentation, and Jane developed a new way of bringing in the joint, so that this gage was evident. The elder Miss Maitland was aggrieved by it, and told my wife that servants ought not to wear rings. But my wife looked it up in “Enquire Within” and “Mrs. Motherly’s Book of Household Management,” and found no prohibition. So Jane remained with this happiness added to her love.

The treasure of Jane’s heart appeared to me to be what respectable people call a very deserving young man. “William, ma’am,” said Jane, one day suddenly, with ill-concealed complacency, as she counted out the beer bottles, “William, ma’am, is a teetotaler. Yes, m’m; and he don’t smoke. Smoking, ma’am,” said Jane, as one who reads the heart, “do make such a dust about. 396 Beside the waste of money. *And* the smell. However, I suppose it’s necessary to some.”

Possibly it dawned on Jane that she was reflecting a little severely upon Euphemia’s comparative ill-fortune; and she added kindly, “I’m sure the master is a hangel when his pipe’s alight. Compared to other times.”

William was at first a rather shabby young man of the ready-made black-coat school of costume. He had watery grey eyes, and a complexion appropriate to the brother of one in a Home for the Dying. Euphemia did not fancy him very much, even at the beginning. His eminent respectability was vouched for by an alpaca umbrella, from which he never allowed himself to be parted.

“He goes to chapel,” said Jane. “His papa, ma’am—”

“His *what*, Jane?”

“His papa, ma’am, was Church; but Mr. Maynard is a Plymouth Brother, and William thinks it Policy, ma’am, to go there too. Mr. Maynard comes and talks to him quite friendly, when they ain’t busy, about using up all the ends of string, and about his soul. He takes a lot of notice, do Mr. Maynard, of William, and the way he saves string and his soul, ma’am.”

Presently we heard that the head porter at Maynard’s had left, and that William was head porter at twenty-three shillings a week. “He is really kind of over the man who drives the van,” 397 said Jane, “and him married with three children.” And she

promised in the pride of her heart to make interest for us with William to favour us so that we might get our parcels of drapery from Maynard's with exceptional promptitude.

After this promotion a rapidly increasing prosperity came upon Jane's young man. One day, we learned that Mr. Maynard had given William a book. "Smiles' 'Elp Yourself, it's called," said Jane; "but it ain't comic. It tells you how to get on in the world, and some what William read to me was *lovely*, ma'am."

Euphemia told me of this laughing, and then she became suddenly grave. "Do you know, dear," she said, "Jane said one thing I did not like. She had been quiet for a minute, and then she suddenly remarked, 'William is a lot above me, ma'am, ain't he?'"

"I don't see anything in that," I said, though later my eyes were to be opened.

One Sunday afternoon about that time I was sitting at my writing-desk—possibly I was reading a good book—when a something went by the window. I heard a startled exclamation behind me, and saw Euphemia with her hands clasped together and her eyes dilated. "George," she said in an awe-stricken whisper, "did you see?"

Then we both spoke to one another at the same moment, slowly and solemnly: "*A silk hat! Yellow gloves! A new umbrella!*"

398 "It may be my fancy, dear," said Euphemia; "but his tie was very like yours. I believe Jane keeps him in ties. She told me a little while ago, in a way that implied volumes about the rest of your costume, 'The master *do* wear pretty ties, ma'am.' And he echoes all your novelties."

The young couple passed our window again on their way to their customary walk. They were arm in arm. Jane looked exquisitely proud, happy, and uncomfortable, with new white cotton gloves, and William, in the silk hat, singularly genteel!

That was the culmination of Jane's happiness. When she returned, "Mr. Maynard has been talking to William, ma'am," she said, "and he is to serve customers, just like the young shop gentlemen, during the next sale. And if he gets on, he is to be made an assistant, ma'am, at the first opportunity. He has got to be as gentlemanly as he can, ma'am; and if he ain't, ma'am, he says it won't be for want of trying. Mr. Maynard has took a great fancy to him."

"He *is* getting on, Jane," said my wife.

"Yes, ma'am," said Jane, thoughtfully, "he *is* getting on."

And she sighed.

That next Sunday, as I drank my tea, I interrogated my wife. "How is this Sunday different from all other Sundays, little woman? What has happened? Have you altered the curtains, or rearranged the furniture, or where is the indefinable difference of it? Are you wearing your hair in a new way without warning me? I clearly perceive a change in my environment, and I cannot for the life of me say what it is."

Then my wife answered in her most tragic voice: "George," she said, "that—that William has not come near the place to-day! And Jane is crying her heart out upstairs."

There followed a period of silence. Jane, as I have said, stopped singing about the house, and began to care for our brittle possessions, which struck my wife as being a very sad sign indeed. The next Sunday, and the next, Jane asked to go out, "to walk with William;" and my wife, who never attempts to extort confidences, gave her permission, and asked no questions. On each occasion Jane came back looking flushed and very determined. At last one day she became communicative.

"William is being led away," she remarked abruptly, with a catching of the breath, apropos of table-cloths. "Yes, m'm. She is a milliner, and she can play on the piano."

"I thought," said my wife, "that you went out with him on Sunday."

"Not out with him, m'm—after him. I walked along by the side of them, and told her he was engaged to me."

"Dear me, Jane, did you? What did they do?"

400 "Took no more notice of me than if I was dirt. So I told her she should suffer for it."

"It could not have been a very agreeable walk, Jane."

"Not for no parties, ma'am.

"I wish," said Jane, "I could play the piano, ma'am. But anyhow, I don't mean to let *her* get him away from me. She's older than him, and her hair ain't gold to the roots, ma'am."

It was on the August Bank Holiday that the crisis came. We do not clearly know the details of the fray, but only such fragments as poor Jane let fall. She came home dusty, excited, and with her heart hot within her.

The milliner's mother, the milliner, and William had made a party to the Art Museum at South Kensington, I think. Anyhow, Jane had calmly but firmly accosted them somewhere in the streets, and asserted her right to what, in spite of the consensus of

literature, she held to be her inalienable property. She did, I think, go so far as to lay hands on him. They dealt with her in a crushingly superior way. They “called a cab.” There was a “scene,” William being pulled away into the four-wheeler by his future wife and mother-in-law from the reluctant hands of our discarded Jane. There were threats of giving her “in charge.”

“My poor Jane!” said my wife, mincing veal as though she was mincing William. “It’s a 401 shame of them. I would think no more of him. He is not worthy of you.”

“No, m’m,” said Jane. “He *is* weak.

“But it’s that woman has done it,” said Jane. She was never known to bring herself to pronounce “that woman’s” name or to admit her girlishness. “I can’t think what minds some women must have—to try and get a girl’s young man away from her. But there, it only hurts to talk about it,” said Jane.

Thereafter our house rested from William. But there was something in the manner of Jane’s scrubbing the front doorstep or sweeping out the rooms, a certain viciousness, that persuaded me that the story had not yet ended.

“Please, m’m, may I go and see a wedding to-morrow?” said Jane, one day.

My wife knew by instinct whose wedding. “Do you think it is wise, Jane?” she said.

“I would like to see the last of him,” said Jane.

“My dear,” said my wife, fluttering into my room about twenty minutes after Jane had started, “Jane has been to the boot-hole and taken all the left-off boots and shoes, and gone off to the wedding with them in a bag. Surely she cannot mean—”

“Jane,” I said, “is developing character. Let us hope for the best.”

Jane came back with a pale, hard face. All the boots seemed to be still in her bag, at which my 402 wife heaved a premature sigh of relief. We heard her go upstairs and replace the boots with considerable emphasis.

“Quite a crowd at the wedding, ma’am,” she said presently, in a purely conversational style, sitting in our little kitchen, and scrubbing the potatoes; “and such a lovely day for them.” She proceeded to numerous other details, clearly avoiding some cardinal incident.

“It was all extremely respectable and nice, ma’am; but *her* father didn’t wear a black coat, and looked quite out of place, ma’am. Mr. Piddingquirk—”

“*Who?*”

“Mr. Piddingquirk—William that *was*, ma’am—had white gloves, and a coat like a clergyman, and a lovely chrysanthemum. He looked so nice, ma’am. And there was red carpet down, just like for gentlefolks. And they say he gave the clerk four shillings, ma’am. It was a real kerridge they had—not a fly. When they came out of church, there was rice-throwing, and her two little sisters dropping dead flowers. And some one threw a slipper, and then I threw a boot—”

“Threw a *boot*, Jane!”

“Yes, ma’am. Aimed at *her*. But it hit *him*. Yes, ma’am, hard. Gev him a black eye, I should think. I only threw that one. I hadn’t the heart to try again. All the little boys cheered when it hit him.”

403After an interval—“I am sorry the boot hit *him*.”

Another pause. The potatoes were being scrubbed violently. “He always *was* a bit above me, you know, ma’am. And he was led away.”

The potatoes were more than finished. Jane rose sharply, with a sigh, and rapped the basin down on the table.

“I don’t care,” she said. “I don’t care a rap. He will find out his mistake yet. It serves me right. I was stuck up about him. I ought not to have looked so high. And I am glad things are as things are.”

My wife was in the kitchen, seeing to the higher cookery. After the confession of the boot-throwing, she must have watched poor Jane fuming with a certain dismay in those brown eyes of hers. But I imagine they softened again very quickly, and then Jane’s must have met them.

“Oh, ma’am,” said Jane, with an astonishing change of note, “think of all that *might* have been! Oh, ma’am, I *could* have been so happy! I ought to have known, but I didn’t know—You’re very kind to let me talk to you, ma’am—for it’s hard on me, ma’am—it’s har-r-r-r-d—”

And I gather that Euphemia so far forgot herself as to let Jane sob out some of the fulness of her heart on a sympathetic shoulder. My Euphemia, thank Heaven, has never properly grasped the importance of “keeping up her position.” 404And since that fit of weeping, much of the accent of bitterness has gone out of Jane’s scrubbing and brush-work.

Indeed, something passed the other day with the butcher-boy—but that scarcely belongs to this story. However, Jane is young still, and time and change are at work

with her. We all have our sorrows, but I do not believe very much in the existence of sorrows that never heal.

405

THE LOST INHERITANCE

“My uncle,” said the man with the glass eye, “was what you might call a hemi-semi-demi millionaire. He was worth about a hundred and twenty thousand. Quite. And he left me all his money.”

I glanced at the shiny sleeve of his coat, and my eye travelled up to the frayed collar.

“Every penny,” said the man with the glass eye, and I caught the active pupil looking at me with a touch of offence.

“I’ve never had any windfalls like that,” I said, trying to speak enviously and propitiate him.

“Even a legacy isn’t always a blessing,” he remarked with a sigh, and with an air of philosophical resignation he put the red nose and the wiry moustache into his tankard for a space.

“Perhaps not,” I said.

“He was an author, you see, and he wrote a lot of books.”

“Indeed!”

“That was the trouble of it all.” He stared at me with the available eye, to see if I grasped his statement, then averted his face a little and produced a toothpick.

406 “You see,” he said, smacking his lips after a pause, “it was like this. He was my uncle—my maternal uncle. And he had—what shall I call it?—a weakness for writing edifying literature. Weakness is hardly the word—downright mania is nearer the mark. He’d been librarian in a Polytechnic, and as soon as the money came to him he began to indulge his ambition. It’s a simply extraordinary and incomprehensible thing to me. Here was a man of thirty-seven suddenly dropped into a perfect pile of gold, and he didn’t go—not a day’s bust on it. One would think a chap would go and get himself dressed a bit decent—say a couple of dozen pairs of trousers at a West End tailor’s; but he never did. You’d hardly believe it, but when he died he hadn’t even a gold watch. It seems wrong for people like that to have money. All he did was just to take a house, and order in pretty nearly five tons of books and ink and paper, and set to writing edifying literature as hard as ever he could write. I *can’t* understand it! But he

did. The money came to him, curiously enough, through a maternal uncle of *his*, unexpected like, when he was seven-and-thirty. My mother, it happened, was his only relation in the wide, wide world, except some second cousins of his. And I was her only son. You follow all that? The second cousins had one only son, too; but they brought him to see the old man too soon. He was rather a spoilt youngster, 407 was this son of theirs, and directly he set eyes on my uncle, he began bawling out as hard as he could. 'Take 'im away—er,' he says, 'take 'im away,' and so did for himself entirely. It was pretty straight sailing, you'd think, for me, eh? And my mother, being a sensible, careful woman, settled the business in her own mind long before he did.

"He was a curious little chap, was my uncle, as I remember him. I don't wonder at the kid being scared. Hair, just like these Japanese dolls they sell, black and straight and stiff all round the brim and none in the middle, and below, a whitish kind of face and rather large dark grey eyes moving about behind his spectacles. He used to attach a great deal of importance to dress, and always wore a flapping overcoat and a big-rimmed felt hat of a most extraordinary size. He looked a rummy little beggar, I can tell you. Indoors it was, as a rule, a dirty red flannel dressing-gown and a black skull-cap he had. That black skull-cap made him look like the portraits of all kinds of celebrated people. He was always moving about from house to house, was my uncle, with his chair which had belonged to Savage Landor, and his two writing-tables, one of Carlyle's and the other of Shelley's, so the dealer told him, and the completest portable reference library in England, he said he had,—and he lugged the whole caravan, now to a house at Down, near Darwin's old place, then to Reigate, 408 near Meredith, then off to Haslemere, then back to Chelsea for a bit, and then up to Hampstead. He knew there was something wrong with his stuff, but he never knew there was anything wrong with his brains. It was always the air, or the water, or the altitude, or some tommy-rot like that. 'So much depends on environment,' he used to say, and stare at you hard, as if he half-suspected you were hiding a grin at him somewhere under your face. 'So much depends on environment to a sensitive mind like mine.'

"What was his name? You wouldn't know it if I told you. He wrote nothing that any one has ever read—nothing. No one *could* read it. He wanted to be a great teacher, he said, and he didn't know what he wanted to teach any more than a child. So he just blethered at large about Truth and Righteousness, and the Spirit of History, and all that. Book after book he wrote and published at his own expense. He wasn't quite right in his head, you know, really; and to hear him go on at the critics—not because they slated him, mind you—he liked that—but because they didn't take any notice of him at all. 'What do the nations want?' he would ask, holding out his brown old claw.

‘Why, teaching—guidance! They are scattered upon the hills like sheep without a shepherd. There is War, and Rumours of War, the unlaid Spirit of Discord abroad in the land, Nihilism, Vivisection, Vaccination, 409Drunkenness, Penury, Want, Socialistic Error, Selfish Capital! Do you see the clouds, Ted?’—my name, you know—‘Do you see the clouds lowering over the land? and behind it all—the Mongol waits!’ He was always very great on Mongols, and the Spectre of Socialism, and such-like things.

“Then out would come his finger at me, and, with his eyes all afire and his skull-cap askew, he would whisper: ‘And here am I. What do I want? Nations to teach. Nations! I say it with all modesty, Ted, I *could*. I would guide them; nay! but I *will* guide them to a safe haven, to the land of Righteousness, flowing with milk and honey.’

“That’s how he used to go on. Ramble, rave about the nations, and righteousness, and that kind of thing. Kind of mincemeat of Bible and blethers. From fourteen up to three-and-twenty, when I might have been improving my mind, my mother used to wash me and brush my hair (at least in the earlier years of it), with a nice parting down the middle, and take me, once or twice a week, to hear this old lunatic jabber about things he had read of in the morning papers, trying to do it as much like Carlyle as he could; and I used to sit according to instructions, and look intelligent and nice, and pretend to be taking it all in. Afterwards, I used to go of my own free will, out of a regard for the legacy. I was the only person 410that used to go and see him. He wrote, I believe, to every man who made the slightest stir in the world, sending him a copy or so of his books, and inviting him to come and talk about the nations to him; but half of them didn’t answer, and none ever came. And when the girl let you in—she was an artful bit of goods, that girl—there were heaps of letters on the hall-seat waiting to go off, addressed to Prince Bismark, the President of the United States, and such-like people. And one went up the staircase and along the cobwebby passage,—the housekeeper drank like fury, and his passages were always cobwebby,—and found him at last, with books turned down all over the room, and heaps of torn paper on the floor, and telegrams and newspapers littered about, and empty coffee-cups and half-eaten bits of toast on the desk and the mantel. You’d see his back humped up, and his hair would be sticking out quite straight between the collar of that dressing-gown thing and the edge of the skull-cap.

“‘A moment!’ he would say. ‘A moment!’ over his shoulder. ‘The *mot juste*, you know, Ted, *le mot juste*. Righteous thought righteously expressed—Aah!—concatenation. And now, Ted,’ he’d say, spinning round in his study chair, ‘how’s Young England?’ That was his silly name for me.

“Well, that was my uncle, and that was how he talked—to me, at any rate. With others about 411 he seemed a bit shy. And he not only talked to me, but he gave me his books, books of six hundred pages or so, with cock-eyed headings, ‘The Shrieking Sisterhood,’ ‘The Behemoth of Bigotry,’ ‘Crucibles and Cullenders,’ and so on. All very strong, and none of them original. The very last time but one that I saw him he gave me a book. He was feeling ill even then, and his hand shook and he was despondent. I noticed it because I was naturally on the look-out for those little symptoms. ‘My last book, Ted,’ he said. ‘My last book, my boy; my last word to the deaf and hardened nations;’ and I’m hanged if a tear didn’t go rolling down his yellow old cheek. He was regular crying because it was so nearly over, and he hadn’t only written about fifty-three books of rubbish. ‘I’ve sometimes thought, Ted—’ he said, and stopped.

“Perhaps I’ve been a bit hasty and angry with this stiff-necked generation. A little more sweetness, perhaps, and a little less blinding light. I’ve sometimes thought—I might have swayed them. But I’ve done my best, Ted.’

“And then, with a burst, for the first and last time in his life he owned himself a failure. It showed he was really ill. He seemed to think for a minute, and then he spoke quietly and low, as sane and sober as I am now. ‘I’ve been a fool, Ted,’ he said. ‘I’ve been flapping nonsense all my life. Only He who readeth the 412heart knows whether this is anything more than vanity. Ted, I don’t. But He knows, He knows, and if I have done foolishly and vainly, in my heart—in my heart—’

“Just like that he spoke, repeating himself, and he stopped quite short and handed the book to me, trembling. Then the old shine came back into his eye. I remember it all fairly well, because I repeated it and acted it to my old mother when I got home, to cheer her up a bit. ‘Take this book and read it,’ he said. ‘It’s my last word, my very last word. I’ve left all my property to you, Ted, and may you use it better than I have done.’ And then he fell a-coughing.

“I remember that quite well even now, and how I went home cock-a-hoop, and how he was in bed the next time I called. The housekeeper was downstairs drunk, and I fooled about—as a young man will—with the girl in the passage before I went to him. He was sinking fast. But even then his vanity clung to him.

“‘Have you read it?’ he whispered.

“‘Sat up all night reading it,’ I said in his ear to cheer him. ‘It’s the last,’ said I, and then, with a memory of some poetry or other in my head, ‘but it’s the bravest and best.’

“He smiled a little and tried to squeeze my hand as a woman might do, and left off squeezing in the middle, and lay still. ‘The bravest and the best,’ said I again, seeing it

pleased him. But he didn't answer. I heard the girl giggle outside the door, for occasionally we'd had just a bit of innocent laughter, you know, at his ways. I looked at his face, and his eyes were closed, and it was just as if somebody had punched in his nose on either side. But he was still smiling. It's queer to think of—he lay dead, lay dead there, an utter failure, with the smile of success on his face.

“That was the end of my uncle. You can imagine me and my mother saw that he had a decent funeral. Then, of course, came the hunt for the will. We began decent and respectful at first, and before the day was out we were ripping chairs, and smashing bureau panels, and sounding walls. Every hour we expected those others to come in. We asked the housekeeper, and found she'd actually witnessed a will—on an ordinary half-sheet of notepaper it was written, and very short, she said—not a month ago. The other witness was the gardener, and he bore her out word for word. But I'm hanged if there was that or any other will to be found. The way my mother talked must have made him turn in his grave. At last a lawyer at Reigate sprang one on us that had been made years ago during some temporary quarrel with my mother. I'm blest if that wasn't the only will to be discovered anywhere, and it left every penny he possessed to that 'Take 'im away' youngster of his second cousin's—a chap who'd never had to stand his talking not for one afternoon of his life.”

The man with the glass eye stopped.

“I thought you said—” I began.

“Half a minute,” said the man with the glass eye. “I had to wait for the end of the story till this very morning, and I was a blessed sight more interested than you are. You just wait a bit, too. They executed the will, and the other chap inherited, and directly he was one-and-twenty he began to blow it. How he did blow it, to be sure! He bet, he drank, he got in the papers for this and that. I tell you, it makes me wriggle to think of the times he had. He blew every ha'penny of it before he was thirty, and the last I heard of him was—Holloway! Three years ago.

“Well, I naturally fell on hard times, because, as you see, the only trade I knew was legacy-cadging. All my plans were waiting over to begin, so to speak, when the old chap died. I've had my ups and downs since then. Just now it's a period of depression. I tell you frankly, I'm on the look-out for help. I was hunting round my room to find something to raise a bit on for immediate necessities, and the sight of all those presentation volumes—no one will buy them, not to wrap butter in, even—well, they annoyed me. I'd promised him not to part with them, and I never kept a promise easier. I let out at them with my boot, and sent them shooting across the room. One lifted at the kick, and spun through the air. And out of it flapped—You guess?

“It was the will. He’d given it me himself in that very last volume of all.”

He folded his arms on the table, and looked sadly with the active eye at his empty tankard. He shook his head slowly, and said softly, “I’d never *opened* the book, much more cut a page!” Then he looked up, with a bitter laugh, for my sympathy. “Fancy hiding it there! Eigh? Of all places.”

He began to fish absently for a dead fly with his finger. “It just shows you the vanity of authors,” he said, looking up at me. “It wasn’t no trick of his. He’d meant perfectly fair. He’d really thought I was really going home to read that blessed book of his through. But it shows you, don’t it?”—his eye went down to the tankard again,—“it shows you, too, how we poor human beings fail to understand one another.”

But there was no misunderstanding the eloquent thirst of his eye. He accepted with ill-feigned surprise. He said, in the usual subtle formula, that he didn’t mind if he did.

416

POLLOCK AND THE PORROH MAN

It was in a swampy village on the lagoon river behind the Turner Peninsula that Pollock’s first encounter with the Porroh man occurred. The women of that country are famous for their good looks—they are Gallinas with a dash of European blood that dates from the days of Vasco da Gama and the English slave-traders, and the Porroh man, too, was possibly inspired by a faint Caucasian taint in his composition. (It’s a curious thing to think that some of us may have distant cousins eating men on Sherboro Island or raiding with the Sofas.) At any rate, the Porroh man stabbed the woman to the heart as though he had been a mere low-class Italian, and very narrowly missed Pollock. But Pollock, using his revolver to parry the lightning stab which was aimed at his deltoid muscle, sent the iron dagger flying, and, firing, hit the man in the hand.

He fired again and missed, knocking a sudden window out of the wall of the hut. The Porroh man stooped in the doorway, glancing under his arm at Pollock. Pollock caught a glimpse of his inverted face in the sunlight, and then the Englishman was alone, sick and trembling with the excitement 417 of the affair, in the twilight of the place. It had all happened in less time than it takes to read about it.

The woman was quite dead, and having ascertained this, Pollock went to the entrance of the hut and looked out. Things outside were dazzling bright. Half a dozen of the porters of the expedition were standing up in a group near the green huts they occupied, and staring towards him, wondering what the shots might signify. Behind

the little group of men was the broad stretch of black fetid mud by the river, a green carpet of rafts of papyrus and water-grass, and then the leaden water. The mangroves beyond the stream loomed indistinctly through the blue haze. There were no signs of excitement in the squat village, whose fence was just visible above the cane-grass.

Pollock came out of the hut cautiously and walked towards the river, looking over his shoulder at intervals. But the Porroh man had vanished. Pollock clutched his revolver nervously in his hand.

One of his men came to meet him, and as he came, pointed to the bushes behind the hut in which the Porroh man had disappeared. Pollock had an irritating persuasion of having made an absolute fool of himself; he felt bitter, savage, at the turn things had taken. At the same time, he would have to tell Waterhouse—the moral, exemplary, cautious Waterhouse—who would inevitably take the matter seriously. Pollock cursed bitterly at his luck, at Waterhouse, and especially at the West Coast of Africa. He felt consummately sick of the expedition. And in the back of his mind all the time was a speculative doubt where precisely within the visible horizon the Porroh man might be.

It is perhaps rather shocking, but he was not at all upset by the murder that had just happened. He had seen so much brutality during the last three months, so many dead women, burnt huts, drying skeletons, up the Kittam River in the wake of the Sofa cavalry, that his senses were blunted. What disturbed him was the persuasion that this business was only beginning.

He swore savagely at the black, who ventured to ask a question, and went on into the tent under the orange-trees where Waterhouse was lying, feeling exasperatingly like a boy going into the headmaster's study.

Waterhouse was still sleeping off the effects of his last dose of chlorodyne, and Pollock sat down on a packing-case beside him, and, lighting his pipe, waited for him to awake. About him were scattered the pots and weapons Waterhouse had collected from the Mendi people, and which he had been repacking for the canoe voyage to Sulyma.

Presently Waterhouse woke up, and after judicial stretching, decided he was all right again. Pollock got him some tea. Over the tea the incidents of the afternoon were described by Pollock, after some preliminary beating about the bush. Waterhouse took the matter even more seriously than Pollock had anticipated. He did not simply disapprove, he scolded, he insulted.

“You’re one of those infernal fools who think a black man isn’t a human being,” he said. “I can’t be ill a day without you must get into some dirty scrape or other. This is the third time in a month that you have come crossways-on with a native, and this time you’re in for it with a vengeance. Porroh, too! They’re down upon you enough as it is, about that idol you wrote your silly name on. And they’re the most vindictive devils on earth! You make a man ashamed of civilisation. To think you come of a decent family! If ever I cumber myself up with a vicious, stupid young lout like you again—”

“Steady on, now,” snarled Pollock, in the tone that always exasperated Waterhouse; “steady on.”

At that Waterhouse became speechless. He jumped to his feet.

“Look here, Pollock,” he said, after a struggle to control his breath. “You must go home. I won’t have you any longer. I’m ill enough as it is through you—”

“Keep your hair on,” said Pollock, staring in front of him. “I’m ready enough to go.”

Waterhouse became calmer again. He sat down on the camp-stool. “Very well,” he said. “I don’t want a row, Pollock, you know; but it’s confoundedly annoying to have one’s plans put out by this kind of thing. I’ll come to Sulyma with you, and see you safe aboard—”

“You needn’t,” said Pollock. “I can go alone. From here.”

“Not far,” said Waterhouse. “You don’t understand this Porroh business.”

“How should I know she belonged to a Porrohman?” said Pollock, bitterly.

“Well, she did,” said Waterhouse; “and you can’t undo the thing. Go alone, indeed! I wonder what they’d do to you. You don’t seem to understand that this Porroh hokey-pokey rules this country, is its law, religion, constitution, medicine, magic—They appoint the chiefs. The Inquisition, at its best, couldn’t hold a candle to these chaps. He will probably set Awajale, the chief here, on to us. It’s lucky our porters are Mendis. We shall have to shift this little settlement of ours—Confound you, Pollock! And, of course, you must go and miss him.”

He thought, and his thoughts seemed disagreeable. Presently he stood up and took his rifle. “I’d keep close for a bit, if I were you,” he said, over his shoulder, as he went out. “I’m going out to see what I can find out about it.”

Pollock remained sitting in the tent, meditating. 421 “I was meant for a civilised life,” he said to himself, regretfully, as he filled his pipe. “The sooner I get back to London or Paris the better for me.”

His eye fell on the sealed case in which Waterhouse had put the featherless poisoned arrows they had bought in the Mendi country. "I wish I had hit the beggar somewhere vital," said Pollock, viciously.

Waterhouse came back after a long interval. He was not communicative, though Pollock asked him questions enough. The Porroh man, it seems, was a prominent member of that mystical society. The village was interested, but not threatening. No doubt the witch-doctor had gone into the bush. He was a great witch-doctor. "Of course, he's up to something," said Waterhouse, and became silent.

"But what can he do?" asked Pollock, unheeded.

"I must get you out of this. There's something brewing, or things would not be so quiet," said Waterhouse, after a gap of silence. Pollock wanted to know what the brew might be. "Dancing in a circle of skulls," said Waterhouse; "brewing a stink in a copper pot." Pollock wanted particulars. Waterhouse was vague, Pollock pressing. At last Waterhouse lost his temper. "How the devil should I know?" he said to Pollock's twentieth inquiry what the Porroh 422man would do. "He tried to kill you off-hand in the hut. Now, I fancy he will try something more elaborate. But you'll see fast enough. I don't want to help unnerve you. It's probably all nonsense."

That night, as they were sitting at their fire, Pollock again tried to draw Waterhouse out on the subject of Porroh methods. "Better get to sleep," said Waterhouse, when Pollock's bent became apparent; "we start early to-morrow. You may want all your nerve about you."

"But what line will he take?"

"Can't say. They're versatile people. They know a lot of rum dodges. You'd better get that copper-devil, Shakespear, to talk."

There was a flash and a heavy bang out of the darkness behind the huts, and a clay bullet came whistling close to Pollock's head. This, at least, was crude enough. The blacks and half-breeds sitting and yarning round their own fire jumped up, and some one fired into the dark.

"Better go into one of the huts," said Waterhouse, quietly, still sitting unmoved.

Pollock stood up by the fire and drew his revolver. Fighting, at least, he was not afraid of. But a man in the dark is in the best of armour. Realising the wisdom of Waterhouse's advice, Pollock went into the tent and lay down there.

What little sleep he had was disturbed by dreams, variegated dreams, but chiefly of the Porroh 423man's face, upside down, as he went out of the hut, and looked up under his arm. It was odd that this transitory impression should have stuck so firmly in Pollock's memory. Moreover, he was troubled by queer pains in his limbs.

In the white haze of the early morning, as they were loading the canoes, a barbed arrow suddenly appeared quivering in the ground close to Pollock's foot. The boys made a perfunctory effort to clear out the thicket, but it led to no capture.

After these two occurrences, there was a disposition on the part of the expedition to leave Pollock to himself, and Pollock became, for the first time in his life, anxious to mingle with blacks. Waterhouse took one canoe, and Pollock, in spite of a friendly desire to chat with Waterhouse, had to take the other. He was left all alone in the front part of the canoe, and he had the greatest trouble to make the men—who did not love him—keep to the middle of the river, a clear hundred yards or more from either shore. However, he made Shakespear, the Freetown half-breed, come up to his own end of the canoe and tell him about Porroh, which Shakespear, failing in his attempts to leave Pollock alone, presently did with considerable freedom and gusto.

The day passed. The canoe glided swiftly along the ribbon of lagoon water, between the drift of water-figs, fallen trees, papyrus, and palm-wine palms, and with the dark mangrove swamp 424to the left, through which one could hear now and then the roar of the Atlantic surf. Shakespear told, in his soft blurred English, of how the Porroh could cast spells; how men withered up under their malice; how they could send dreams and devils; how they tormented and killed the sons of Ijibu; how they kidnapped a white trader from Sulyma who had maltreated one of the sect, and how his body looked when it was found. And Pollock after each narrative cursed under his breath at the want of missionary enterprise that allowed such things to be, and at the inert British Government that ruled over this dark heathendom of Sierra Leone. In the evening they came to the Kasi Lake, and sent a score of crocodiles lumbering off the island on which the expedition camped for the night.

The next day they reached Sulyma, and smelt the sea breeze; but Pollock had to put up there for five days before he could get on to Freetown. Waterhouse, considering him to be comparatively safe here, and within the pale of Freetown influence, left him and went back with the expedition to Gbemba, and Pollock became very friendly with Perera, the only resident white trader at Sulyma—so friendly, indeed, that he went about with him everywhere. Perera was a little Portuguese Jew, who had lived in England, and he appreciated the Englishman's friendliness as a great compliment.

425 For two days nothing happened out of the ordinary; for the most part Pollock and Perera played Nap—the only game they had in common—and Pollock got into debt. Then, on the second evening, Pollock had a disagreeable intimation of the arrival of the Porroh man in Sulyma by getting a flesh-wound in the shoulder from a lump of filed iron. It was a long shot, and the missile had nearly spent its force when it hit him. Still it conveyed its message plainly enough. Pollock sat up in his hammock, revolver in hand, all that night, and next morning confided, to some extent, in the Anglo-Portuguese.

Perera took the matter seriously. He knew the local customs pretty thoroughly. “It is a personal question, you must know. It is revenge. And of course he is hurried by your leaving de country. None of de natives or half-breeds will interfere wid him very much—unless you make it wort deir while. If you come upon him suddenly, you might shoot him. But den he might shoot you.

“Den dere’s dis—infernal magic,” said Perera. “Of course, I don’t believe in it—superstition; but still it’s not nice to tink dat wherever you are, dere is a black man, who spends a moonlight night now and den a-dancing about a fire to send you bad dreams—Had any bad dreams?”

“Rather,” said Pollock. “I keep on seeing the beggar’s head upside down grinning at me and 426 showing all his teeth as he did in the hut, and coming close up to me, and then going ever so far off, and coming back. It’s nothing to be afraid of, but somehow it simply paralyses me with terror in my sleep. Queer things—dreams. I know it’s a dream all the time, and I can’t wake up from it.”

“It’s probably only fancy,” said Perera. “Den my niggers say Porroh men can send snakes. Seen any snakes lately?”

“Only one. I killed him this morning, on the floor near my hammock. Almost trod on him as I got up.”

“Ah!” said Perera, and then, reassuringly, “Of course it is a—coincidence. Still I would keep my eyes open. Den dere’s pains in de bones.”

“I thought they were due to miasma,” said Pollock.

“Probably dey are. When did dey begin?”

Then Pollock remembered that he first noticed them the night after the fight in the hut. “It’s my opinion he don’t want to kill you,” said Perera—“at least not yet. I’ve heard deir idea is to scare and worry a man wid deir spells, and narrow misses, and rheumatic

pains, and bad dreams, and all dat, until he's sick of life. Of course, it's all talk, you know. You mustn't worry about it—But I wonder what he'll be up to next.”

“I shall have to be up to something first,” said 427Pollock, staring gloomily at the greasy cards that Perera was putting on the table. “It don't suit my dignity to be followed about, and shot at, and blighted in this way. I wonder if Porroh hokey-pokey upsets your luck at cards.”

He looked at Perera suspiciously.

“Very likely it does,” said Perera, warmly, shuffling. “Dey are wonderful people.”

That afternoon Pollock killed two snakes in his hammock, and there was also an extraordinary increase in the number of red ants that swarmed over the place; and these annoyances put him in a fit temper to talk over business with a certain Mendi rough he had interviewed before. The Mendi rough showed Pollock a little iron dagger, and demonstrated where one struck in the neck, in a way that made Pollock shiver; and in return for certain considerations Pollock promised him a double-barrelled gun with an ornamental lock.

In the evening, as Pollock and Perera were playing cards, the Mendi rough came in through the doorway, carrying something in a blood-soaked piece of native cloth.

“Not here!” said Pollock, very hurriedly. “Not here!”

But he was not quick enough to prevent the man, who was anxious to get to Pollock's side of the bargain, from opening the cloth and throwing the head of the Porroh man upon the table. It bounded from there on to the floor, leaving a red 428trail on the cards, and rolled into a corner, where it came to rest upside down, but glaring hard at Pollock.

Perera jumped up as the thing fell among the cards, and began in his excitement to gabble in Portuguese. The Mendi was bowing, with the red cloth in his hand. “De gun!” he said. Pollock stared back at the head in the corner. It bore exactly the expression it had in his dreams. Something seemed to snap in his own brain as he looked at it.

Then Perera found his English again.

“You got him killed?” he said. “You did not kill him yourself?”

“Why should I?” said Pollock.

“But he will not be able to take it off now!”

“Take *what* off?” said Pollock.

“And all dese cards are spoiled!”

“*What* do you mean by taking off?” said Pollock.

“You must send me a new pack from Freetown. You can buy dem dere.”

“But—‘take it off’?”

“It is only superstition. I forgot. De niggers say dat if de witches—he was a witch—But it is rubbish—You must make de Porroh man take it off, or kill him yourself—It is very silly.”

Pollock swore under his breath, still staring hard at the head in the corner.

“I can’t stand that glare,” he said. Then suddenly he rushed at the thing and kicked it. It rolled some yards or so, and came to rest in the same position as before, upside down, and looking at him.

“He is ugly,” said the Anglo-Portuguese. “Very ugly. Dey do it on deir faces with little knives.”

Pollock would have kicked the head again, but the Mendi man touched him on the arm. “De gun?” he said, looking nervously at the head.

“Two—if you will take that beastly thing away,” said Pollock.

The Mendi shook his head, and intimated that he only wanted one gun now due to him, and for which he would be obliged. Pollock found neither cajolery nor bullying any good with him. Perera had a gun to sell (at a profit of three hundred per cent.), and with that the man presently departed. Then Pollock’s eyes, against his will, were recalled to the thing on the floor.

“It is funny dat his head keeps upside down,” said Perera, with an uneasy laugh. “His brains must be heavy, like de weight in de little images one sees dat keep always upright wid lead in dem. You will take him wiv you when you go presently. You might take him now. De cards are all spoilt. Dere is a man sell dem in Freetown. De room is in a filty mess as it is. You should have killed him yourself.”

Pollock pulled himself together, and went and picked up the head. He would hang it up by the lamp-hook in the middle of the ceiling of his room, and dig a grave for it at once. He was under the impression that he hung it up by the hair, but that must have been wrong, for when he returned for it, it was hanging by the neck upside down.

He buried it before sunset on the north side of the shed he occupied, so that he should not have to pass the grave after dark when he was returning from Perera’s. He

killed two snakes before he went to sleep. In the darkest part of the night he awoke with a start, and heard a pattering sound and something scraping on the floor. He sat up noiselessly, and felt under his pillow for his revolver. A mumbling growl followed, and Pollock fired at the sound. There was a yelp, and something dark passed for a moment across the hazy blue of the doorway. "A dog!" said Pollock, lying down again.

In the early dawn he awoke again with a peculiar sense of unrest. The vague pain in his bones had returned. For some time he lay watching the red ants that were swarming over the ceiling, and then, as the light grew brighter, he looked over the edge of his hammock and saw something dark on the floor. He gave such a violent start that the hammock overset and flung him out.

He found himself lying, perhaps, a yard away from the head of the Porroh man. It had been disinterred by the dog, and the nose was grievously 431battered. Ants and flies swarmed over it. By an odd coincidence, it was still upside down, and with the same diabolical expression in the inverted eyes.

Pollock sat paralysed, and stared at the horror for some time. Then he got up and walked round it,—giving it a wide berth—and out of the shed. The clear light of the sunrise, the living stir of vegetation before the breath of the dying land-breeze, and the empty grave with the marks of the dog's paws, lightened the weight upon his mind a little.

He told Perera of the business as though it was a jest,—a jest to be told with white lips. "You should not have frighten de dog," said Perera, with poorly simulated hilarity.

The next two days, until the steamer came, were spent by Pollock in making a more effectual disposition of his possession. Overcoming his aversion to handling the thing, he went down to the river mouth and threw it into the sea-water, but by some miracle it escaped the crocodiles, and was cast up by the tide on the mud a little way up the river, to be found by an intelligent Arab half-breed, and offered for sale to Pollock and Perera as a curiosity, just on the edge of night. The native hung about in the brief twilight, making lower and lower offers, and at last, getting scared in some way by the evident dread these wise white men had for the thing, went off, 432and, passing Pollock's shed, threw his burden in there for Pollock to discover in the morning.

At this Pollock got into a kind of frenzy. He would burn the thing. He went out straightway into the dawn, and had constructed a big pyre of brushwood before the heat of the day. He was interrupted by the hooter of the little paddle steamer from Monrovia to Bathurst, which was coming through the gap in the bar. "Thank Heaven!" said Pollock, with infinite piety, when the meaning of the sound dawned upon him.

With trembling hands he lit his pile of wood hastily, threw the head upon it, and went away to pack his portmanteau and make his adieux to Perera.

That afternoon, with a sense of infinite relief, Pollock watched the flat swampy foreshore of Sulyma grow small in the distance. The gap in the long line of white surge became narrower and narrower. It seemed to be closing in and cutting him off from his trouble. The feeling of dread and worry began to slip from him bit by bit. At Sulyma belief in Porroh malignity and Porroh magic had been in the air, his sense of Porroh had been vast, pervading, threatening, dreadful. Now manifestly the domain of Porroh was only a little place, a little black band between the sea and the blue cloudy Mendi uplands.

“Good-bye, Porroh!” said Pollock. “Good-bye—certainly not *au revoir*.”

433The captain of the steamer came and leant over the rail beside him, and wished him good evening, and spat at the froth of the wake in token of friendly ease.

“I picked up a rummy curio on the beach this go,” said the captain. “It’s a thing I never saw done this side of Indy before.”

“What might that be?” said Pollock.

“Pickled ’ed,” said the captain.

“*What?*” said Pollock.

“’Ed—smoked. ’Ed of one of these Porroh chaps, all ornamented with knife-cuts. Why! What’s up? Nothing? I shouldn’t have took you for a nervous chap. Green in the face. By gosh! you’re a bad sailor. All right, eh? Lord, how funny you went! Well, this ’ed I was telling you of is a bit rum in a way. I’ve got it, along with some snakes, in a jar of spirit in my cabin what I keeps for such curios, and I’m hanged if it don’t float upsy down. Hullo!”

Pollock had given an incoherent cry, and had his hands in his hair. He ran towards the paddle-boxes with a half-formed idea of jumping into the sea, and then he realised his position and turned back towards the captain.

“Here!” said the captain. “Jack Philips, just keep him off me! Stand off! No nearer, mister! What’s the matter with you? Are you mad?”

Pollock put his hand to his head. It was no 434good explaining. “I believe I am pretty nearly mad at times,” he said. “It’s a pain I have here. Comes suddenly. You’ll excuse me, I hope.”

He was white and in a perspiration. He saw suddenly very clearly all the danger he ran of having his sanity doubted. He forced himself to restore the captain's confidence, by answering his sympathetic inquiries, noting his suggestions, even trying a spoonful of neat brandy in his cheek, and, that matter settled, asking a number of questions about the captain's private trade in curiosities. The captain described the head in detail. All the while Pollock was struggling to keep under a preposterous persuasion that the ship was as transparent as glass, and that he could distinctly see the inverted face looking at him from the cabin beneath his feet.

Pollock had a worse time almost on the steamer than he had at Sulyma. All day he had to control himself in spite of his intense perception of the imminent presence of that horrible head that was overshadowing his mind. At night his old nightmare returned, until, with a violent effort, he would force himself awake, rigid with the horror of it, and with the ghost of a hoarse scream in his throat.

He left the actual head behind at Bathurst, where he changed ship for Teneriffe, but not his dreams nor the dull ache in his bones. At Teneriffe Pollock transferred to a Cape liner, but the head followed him. He gambled, he tried chess, 435he even read books; but he knew the danger of drink. Yet whenever a round black shadow, a round black object came into his range, there he looked for the head, and—saw it. He knew clearly enough that his imagination was growing traitor to him, and yet at times it seemed the ship he sailed in, his fellow-passengers, the sailors, the wide sea, were all part of a filmy phantasmagoria that hung, scarcely veiling it, between him and a horrible real world. Then the Porroh man, thrusting his diabolical face through that curtain, was the one real and undeniable thing. At that he would get up and touch things, taste something, gnaw something, burn his hand with a match, or run a needle into himself.

So, struggling grimly and silently with his excited imagination, Pollock reached England. He landed at Southampton, and went on straight from Waterloo to his banker's in Cornhill in a cab. There he transacted some business with the manager in a private room; and all the while the head hung like an ornament under the black marble mantel and dripped upon the fender. He could hear the drops fall, and see the red on the fender.

"A pretty fern," said the manager, following his eyes. "But it makes the fender rusty."

"Very," said Pollock; "a very pretty fern. And that reminds me. Can you recommend me a physician for mind troubles? I've got a little—what is it?—hallucination."

436The head laughed savagely, wildly. Pollock was surprised the manager did not notice it. But the manager only stared at his face.

With the address of a doctor, Pollock presently emerged in Cornhill. There was no cab in sight, and so he went on down to the western end of the street, and essayed the crossing opposite the Mansion House. The crossing is hardly easy even for the expert Londoner; cabs, vans, carriages, mailcarts, omnibuses go by in one incessant stream; to any one fresh from the malarious solitudes of Sierra Leone it is a boiling, maddening confusion. But when an inverted head suddenly comes bouncing, like an india-rubber ball, between your legs, leaving distinct smears of blood every time it touches the ground, you can scarcely hope to avoid an accident. Pollock lifted his feet convulsively to avoid it, and then kicked at the thing furiously. Then something hit him violently in the back, and a hot pain ran up his arm.

He had been hit by the pole of an omnibus, and three of the fingers of his left hand smashed by the hoof of one of the horses,—the very fingers, as it happened, that he shot from the Porroh man. They pulled him out from between the horses' legs, and found the address of the physician in his crushed hand.

For a couple of days Pollock's sensations were full of the sweet, pungent smell of chloroform, of painful operations that caused him no pain, of lying 437still and being given food and drink. Then he had a slight fever, and was very thirsty, and his old nightmare came back. It was only when it returned that he noticed it had left him for a day.

"If my skull had been smashed instead of my fingers, it might have gone altogether," said Pollock, staring thoughtfully at the dark cushion that had taken on for the time the shape of the head.

Pollock at the first opportunity told the physician of his mind trouble. He knew clearly that he must go mad unless something should intervene to save him. He explained that he had witnessed a decapitation in Dahomey, and was haunted by one of the heads. Naturally, he did not care to state the actual facts. The physician looked grave.

Presently he spoke hesitatingly. "As a child, did you get very much religious training?"

"Very little," said Pollock.

A shade passed over the physician's face. "I don't know if you have heard of the miraculous cures—it may be, of course, they are not miraculous—at Lourdes."

"Faith-healing will hardly suit me, I am afraid," said Pollock, with his eye on the dark cushion.

The head distorted its scarred features in an abominable grimace. The physician went upon a new track. "It's all imagination," he said, speaking with sudden briskness. "A fair case for faith-healing, anyhow. Your nervous system has 438run down, you're in that twilight state of health when the bogles come easiest. The strong impression was too much for you. I must make you up a little mixture that will strengthen your nervous system—especially your brain. And you must take exercise."

"I'm no good for faith-healing," said Pollock.

"And therefore we must restore tone. Go in search of stimulating air—Scotland, Norway, the Alps—"

"Jericho, if you like," said Pollock, "where Naaman went."

However, so soon as his fingers would let him, Pollock made a gallant attempt to follow out the doctor's suggestion. It was now November. He tried football; but to Pollock the game consisted in kicking a furious inverted head about a field. He was no good at the game. He kicked blindly, with a kind of horror, and when they put him back into goal, and the ball came swooping down upon him, he suddenly yelled and got out of its way. The discreditable stories that had driven him from England to wander in the tropics shut him off from any but men's society, and now his increasingly strange behaviour made even his man friends avoid him. The thing was no longer a thing of the eye merely; it gibbered at him, spoke to him. A horrible fear came upon him that presently, when he took hold of the apparition, it would no longer become some mere article of 439furniture, but would *feel* like a real dissevered head. Alone, he would curse at the thing, defy it, entreat it; once or twice, in spite of his grim self-control, he addressed it in the presence of others. He felt the growing suspicion in the eyes of the people that watched him,—his landlady, the servant, his man.

One day early in December his cousin Arnold—his next of kin—came to see him and draw him out, and watch his sunken, yellow face with narrow, eager eyes. And it seemed to Pollock that the hat his cousin carried in his hand was no hat at all, but a Gorgon head that glared at him upside down, and fought with its eyes against his reason. However, he was still resolute to see the matter out. He got a bicycle, and, riding over the frosty road from Wandsworth to Kingston, found the thing rolling along at his side, and leaving a dark trail behind it. He set his teeth and rode faster. Then suddenly, as he came down the hill towards Richmond Park, the apparition rolled in front of him and under his wheel, so quickly that he had no time for thought, and, turning quickly to avoid it, was flung violently against a heap of stones and broke his left wrist.

The end came on Christmas morning. All night he had been in a fever, the bandages encircling his wrist like a band of fire, his dreams more vivid and terrible than ever. In the cold, colourless, uncertain light that came before the sunrise, 440 he sat up in his bed, and saw the head upon the bracket in the place of the bronze jar that had stood there overnight.

“I know that is a bronze jar,” he said, with a chill doubt at his heart. Presently the doubt was irresistible. He got out of bed slowly, shivering, and advanced to the jar with his hand raised. Surely he would see now his imagination had deceived him, recognise the distinctive sheen of bronze. At last, after an age of hesitation, his fingers came down on the patterned cheek of the head. He withdrew them spasmodically. The last stage was reached. His sense of touch had betrayed him.

Trembling, stumbling against the bed, kicking against his shoes with his bare feet, a dark confusion eddying round him, he groped his way to the dressing-table, took his razor from the drawer, and sat down on the bed with this in his hand. In the looking-glass he saw his own face, colourless, haggard, full of the ultimate bitterness of despair.

He beheld in swift succession the incidents in the brief tale of his experience. His wretched home, his still more wretched schooldays, the years of vicious life he had led since then, one act of selfish dishonour leading to another; it was all clear and pitiless now, all its squalid folly, in the cold light of the dawn. He came to the hut, to the fight with the Porroh man, to the retreat 441 down the river to Sulyma, to the Mendi assassin and his red parcel, to his frantic endeavours to destroy the head, to the growth of his hallucination. It was a hallucination! He *knew* it was. A hallucination merely. For a moment he snatched at hope. He looked away from the glass, and on the bracket, the inverted head grinned and grimaced at him—With the stiff fingers of his bandaged hand he felt at his neck for the throb of his arteries. The morning was very cold, the steel blade felt like ice.

442

THE SEA RAIDERS

I

Until the extraordinary affair at Sidmouth, the peculiar species *Haploteuthis ferox* was known to science only generically, on the strength of a half-digested tentacle obtained near the Azores, and a decaying body pecked by birds and nibbled by fish, found early in 1896 by Mr. Jennings, near Land's End.

In no department of zoölogical science, indeed, are we quite so much in the dark as with regard to the deep-sea cephalopods. A mere accident, for instance, it was that led to the Prince of Monaco's discovery of nearly a dozen new forms in the summer of 1895, a discovery in which the before-mentioned tentacle was included. It chanced that a cachalot was killed off Terceira by some sperm-whalers, and in its last struggles charged almost to the Prince's yacht, missed it, rolled under, and died within twenty yards of his rudder. And in its agony it threw up a number of large objects, which the Prince, dimly perceiving they were strange and important, was, by a happy expedient, able to secure before they sank. He set his screws in motion, and kept them circling 443 in the vortices thus created until a boat could be lowered. And these specimens were whole cephalopods and fragments of cephalopods, some of gigantic proportions, and almost all of them unknown to science!

It would seem, indeed, that these large and agile creatures, living in the middle depths of the sea, must, to a large extent, for ever remain unknown to us, since under water they are too nimble for nets, and it is only by such rare unlooked-for accidents that specimens can be obtained. In the case of *Haploteuthis ferox*, for instance, we are still altogether ignorant of its habitat, as ignorant as we are of the breeding-ground of the herring or the sea-ways of the salmon. And zoölogists are altogether at a loss to account for its sudden appearance on our coast. Possibly it was the stress of a hunger migration that drove it hither out of the deep. But it will be, perhaps, better to avoid necessarily inconclusive discussion, and to proceed at once with our narrative.

The first human being to set eyes upon a living *Haploteuthis*—the first human being to survive, that is, for there can be little doubt now that the wave of bathing fatalities and boating accidents that travelled along the coast of Cornwall and Devon in early May was due to this cause—was a retired tea-dealer of the name of Fison, who was stopping at a Sidmouth boarding-house. It was in the afternoon, and he was walking along the 444 cliff path between Sidmouth and Ladram Bay. The cliffs in this direction are very high, but down the red face of them in one place a kind of ladder staircase has been made. He was near this when his attention was attracted by what at first he thought to be a cluster of birds struggling over a fragment of food that caught the sunlight, and glistened pinkish-white. The tide was right out, and this object was not only far below him, but remote across a broad waste of rock reefs covered with dark seaweed and interspersed with silvery, shining, tidal pools. And he was, moreover, dazzled by the brightness of the further water.

In a minute, regarding this again, he perceived that his judgment was in fault, for over this struggle circled a number of birds, jackdaws and gulls for the most part, the latter gleaming blindingly when the sunlight smote their wings, and they seemed minute in

comparison with it. And his curiosity was, perhaps, aroused all the more strongly because of his first insufficient explanations.

As he had nothing better to do than amuse himself, he decided to make this object, whatever it was, the goal of his afternoon walk, instead of Ladram Bay, conceiving it might perhaps be a great fish of some sort, stranded by some chance, and flapping about in its distress. And so he hurried down the long steep ladder, stopping at intervals of thirty feet or so to take breath and scan the mysterious movement.

445At the foot of the cliff he was, of course, nearer his object than he had been; but, on the other hand, it now came up against the incandescent sky, beneath the sun, so as to seem dark and indistinct. Whatever was pinkish of it was now hidden by a skerry of weedy boulders. But he perceived that it was made up of seven rounded bodies, distinct or connected, and that the birds kept up a constant croaking and screaming, but seemed afraid to approach it too closely.

Mr. Fison, torn by curiosity, began picking his way across the wave-worn rocks, and, finding the wet seaweed that covered them thickly rendered them extremely slippery, he stopped, removed his shoes and socks, and coiled his trousers above his knees. His object was, of course, merely to avoid stumbling into the rocky pools about him, and perhaps he was rather glad, as all men are, of an excuse to resume, even for a moment, the sensations of his boyhood. At any rate, it is to this, no doubt, that he owes his life.

He approached his mark with all the assurance which the absolute security of this country against all forms of animal life gives its inhabitants. The round bodies moved to and fro, but it was only when he surmounted the skerry of boulders I have mentioned that he realised the horrible nature of the discovery. It came upon him with some suddenness.

The rounded bodies fell apart as he came into 446sight over the ridge, and displayed the pinkish object to be the partially devoured body of a human being, but whether of a man or woman he was unable to say. And the rounded bodies were new and ghastly-looking creatures, in shape somewhat resembling an octopus, and with huge and very long and flexible tentacles, coiled copiously on the ground. The skin had a glistening texture, unpleasant to see, like shiny leather. The downward bend of the tentacle-surrounded mouth, the curious excrescence at the bend, the tentacles, and the large, intelligent eyes, gave the creatures a grotesque suggestion of a face. They were the size of a fair-sized swine about the body, and the tentacles seemed to him to be many feet in length. There were, he thinks, seven or eight at least of the creatures. Twenty

yards beyond them, amid the surf of the now returning tide, two others were emerging from the sea.

Their bodies lay flatly on the rocks, and their eyes regarded him with evil interest; but it does not appear that Mr. Fison was afraid, or that he realised that he was in any danger. Possibly his confidence is to be ascribed to the limpness of their attitudes. But he was horrified, of course, and intensely excited and indignant at such revolting creatures preying upon human flesh. He thought they had chanced upon a drowned body. He shouted to them, with the idea of driving them off, and, finding they did not budge, cast 447 about him, picked up a big rounded lump of rock, and flung it at one.

And then, slowly uncoiling their tentacles, they all began moving towards him—creeping at first deliberately, and making a soft, purring sound to each other.

In a moment Mr. Fison realised that he was in danger. He shouted again, threw both his boots, and started off, with a leap, forthwith. Twenty yards off he stopped and faced about, judging them slow, and, behold! the tentacles of their leader were already pouring over the rocky ridge on which he had just been standing!

At that he shouted again, but this time not threatening, but a cry of dismay, and began jumping, striding, slipping, wading across the uneven expanse between him and the beach. The tall red cliffs seemed suddenly at a vast distance, and he saw, as though they were creatures in another world, two minute workmen engaged in the repair of the ladder-way, and little suspecting the race for life that was beginning below them. At one time he could hear the creatures splashing in the pools not a dozen feet behind him, and once he slipped and almost fell.

They chased him to the very foot of the cliffs, and desisted only when he had been joined by the workmen at the foot of the ladder-way up the cliff. All three of the men pelted them with stones for a time, and then hurried to the cliff top and along 448 the path towards Sidmouth, to secure assistance and a boat, and to rescue the desecrated body from the clutches of these abominable creatures.

II

And, as if he had not already been in sufficient peril that day, Mr. Fison went with the boat to point out the exact spot of his adventure.

As the tide was down, it required a considerable detour to reach the spot, and when at last they came off the ladder-way, the mangled body had disappeared. The water was now running in, submerging first one slab of slimy rock and then another, and the four

men in the boat—the workmen, that is, the boatman, and Mr. Fison—now turned their attention from the bearings off shore to the water beneath the keel.

At first they could see little below them, save a dark jungle of laminaria, with an occasional darting fish. Their minds were set on adventure, and they expressed their disappointment freely. But presently they saw one of the monsters swimming through the water seaward, with a curious rolling motion that suggested to Mr. Fison the spinning roll of a captive balloon. Almost immediately after, the waving streamers of laminaria were extraordinarily perturbed, parted for a moment, and three of these beasts became darkly visible, struggling for what was probably some fragment of the 449drowned man. In a moment the copious olive-green ribbons had poured again over this writhing group.

At that all four men, greatly excited, began beating the water with oars and shouting, and immediately they saw a tumultuous movement among the weeds. They desisted, to see more clearly, and as soon as the water was smooth, they saw, as it seemed to them, the whole sea bottom among the weeds set with eyes.

“Ugly swine!” cried one of the men. “Why, there’s dozens!”

And forthwith the things began to rise through the water about them. Mr. Fison has since described to the writer this startling eruption out of the waving laminaria meadows. To him it seemed to occupy a considerable time, but it is probable that really it was an affair of a few seconds only. For a time nothing but eyes, and then he speaks of tentacles streaming out and parting the weed fronds this way and that. Then these things, growing larger, until at last the bottom was hidden by their intercoiling forms, and the tips of tentacles rose darkly here and there into the air above the swell of the waters.

One came up boldly to the side of the boat, and, clinging to this with three of its sucker-set tentacles, threw four others over the gunwale, as if with an intention either of oversetting the boat or of clambering into it. Mr. Fison at once 450caught up the boathook, and, jabbing furiously at the soft tentacles, forced it to desist. He was struck in the back and almost pitched overboard by the boatman, who was using his oar to resist a similar attack on the other side of the boat. But the tentacles on either side at once relaxed their hold at this, slid out of sight, and splashed into the water.

“We’d better get out of this,” said Mr. Fison, who was trembling violently. He went to the tiller, while the boatman and one of the workmen seated themselves and began rowing. The other workman stood up in the fore part of the boat, with the boathook, ready to strike any more tentacles that might appear. Nothing else seems to have

been said. Mr. Fison had expressed the common feeling beyond amendment. In a hushed, scared mood, with faces white and drawn, they set about escaping from the position into which they had so recklessly blundered.

But the oars had scarcely dropped into the water before dark, tapering, serpentine ropes had bound them, and were about the rudder; and creeping up the sides of the boat with a looping motion came the suckers again. The men gripped their oars and pulled, but it was like trying to move a boat in a floating raft of weeds. "Help here!" cried the boatman, and Mr. Fison and the second workman rushed to help lug at the oar.

Then the man with the boathook—his name was Ewan, or Ewen—sprang up with a curse, and began striking downward over the side, as far as he could reach, at the bank of tentacles that now clustered along the boat's bottom. And, at the same time, the two rowers stood up to get a better purchase for the recovery of their oars. The boatman handed his to Mr. Fison, who lugged desperately, and, meanwhile, the boatman opened a big clasp-knife, and, leaning over the side of the boat, began hacking at the spiring arms upon the oar shaft.

Mr. Fison, staggering with the quivering rocking of the boat, his teeth set, his breath coming short, and the veins starting on his hands as he pulled at his oar, suddenly cast his eyes seaward. And there, not fifty yards off, across the long rollers of the incoming tide, was a large boat standing in towards them, with three women and a little child in it. A boatman was rowing, and a little man in a pink-ribboned straw hat and whites stood in the stern, hailing them. For a moment, of course, Mr. Fison thought of help, and then he thought of the child. He abandoned his oar forthwith, threw up his arms in a frantic gesture, and screamed to the party in the boat to keep away "for God's sake!" It says much for the modesty and courage of Mr. Fison that he does not seem to be aware that there was any quality of heroism in his action at this juncture. The oar he had abandoned was at once drawn under, and presently reappeared floating about twenty yards away.

At the same moment Mr. Fison felt the boat under him lurch violently, and a hoarse scream, a prolonged cry of terror from Hill, the boatman, caused him to forget the party of excursionists altogether. He turned, and saw Hill crouching by the forward rowlock, his face convulsed with terror, and his right arm over the side and drawn tightly down. He gave now a succession of short, sharp cries, "Oh! oh! oh!—oh!" Mr. Fison believes that he must have been hacking at the tentacles below the water-line, and have been grasped by them, but, of course, it is quite impossible to say now certainly what had happened. The boat was heeling over, so that the gunwale was

within ten inches of the water, and both Ewan and the other labourer were striking down into the water, with oar and boathook, on either side of Hill's arm. Mr. Fison instinctively placed himself to counterpoise them.

Then Hill, who was a burly, powerful man, made a strenuous effort, and rose almost to a standing position. He lifted his arm, indeed, clean out of the water. Hanging to it was a complicated tangle of brown ropes; and the eyes of one of the brutes that had hold of him, glaring straight and resolute, showed momentarily above the surface. The boat heeled more and more, and the green-brown water came pouring in a cascade over the side. 453 Then Hill slipped and fell with his ribs across the side, and his arm and the mass of tentacles about it splashed back into the water. He rolled over; his boot kicked Mr. Fison's knee as that gentleman rushed forward to seize him, and in another moment fresh tentacles had whipped about his waist and neck, and after a brief, convulsive struggle, in which the boat was nearly capsized, Hill was lugged overboard. The boat righted with a violent jerk that all but sent Mr. Fison over the other side, and hid the struggle in the water from his eyes.

He stood staggering to recover his balance for a moment, and as he did so, he became aware that the struggle and the inflowing tide had carried them close upon the weedy rocks again. Not four yards off a table of rock still rose in rhythmic movements above the in-wash of the tide. In a moment Mr. Fison seized the oar from Ewan, gave one vigorous stroke, then, dropping it, ran to the bows and leapt. He felt his feet slide over the rock, and, by a frantic effort, leapt again towards a further mass. He stumbled over this, came to his knees, and rose again.

"Look out!" cried some one, and a large drab body struck him. He was knocked flat into a tidal pool by one of the workmen, and as he went down he heard smothered, choking cries, that he believed at the time came from Hill. Then he found himself 454 marvelling at the shrillness and variety of Hill's voice. Some one jumped over him, and a curving rush of foamy water poured over him, and passed. He scrambled to his feet, dripping, and, without looking seaward, ran as fast as his terror would let him shoreward. Before him, over the flat space of scattered rocks, stumbled the two workmen—one a dozen yards in front of the other.

He looked over his shoulder at last, and, seeing that he was not pursued, faced about. He was astonished. From the moment of the rising of the cephalopods out of the water, he had been acting too swiftly to fully comprehend his actions. Now it seemed to him as if he had suddenly jumped out of an evil dream.

For there were the sky, cloudless and blazing with the afternoon sun, the sea, weltering under its pitiless brightness, the soft creamy foam of the breaking water, and

the low, long, dark ridges of rock. The righted boat floated, rising and falling gently on the swell about a dozen yards from shore. Hill and the monsters, all the stress and tumult of that fierce fight for life, had vanished as though they had never been.

Mr. Fison's heart was beating violently; he was throbbing to the finger-tips, and his breath came deep.

There was something missing. For some seconds he could not think clearly enough what this might be. Sun, sky, sea, rocks—what was it? Then he remembered the boatload of excursionists. It had vanished. He wondered whether he had imagined it. He turned, and saw the two workmen standing side by side under the projecting masses of the tall pink cliffs. He hesitated whether he should make one last attempt to save the man Hill. His physical excitement seemed to desert him suddenly, and leave him aimless and helpless. He turned shoreward, stumbling and wading towards his two companions.

He looked back again, and there were now two boats floating, and the one farthest out at sea pitched clumsily, bottom upward.

III

So it was *Haploteuthis ferax* made its appearance upon the Devonshire coast. So far, this has been its most serious aggression. Mr. Fison's account, taken together with the wave of boating and bathing casualties to which I have already alluded, and the absence of fish from the Cornish coasts that year, points clearly to a shoal of these voracious deep-sea monsters prowling slowly along the sub-tidal coast-line. Hunger migration has, I know, been suggested as the force that drove them hither; but, for my own part, I prefer to believe the alternative theory of Hemsley. Hemsley holds that a pack or shoal of these creatures may have become enamoured of human flesh by the accident of a foundered ship sinking among them, and have wandered in search of it out of their accustomed zone; first waylaying and following ships, and so coming to our shores in the wake of the Atlantic traffic. But to discuss Hemsley's cogent and admirably-stated arguments would be out of place here.

It would seem that the appetites of the shoal were satisfied by the catch of eleven people—for so far as can be ascertained, there were ten people in the second boat, and certainly these creatures gave no further signs of their presence off Sidmouth that day. The coast between Seaton and Budleigh Salterton was patrolled all that evening and night by four Preventive Service boats, the men in which were armed with harpoons and cutlasses, and as the evening advanced, a number of more or less

similarly equipped expeditions, organised by private individuals, joined them. Mr. Fison took no part in any of these expeditions.

About midnight excited hails were heard from a boat about a couple of miles out at sea to the south-east of Sidmouth, and a lantern was seen waving in a strange manner to and fro and up and down. The nearer boats at once hurried towards the alarm. The venturesome occupants of the boat, a seaman, a curate, and two schoolboys, had actually seen the monsters passing under their boat. The creatures, it seems, like most deep-sea organisms, were phosphorescent, and they had been floating, five fathoms deep or so, like creatures of moonshine through the blackness of the water, their tentacles retracted and as if asleep, rolling over and over, and moving slowly in a wedge-like formation towards the south-east.

These people told their story in gesticulated fragments, as first one boat drew alongside and then another. At last there was a little fleet of eight or nine boats collected together, and from them a tumult, like the chatter of a marketplace, rose into the stillness of the night. There was little or no disposition to pursue the shoal, the people had neither weapons nor experience for such a dubious chase, and presently—even with a certain relief, it may be—the boats turned shoreward.

And now to tell what is perhaps the most astonishing fact in this whole astonishing raid. We have not the slightest knowledge of the subsequent movements of the shoal, although the whole southwest coast was now alert for it. But it may, perhaps, be significant that a cachalot was stranded off Sark on June 3. Two weeks and three days after this Sidmouth affair, a living *Haploteuthis* came ashore on Calais sands. It was alive, because several witnesses saw its tentacles moving in a convulsive way. But it is probable that it was dying. A gentleman named Pouchet obtained a rifle and shot it.

That was the last appearance of a living *Haploteuthis*. No others were seen on the French coast. On the 15th of June a dead body, almost complete, was washed ashore near Torquay, and a few days later a boat from the Marine Biological station, engaged in dredging off Plymouth, picked up a rotting specimen, slashed deeply with a cutlass wound. How the former specimen had come by its death it is impossible to say. And on the last day of June, Mr. Egbert Caine, an artist, bathing near Newlyn, threw up his arms, shrieked, and was drawn under. A friend bathing with him made no attempt to save him, but swam at once for the shore. This is the last fact to tell of this extraordinary raid from the deeper sea. Whether it is really the last of these horrible creatures it is, as yet, premature to say. But it is believed, and certainly it is to be hoped, that they have returned now, and returned for good, to the sunless depths of the middle seas, out of which they have so strangely and so mysteriously arisen.

IN THE MODERN VEIN AN UNSYMPATHETIC LOVE STORY

Of course the cultivated reader has heard of Aubrey Vair. He has published on three several occasions volumes of delicate verses,—some, indeed, border on indelicacy,—and his column “Of Things Literary” in the “Climax” is well known. His Byronic visage and an interview have appeared in the “Perfect Lady.” It was Aubrey Vair, I believe, who demonstrated that the humour of Dickens was worse than his sentiment, and who detected “a subtle bourgeois flavour” in Shakespeare. However, it is not generally known that Aubrey Vair has had erotic experiences as well as erotic inspirations. He adopted Goethe some little time since as his literary prototype, and that may have had something to do with his temporary lapse from sexual integrity.

For it is one of the commonest things that undermine literary men, giving us landslips and picturesque effects along the otherwise even cliff of their respectable life, ranking next to avarice, and certainly above drink, this instability called 460genius, or, more fully, the consciousness of genius, such as Aubrey Vair possessed. Since Shelley set the fashion, your man of gifts has been assured that his duty to himself and his duty to his wife are incompatible, and his renunciation of the Philistine has been marked by such infidelity as his means and courage warranted. Most virtue is lack of imagination. At any rate, a minor genius without his affections twisted into an inextricable muddle, and who did not occasionally shed sonnets over his troubles, I have never met.

Even Aubrey Vair did this, weeping the sonnets overnight into his blotting-book, and pretending to write literary *causerie* when his wife came down in her bath slippers to see what kept him up. She did not understand him, of course. He did this even before the other woman appeared, so ingrained is conjugal treachery in the talented mind. Indeed, he wrote more sonnets before the other woman came than after that event, because thereafter he spent much of his leisure in cutting down the old productions, retrimming them, and generally altering this ready-made clothing of his passion to suit her particular height and complexion.

Aubrey Vair lived in a little red villa with a lawn at the back and a view of the Downs behind Reigate. He lived upon discreet investment eked out by literary work. His wife was handsome, sweet, and gentle, and—such is the tender humility 461of good married women—she found her life’s happiness in seeing that little Aubrey Vair had well-cooked variety for dinner, and that their house was the neatest and brightest of all the houses they entered. Aubrey Vair enjoyed the dinners, and was proud of the

house, yet nevertheless he mourned because his genius dwindled. Moreover, he grew plump, and corpulence threatened him.

We learn in suffering what we teach in song, and Aubrey Vair knew certainly that his soul could give no creditable crops unless his affections were harrowed. And how to harrow them was the trouble, for Reigate is a moral neighbourhood.

So Aubrey Vair's romantic longings blew loose for a time, much as a seedling creeper might, planted in the midst of a flower-bed. But at last, in the fulness of time, the other woman came to the embrace of Aubrey Vair's yearning heart-tendrils, and his romantic episode proceeded as is here faithfully written down.

The other woman was really a girl, and Aubrey Vair met her first at a tennis party at Redhill. Aubrey Vair did not play tennis after the accident to Miss Morton's eye, and because latterly it made him pant and get warmer and moister than even a poet should be; and this young lady had only recently arrived in England, and could not play. So they gravitated into the two vacant 462basket chairs beside Mrs. Bayne's deaf aunt, in front of the hollyhocks, and were presently talking at their ease together.

The other woman's name was unpropitious,—Miss Smith,—but you would never have suspected it from her face and costume. Her parentage was promising, she was an orphan, her mother was a Hindoo, and her father an Indian civil servant; and Aubrey Vair—himself a happy mixture of Kelt and Teuton, as, indeed, all literary men have to be nowadays—naturally believed in the literary consequences of a mixture of races. She was dressed in white. She had finely moulded, pale features, great depth of expression, and a cloud of delicately *frisé* black hair over her dark eyes, and she looked at Aubrey Vair with a look half curious and half shy, that contrasted admirably with the stereotyped frankness of your common Reigate girl.

“This is a splendid lawn—the best in Redhill,” said Aubrey Vair, in the course of the conversation; “and I like it all the better because the daisies are spared.” He indicated the daisies with a graceful sweep of his rather elegant hand.

“They are sweet little flowers,” said the lady in white, “and I have always associated them with England, chiefly, perhaps, through a picture I saw ‘over there’ when I was very little, of children making daisy chains. I promised myself 463that pleasure when I came home. But, alas! I feel now rather too large for such delights.”

“I do not see why we should not be able to enjoy these simple pleasures as we grow older—why our growth should have in it so much forgetting. For my own part—”

“Has your wife got Jane’s recipe for stuffing trout?” asked Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt, abruptly.

“I really don’t know,” said Aubrey Vair.

“That’s all right,” said Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt. “It ought to please even you.”

“Anything will please me,” said Aubrey Vair; “I care very little—”

“Oh, it’s a lovely dish,” said Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt, and relapsed into contemplation.

“I was saying,” said Aubrey Vair, “that I think I still find my keenest pleasures in childish pastimes. I have a little nephew that I see a great deal of, and when we fly kites together, I am sure it would be hard to tell which of us is the happier. By-the-by, you should get at your daisy chains in that way. Beguile some little girl.”

“But I did. I took that Morton mite for a walk in the meadows, and timidly broached the subject. And she reproached me for suggesting ‘frivolous pursuits.’ It was a horrible disappointment.”

“The governess here,” said Aubrey Vair, “is robbing that child of its youth in a terrible way. 464What will a life be that has no childhood at the beginning?”

“Some human beings are never young,” he continued, “and they never grow up. They lead absolutely colourless lives. They are—they are etiolated. They never love, and never feel the loss of it. They are—for the moment I can think of no better image—they are human flowerpots, in which no soul has been planted. But a human soul properly growing must begin in a fresh childishness.”

“Yes,” said the dark lady, thoughtfully, “a careless childhood, running wild almost. That should be the beginning.”

“Then we pass through the wonder and diffidence of youth.”

“To strength and action,” said the dark lady. Her dreamy eyes were fixed on the Downs, and her fingers tightened on her knees as she spoke. “Ah, it is a grand thing to live—as a man does—self-reliant and free.”

“And so at last,” said Aubrey Vair, “come to the culmination and crown of life.” He paused and glanced hastily at her. Then he dropped his voice almost to a whisper—
“And the culmination of life is love.”

Their eyes met for a moment, but she looked away at once. Aubrey Vair felt a peculiar thrill and a catching in his breath, but his emotions were too complex for analysis. He had a certain 465sense of surprise, also, at the way his conversation had developed.

Mrs. Bayne's deaf aunt suddenly dug him in the chest with her ear-trumpet, and some one at tennis bawled, "Love all!"

"Did I tell you Jane's girls have had scarlet fever?" asked Mrs. Bayne's deaf aunt.

"No," said Aubrey Vair.

"Yes; and they are peeling now," said Mrs. Bayne's deaf aunt, shutting her lips tightly, and nodding in a slow, significant manner at both of them.

There was a pause. All three seemed lost in thought, too deep for words.

"Love," began Aubrey Vair, presently, in a severely philosophical tone, leaning back in his chair, holding his hands like a praying saint's in front of him, and staring at the toe of his shoe,— "love is, I believe, the one true and real thing in life. It rises above reason, interest, or explanation. Yet I never read of an age when it was so much forgotten as it is now. Never was love expected to run so much in appointed channels, never was it so despised, checked, ordered, and obstructed. Policemen say, 'This way, Eros!' As a result, we relieve our emotional possibilities in the hunt for gold and notoriety. And after all, with the best fortune in these, we only hold up the gilded images of our success, and are weary slaves, with unsatisfied hearts, in the pageant of life."

466Aubrey Vair sighed, and there was a pause. The girl looked at him out of the mysterious darkness of her eyes. She had read many books, but Aubrey Vair was her first literary man, and she took this kind of thing for genius—as girls have done before.

"We are," continued Aubrey Vair, conscious of a favourable impression,— "we are like fireworks, mere dead, inert things until the appointed spark comes; and then—if it is not damp—the dormant soul blazes forth in all its warmth and beauty. That is living. I sometimes think, do you know, that we should be happier if we could die soon after that golden time, like the Ephemerides. There is a decay sets in."

"Eigh?" said Mrs. Bayne's deaf aunt, startingly. "I didn't hear you."

"I was on the point of remarking," shouted Aubrey Vair, wheeling the array of his thoughts,— "I was on the point of remarking that few people in Redhill could match Mrs. Morton's fine broad green."

"Others have noticed it," Mrs. Bayne's deaf aunt shouted back. "It is since she has had in her new false teeth."

This interruption dislocated the conversation a little. However—

“I must thank you, Mr. Vair,” said the dark girl, when they parted that afternoon, “for having given me very much to think about.”

467And from her manner, Aubrey Vair perceived clearly he had not wasted his time.

It would require a subtler pen than mine to tell how from that day a passion for Miss Smith grew like Jonah’s gourd in the heart of Aubrey Vair. He became pensive, and in the prolonged absence of Miss Smith, irritable. Mrs. Aubrey Vair felt the change in him, and put it down to a vitriolic Saturday Reviewer. Indisputably the “Saturday” does at times go a little far. He re-read “Elective Affinities,” and lent it to Miss Smith. Incredible as it may appear to members of the Areopagus Club, where we know Aubrey Vair, he did also beyond all question inspire a sort of passion in that sombre-eyed, rather clever, and really very beautiful girl.

He talked to her a lot about love and destiny, and all that bric-à-brac of the minor poet. And they talked together about his genius. He elaborately, though discreetly, sought her society, and presented and read to her the milder of his unpublished sonnets. We consider his Byronic features pasty, but the feminine mind has its own laws. I suppose, also, where a girl is not a fool, a literary man has an enormous advantage over any one but a preacher, in the show he can make of his heart’s wares.

At last a day in that summer came when he met her alone, possibly by chance, in a quiet lane 468towards Horley. There were ample hedges on either side, rich with honeysuckle, vetch, and mullein.

They conversed intimately of his poetic ambitions, and then he read her those verses of his subsequently published in “Hobson’s Magazine:” “Tenderly ever, since I have met thee.” He had written these the day before; and though I think the sentiment is uncommonly trite, there is a redeeming note of sincerity about the lines not conspicuous in all Aubrey Vair’s poetry.

He read rather well, and a swell of genuine emotion crept into his voice as he read, with one white hand thrown out to point the rhythm of the lines. “Ever, my sweet, for thee,” he concluded, looking up into her face.

Before he looked up, he had been thinking chiefly of his poem and its effect. Straightway he forgot it. Her arms hung limply before her, and her hands were clasped together. Her eyes were very tender.

“Your verses go to the heart,” she said softly.

Her mobile features were capable of wonderful shades of expression. He suddenly forgot his wife and his position as a minor poet as he looked at her. It is possible that

his classical features may themselves have undergone a certain transfiguration. For one brief moment—and it was always to linger in his memory—destiny lifted him out of his vain little self to a nobler level of simplicity. 469The copy of “Tenderly ever” fluttered from his hand. Considerations vanished. Only one thing seemed of importance.

“I love you,” he said abruptly.

An expression of fear came into her eyes. The grip of her hands upon one another tightened convulsively. She became very pale.

Then she moved her lips as if to speak, bringing her face slightly nearer to his. There was nothing in the world at that moment for either of them but one another. They were both trembling exceedingly. In a whisper she said, “You love me?”

Aubrey Vair stood quivering and speechless, looking into her eyes. He had never seen such a light as he saw there before. He was in a wild tumult of emotion. He was dreadfully scared at what he had done. He could not say another word. He nodded.

“And this has come to me?” she said presently, in the same awe-stricken whisper, and then, “Oh, my love, my love!”

And thereupon Aubrey Vair had her clasped to himself, her cheek upon his shoulder and his lips to hers.

Thus it was that Aubrey Vair came by the cardinal memory of his life. To this day it recurs in his works.

A little boy clambering in the hedge some way down the lane saw this group with surprise, and 470then with scorn and contempt. Reckless of his destiny, he turned away, feeling that he at least could never come to the unspeakable unmanliness of hugging girls. Unhappily for Reigate scandal, his shame for his sex was altogether too deep for words.

An hour after, Aubrey Vair returned home in a hushed mood. There were muffins after his own heart for his tea—Mrs. Aubrey Vair had had hers. And there were chrysanthemums, chiefly white ones,—flowers he loved,—set out in the china bowl he was wont to praise. And his wife came behind him to kiss him as he sat eating.

“De lill Jummuns,” she remarked, kissing him under the ear.

Then it came into the mind of Aubrey Vair with startling clearness, while his ear was being kissed, and with his mouth full of muffin, that life is a singularly complex thing.

The summer passed at last into the harvest-time, and the leaves began falling. It was evening, the warm sunset light still touched the Downs, but up the valley a blue haze was creeping. One or two lamps in Reigate were already alight.

About half-way up the slanting road that scales the Downs, there is a wooden seat where one may obtain a fine view of the red villas scattered below, and of the succession of blue hills beyond. Here the girl with the shadowy face was sitting.

471 She had a book on her knees, but it lay neglected. She was leaning forward, her chin resting upon her hand. She was looking across the valley into the darkening sky, with troubled eyes.

Aubrey Vair appeared through the hazel-bushes, and sat down beside her. He held half a dozen dead leaves in his hand.

She did not alter her attitude. "Well?" she said.

"Is it to be flight?" he asked.

Aubrey Vair was rather pale. He had been having bad nights latterly, with dreams of the Continental Express Mrs. Aubrey Vair possibly even in pursuit,—he always fancied her making the tragedy ridiculous by tearfully bringing additional pairs of socks, and any such trifles he had forgotten, with her,—all Reigate and Redhill in commotion. He had never eloped before, and he had visions of difficulties with hotel proprietors. Mrs. Aubrey Vair might telegraph ahead. Even he had had a prophetic vision of a headline in a halfpenny evening newspaper: "Young Lady abducts a Minor Poet." So there was a quaver in his voice as he asked, "Is it to be flight?"

"As you will," she answered, still not looking at him.

"I want you to consider particularly how this will affect you. A man," said Aubrey Vair, slowly, and staring hard at the leaves in his hand, "even gains 472a certain éclat in these affairs. But to a woman it is ruin—social, moral."

"This is not love," said the girl in white.

"Ah, my dearest! Think of yourself."

"Stupid!" she said, under her breath.

"You spoke?"

"Nothing."

“But cannot we go on, meeting one another, loving one another, without any great scandal or misery? Could we not—”

“That,” interrupted Miss Smith, “would be unspeakably horrible.”

“This is a dreadful conversation to me. Life is so intricate, such a web of subtle strands binds us this way and that. I cannot tell what is right. You must consider—”

“A man would break such strands.”

“There is no manliness,” said Aubrey Vair, with a sudden glow of moral exaltation, “in doing wrong. My love—”

“We could at least die together, dearest,” she said discontentedly.

“Good Lord!” said Aubrey Vair. “I mean—consider my wife.”

“You have not considered her hitherto.”

“There is a flavour—of cowardice, of desertion, about suicide,” said Aubrey Vair.

“Frankly, I have the English prejudice, and do not like any kind of running away.”

Miss Smith smiled very faintly. “I see clearly now what I did not see. My love and yours are very different things.”

“Possibly it is a sexual difference,” said Aubrey Vair; and then, feeling the remark inadequate, he relapsed into silence.

They sat for some time without a word. The two lights in Reigate below multiplied to a score of bright points, and, above, one star had become visible. She began laughing, an almost noiseless, hysterical laugh that jarred unaccountably upon Aubrey Vair.

Presently she stood up. “They will wonder where I am,” she said. “I think I must be going.”

He followed her to the road. “Then this is the end?” he said, with a curious mixture of relief and poignant regret.

“Yes, this is the end,” she answered, and turned away.

There straightway dropped into the soul of Aubrey Vair a sense of infinite loss. It was an altogether new sensation. She was perhaps twenty yards away, when he groaned aloud with the weight of it, and suddenly began running after her with his arms extended.

“Annie,” he cried,—“Annie! I have been talking *rot*. Annie, now I know I love you! I cannot spare you. This must not be. I did not understand.”

The weight was horrible.

474 “Oh, stop, Annie!” he cried, with a breaking voice, and there were tears on his face.

She turned upon him suddenly, with a look of annoyance, and his arms fell by his side. His expression changed at the sight of her pale face.

“You do not understand,” she said. “I have said good-bye.”

She looked at him; he was evidently greatly distressed, a little out of breath, and he had just stopped blubbering. His contemptible quality reached the pathetic. She came up close to him, and, taking his damp Byronic visage between her hands, she kissed him again and again. “Good-bye, little man that I loved,” she said; “and good-bye to this folly of love.”

Then, with something that may have been a laugh or a sob,—she herself, when she came to write it all in her novel, did not know which,—she turned and hurried away again, and went out of the path that Aubrey Vair must pursue, at the cross-roads.

Aubrey Vair stood, where she had kissed him, with a mind as inactive as his body, until her white dress had disappeared. Then he gave an involuntary sigh, a large, exhaustive expiration, and so awoke himself, and began walking, pensively dragging his feet through the dead leaves, home. Emotions are terrible things.

“Do you like the potatoes, dear?” asked Mrs. 475 Aubrey Vair at dinner. “I cooked them myself.”

Aubrey Vair descended slowly from cloudy, impalpable meditations to the level of fried potatoes. “These potatoes—” he remarked, after a pause during which he was struggling with recollection. “Yes. These potatoes have exactly the tints of the dead leaves of the hazel.”

“What a fanciful poet it is!” said Mrs. Aubrey Vair. “Taste them. They are very nice potatoes indeed.”

476

THE LORD OF THE DYNAMOS

The chief attendant of the three dynamos that buzzed and rattled at Camberwell, and kept the electric railway going, came out of Yorkshire, and his name was James Holroyd. He was a practical electrician, but fond of whiskey, a heavy red-haired brute

with irregular teeth. He doubted the existence of the deity, but accepted Carnot's cycle, and he had read Shakespeare and found him weak in chemistry. His helper came out of the mysterious East, and his name was Azuma-zi. But Holroyd called him Pooh-bah. Holroyd liked a nigger help because he would stand kicking—a habit with Holroyd—and did not pry into the machinery and try to learn the ways of it. Certain odd possibilities of the negro mind brought into abrupt contact with the crown of our civilisation Holroyd never fully realised, though just at the end he got some inkling of them.

To define Azuma-zi was beyond ethnology. He was, perhaps, more negroid than anything else, though his hair was curly rather than frizzy, and his nose had a bridge. Moreover, his skin was brown rather than black, and the whites of his eyes were yellow. His broad cheek-bones⁴⁷⁷ and narrow chin gave his face something of the viperine V. His head, too, was broad behind, and low and narrow at the forehead, as if his brain had been twisted round in the reverse way to a European's. He was short of stature and still shorter of English. In conversation he made numerous odd noises of no known marketable value, and his infrequent words were carved and wrought into heraldic grotesqueness. Holroyd tried to elucidate his religious beliefs, and—especially after whiskey—lectured to him against superstition and missionaries. Azuma-zi, however, shirked the discussion of his gods, even though he was kicked for it.

Azuma-zi had come, clad in white but insufficient raiment, out of the stoke-hole of the *Lord Clive*, from the Straits Settlements, and beyond, into London. He had heard even in his youth of the greatness and riches of London, where all the women are white and fair, and even the beggars in the streets are white; and he had arrived, with newly earned gold coins in his pocket, to worship at the shrine of civilisation. The day of his landing was a dismal one; the sky was dun, and a wind-worried drizzle filtered down to the greasy streets, but he plunged boldly into the delights of Shadwell, and was presently cast up, shattered in health, civilised in costume, penniless, and, except in matters of the direst necessity, practically a dumb animal, to toil for James⁴⁷⁸ Holroyd and to be bullied by him in the dynamo shed at Camberwell. And to James Holroyd bullying was a labour of love.

There were three dynamos with their engines at Camberwell. The two that have been there since the beginning are small machines; the larger one was new. The smaller machines made a reasonable noise; their straps hummed over the drums, every now and then the brushes buzzed and fizzled, and the air churned steadily, whoo! whoo! whoo! between their poles. One was loose in its foundations and kept the shed vibrating. But the big dynamo drowned these little noises altogether with the

sustained drone of its iron core, which somehow set part of the iron-work humming. The place made the visitor's head reel with the throb, throb, throb of the engines, the rotation of the big wheels, the spinning ball-valves, the occasional spittings of the steam, and over all the deep, unceasing, surging note of the big dynamo. This last noise was from an engineering point of view a defect; but Azuma-zi accounted it unto the monster for mightiness and pride.

If it were possible we would have the noises of that shed always about the reader as he reads, we would tell all our story to such an accompaniment. It was a steady stream of din, from which the ear picked out first one thread and then another; there was the intermittent snorting, panting, and seething of the steam-engines, the suck and thud of their pistons, the dull beat on the air as the spokes of the great driving-wheels came round, a note the leather straps made as they ran tighter and looser, and a fretful tumult from the dynamos; and, over all, sometimes inaudible, as the ear tired of it, and then creeping back upon the senses again, was this trombone note of the big machine. The floor never felt steady and quiet beneath one's feet, but quivered and jarred. It was a confusing, unsteady place, and enough to send any one's thoughts jerking into odd zigzags. And for three months, while the big strike of the engineers was in progress, Holroyd, who was a blackleg, and Azuma-zi, who was a mere black, were never out of the stir and eddy of it, but slept and fed in the little wooden shanty between the shed and the gates.

Holroyd delivered a theological lecture on the text of his big machine soon after Azuma-zi came. He had to shout to be heard in the din. "Look at that," said Holroyd; "where's your 'eathen idol to match 'im?" And Azuma-zi looked. For a moment Holroyd was inaudible, and then Azuma-zi heard: "Kill a hundred men. Twelve per cent. on the ordinary shares," said Holroyd, "and that's something like a Gord!"

Holroyd was proud of his big dynamo, and expatiated upon its size and power to Azuma-zi until heaven knows what odd currents of thought that, and the incessant whirling and shindy, set up within the curly, black cranium. He would explain in the most graphic manner the dozen or so ways in which a man might be killed by it, and once he gave Azuma-zi a shock as a sample of its quality. After that, in the breathing-times of his labour—it was heavy labour, being not only his own but most of Holroyd's—Azuma-zi would sit and watch the big machine. Now and then the brushes would sparkle and spit blue flashes, at which Holroyd would swear, but all the rest was as smooth and rhythmic as breathing. The band ran shouting over the shaft, and ever behind one as one watched was the complacent thud of the piston. So it lived all day in this big airy shed, with him and Holroyd to wait upon it; not prisoned up and slaving to drive a ship as the other engines he knew—mere captive devils of the British

Solomon—had been, but a machine enthroned. Those two smaller dynamos, Azuma-zi by force of contrast despised; the large one he privately christened the Lord of the Dynamos. They were fretful and irregular, but the big dynamo was steady. How great it was! How serene and easy in its working! Greater and calmer even than the Buddahs he had seen at Rangoon, and yet not motionless, but living! The great black coils spun, spun, spun, the rings ran round under the brushes, and the deep note of its coil steadied the whole. It affected Azuma-zi queerly.

481Azuma-zi was not fond of labour. He would sit about and watch the Lord of the Dynamos while Holroyd went away to persuade the yard porter to get whiskey, although his proper place was not in the dynamo shed but behind the engines, and, moreover, if Holroyd caught him skulking he got hit for it with a rod of stout copper wire. He would go and stand close to the colossus and look up at the great leather band running overhead. There was a black patch on the band that came round, and it pleased him somehow among all the clatter to watch this return again and again. Odd thoughts spun with the whirl of it. Scientific people tell us that savages give souls to rocks and trees—and a machine is a thousand times more alive than a rock or a tree. And Azuma-zi was practically a savage still; the veneer of civilisation lay no deeper than his slop suit, his bruises and the coal grime on his face and hands. His father before him had worshipped a meteoric stone, kindred blood, it may be, had splashed the broad wheels of Juggernaut.

He took every opportunity Holroyd gave him of touching and handling the great dynamo that was fascinating him. He polished and cleaned it until the metal parts were blinding in the sun. He felt a mysterious sense of service in doing this. He would go up to it and touch its spinning coils gently. The gods he had worshipped were all far away. The people in London hid their gods.

At last his dim feelings grew more distinct, and 482took shape in thoughts and acts. When he came into the roaring shed one morning he salaamed to the Lord of the Dynamos; and then, when Holroyd was away, he went and whispered to the thundering machine that he was its servant, and prayed it to have pity on him and save him from Holroyd. As he did so a rare gleam of light came in through the open archway of the throbbing machine-shed, and the Lord of the Dynamos, as he whirled and roared, was radiant with pale gold. Then Azuma-zi knew that his service was acceptable to his Lord. After that he did not feel so lonely as he had done, and he had indeed been very much alone in London. And even when his work time was over, which was rare, he loitered about the shed.

Then, the next time Holroyd maltreated him, Azuma-zi went presently to the Lord of the Dynamos and whispered, "Thou seest, O my Lord!" and the angry whirr of the machinery seemed to answer him. Thereafter it appeared to him that whenever Holroyd came into the shed a different note came into the sounds of the great dynamo. "My Lord bides his time," said Azuma-zi to himself. "The iniquity of the fool is not yet ripe." And he waited and watched for the day of reckoning. One day there was evidence of short circuiting, and Holroyd, making an unwary examination—it was in the afternoon—got a rather severe shock. Azuma-zi from behind the engine saw him jump off and curse at the peccant coil.

483 "He is warned," said Azuma-zi to himself. "Surely my Lord is very patient."

Holroyd had at first initiated his "nigger" into such elementary conceptions of the dynamo's working as would enable him to take temporary charge of the shed in his absence. But when he noticed the manner in which Azuma-zi hung about the monster, he became suspicious. He dimly perceived his assistant was "up to something," and connecting him with the anointing of the coils with oil that had rotted the varnish in one place, he issued an edict, shouted above the confusion of the machinery, "Don't 'ee go nigh that big dynamo any more, Pooh-bah, or a 'll take thy skin off!" Besides, if it pleased Azuma-zi to be near the big machine, it was plain sense and decency to keep him away from it.

Azuma-zi obeyed at the time, but later he was caught bowing before the Lord of the Dynamos. At which Holroyd twisted his arm and kicked him as he turned to go away. As Azuma-zi presently stood behind the engine and glared at the back of the hated Holroyd, the noises of the machinery took a new rhythm, and sounded like four words in his native tongue.

It is hard to say exactly what madness is. I fancy Azuma-zi was mad. The incessant din and whirl of the dynamo shed may have churned up his little store of knowledge and big store of superstitious fancy, at last, into something akin to frenzy. 484 At any rate, when the idea of making Holroyd a sacrifice to the Dynamo Fetich was thus suggested to him, it filled him with a strange tumult of exultant emotion.

That night the two men and their black shadows were alone in the shed together. The shed was lit with one big arc light that winked and flickered purple. The shadows lay black behind the dynamos, the ball governors of the engines whirled from light to darkness, and their pistons beat loud and steady. The world outside seen through the open end of the shed seemed incredibly dim and remote. It seemed absolutely silent, too, since the riot of the machinery drowned every external sound. Far away was the black fence of the yard with grey, shadowy houses behind, and above was the deep

blue sky and the pale little stars. Azuma-zi suddenly walked across the centre of the shed above which the leather bands were running, and went into the shadow by the big dynamo. Holroyd heard a click, and the spin of the armature changed.

“What are you dewin’ with that switch?” he bawled in surprise. “Ha’n’t I told you—”

Then he saw the set expression of Azuma-zi’s eyes as the Asiatic came out of the shadow towards him.

In another moment the two men were grappling fiercely in front of the great dynamo.

“You coffee-headed fool!” gasped Holroyd, 485 with a brown hand at his throat. “Keep off those contact rings.” In another moment he was tripped and reeling back upon the Lord of the Dynamos. He instinctively loosened his grip upon his antagonist to save himself from the machine.

The messenger, sent in furious haste from the station to find out what had happened in the dynamo shed, met Azuma-zi at the porter’s lodge by the gate. Azuma-zi tried to explain something, but the messenger could make nothing of the black’s incoherent English, and hurried on to the shed. The machines were all noisily at work, and nothing seemed to be disarranged. There was, however, a queer smell of singed hair. Then he saw an odd-looking, crumpled mass clinging to the front of the big dynamo, and, approaching, recognised the distorted remains of Holroyd.

The man stared and hesitated a moment. Then he saw the face and shut his eyes convulsively. He turned on his heel before he opened them, so that he should not see Holroyd again, and went out of the shed to get advice and help.

When Azuma-zi saw Holroyd die in the grip of the Great Dynamo he had been a little scared about the consequences of his act. Yet he felt strangely elated, and knew that the favour of the Lord Dynamo was upon him. His plan was already settled when he met the man coming from the station, and the scientific manager who speedily 486 arrived on the scene jumped at the obvious conclusion of suicide. This expert scarcely noticed Azuma-zi except to ask a few questions. Did he see Holroyd kill himself? Azuma-zi explained he had been out of sight at the engine furnace until he heard a difference in the noise from the dynamo. It was not a difficult examination, being untingered by suspicion.

The distorted remains of Holroyd, which the electrician removed from the machine, were hastily covered by the porter with a coffee-stained table-cloth. Somebody, by a happy inspiration, fetched a medical man. The expert was chiefly anxious to get the machine at work again, for seven or eight trains had stopped midway in the stuffy

tunnels of the electric railway. Azuma-zi, answering or misunderstanding the questions of the people who had by authority or impudence come into the shed, was presently sent back to the stoke-hole by the scientific manager. Of course a crowd collected outside the gates of the yard,—a crowd, for no known reason, always hovers for a day or two near the scene of a sudden death in London; two or three reporters percolated somehow into the engine-shed, and one even got to Azuma-zi; but the scientific expert cleared them out again, being himself an amateur journalist.

Presently the body was carried away, and public interest departed with it. Azuma-zi remained very quietly at his furnace, seeing over and over again ⁴⁸⁷in the coals a figure that wriggled violently and became still. An hour after the murder, to any one coming into the shed it would have looked exactly as if nothing remarkable had ever happened there. Peeping presently from his engine-room the black saw the Lord Dynamo spin and whirl beside his little brothers, the driving wheels were beating round, and the steam in the pistons went thud, thud, exactly as it had been earlier in the evening. After all, from the mechanical point of view, it had been a most insignificant incident—the mere temporary deflection of a current. But now the slender form and slender shadow of the scientific manager replaced the sturdy outline of Holroyd travelling up and down the lane of light upon the vibrating floor under the straps between the engines and the dynamos.

“Have I not served my Lord?” said Azuma-zi, inaudibly, from his shadow, and the note of the great dynamo rang out full and clear. As he looked at the big, whirling mechanism the strange fascination of it that had been a little in abeyance since Holroyd’s death resumed its sway.

Never had Azuma-zi seen a man killed so swiftly and pitilessly. The big, humming machine had slain its victim without wavering for a second from its steady beating. It was indeed a mighty god.

The unconscious scientific manager stood with his back to him, scribbling on a piece of paper. His shadow lay at the foot of the monster.

⁴⁸⁸“Was the Lord Dynamo still hungry? His servant was ready.”

Azuma-zi made a stealthy step forward, then stopped. The scientific manager suddenly stopped writing, and walked down the shed to the endmost of the dynamos, and began to examine the brushes.

Azuma-zi hesitated, and then slipped across noiselessly into the shadow by the switch. There he waited. Presently the manager’s footsteps could be heard returning. He stopped in his old position, unconscious of the stoker crouching ten feet away

from him. Then the big dynamo suddenly fizzled, and in another moment Azuma-zi had sprung out of the darkness upon him.

First, the scientific manager was gripped round the body and swung towards the big dynamo, then, kicking with his knee and forcing his antagonist's head down with his hands, he loosened the grip on his waist and swung round away from the machine. Then the black grasped him again, putting a curly head against his chest, and they swayed and panted as it seemed for an age or so. Then the scientific manager was impelled to catch a black ear in his teeth and bite furiously. The black yelled hideously.

They rolled over on the floor, and the black, who had apparently slipped from the vice of the teeth or parted with some ear—the scientific manager wondered which at the time—tried to throttle him. The scientific manager was making some ineffectual efforts to claw something with his hands and to kick, when the welcome sound of quick footsteps sounded on the floor. The next moment Azuma-zi had left him and darted towards the big dynamo. There was a splutter amid the roar.

The officer of the company, who had entered, stood staring as Azuma-zi caught the naked terminals in his hands, gave one horrible convulsion, and then hung motionless from the machine, his face violently distorted.

"I'm jolly glad you came in when you did," said the scientific manager, still sitting on the floor.

He looked at the still quivering figure. "It is not a nice death to die, apparently—but it is quick."

The official was still staring at the body. He was a man of slow apprehension.

There was a pause.

The scientific manager got up on his feet rather awkwardly. He ran his fingers along his collar thoughtfully, and moved his head to and fro several times.

"Poor Holroyd! I see now." Then almost mechanically he went towards the switch in the shadow and turned the current into the railway circuit again. As he did so the singed body loosened its grip upon the machine and fell forward on its face. The cone of the dynamo roared out loud and clear, and the armature beat the air.

So ended prematurely the Worship of the Dynamo Deity, perhaps the most short-lived of all religions. Yet withal it could boast a Martyrdom and a Human Sacrifice.

THE TREASURE IN THE FOREST

The canoe was now approaching the land. The bay opened out, and a gap in the white surf of the reef marked where the little river ran out to the sea; the thicker and deeper green of the virgin forest showed its course down the distant hill-slope. The forest here came close to the beach. Far beyond, dim and almost cloudlike in texture, rose the mountains, like suddenly frozen waves. The sea was still save for an almost imperceptible swell. The sky blazed.

The man with the carved paddle stopped. "It should be somewhere here," he said. He shipped the paddle and held his arms out straight before him.

The other man had been in the fore part of the canoe, closely scrutinising the land. He had a sheet of yellow paper on his knee.

"Come and look at this, Evans," he said.

Both men spoke in low tones, and their lips were hard and dry.

The man called Evans came swaying along the canoe until he could look over his companion's shoulder.

492The paper had the appearance of a rough map. By much folding it was creased and worn to the pitch of separation, and the second man held the discoloured fragments together where they had parted. On it one could dimly make out, in almost obliterated pencil, the outline of the bay.

"Here," said Evans, "is the reef and here is the gap." He ran his thumb-nail over the chart.

"This curved and twisting line is the river—I could do with a drink now!—and this star is the place."

"You see this dotted line," said the man with the map; "it is a straight line, and runs from the opening of the reef to a clump of palm-trees. The star comes just where it cuts the river. We must mark the place as we go into the lagoon."

"It's queer," said Evans, after a pause, "what these little marks down here are for. It looks like the plan of a house or something; but what all these little dashes, pointing this way and that, may mean I can't get a notion. And what's the writing?"

"Chinese," said the man with the map.

"Of course! *He* was a Chinee," said Evans.

“They all were,” said the man with the map.

They both sat for some minutes staring at the land, while the canoe drifted slowly. Then Evans looked towards the paddle.

“Your turn with the paddle now, Hooker,” said he.

493And his companion quietly folded up his map, put it in his pocket, passed Evans carefully, and began to paddle. His movements were languid, like those of a man whose strength was nearly exhausted.

Evans sat with his eyes half closed, watching the frothy breakwater of the coral creep nearer and nearer. The sky was like a furnace now, for the sun was near the zenith. Though they were so near the Treasure he did not feel the exaltation he had anticipated. The intense excitement of the struggle for the plan, and the long night voyage from the mainland in the unprovisioned canoe had, to use his own expression, “taken it out of him.” He tried to arouse himself by directing his mind to the ingots the Chinamen had spoken of, but it would not rest there; it came back headlong to the thought of sweet water rippling in the river, and to the almost unendurable dryness of his lips and throat. The rhythmic wash of the sea upon the reef was becoming audible now, and it had a pleasant sound in his ears; the water washed along the side of the canoe, and the paddle dripped between each stroke. Presently he began to doze.

He was still dimly conscious of the island, but a queer dream texture interwove with his sensations. Once again it was the night when he and Hooker had hit upon the Chinamen’s secret; he saw the moonlit trees, the little fire burning, and 494the black figures of the three Chinamen—silvered on one side by moonlight, and on the other glowing from the firelight—and heard them talking together in pigeon-English—for they came from different provinces. Hooker had caught the drift of their talk first, and had motioned to him to listen. Fragments of the conversation were inaudible and fragments incomprehensible. A Spanish galleon from the Philippines hopelessly aground, and its treasure buried against the day of return, lay in the background of the story; a shipwrecked crew thinned by disease, a quarrel or so, and the needs of discipline, and at last taking to their boats never to be heard of again. Then Chang-hi, only a year since, wandering ashore, had happened upon the ingots hidden for two hundred years, had deserted his junk, and reburied them with infinite toil, single-handed but very safe. He laid great stress on the safety—it was a secret of his. Now he wanted help to return and exhume them. Presently the little map fluttered and the voices sank. A fine story for two stranded British wastrels to hear! Evans’ dream shifted to the moment when he had Chang-hi’s pigtail in his hand. The life of a Chinaman is scarcely sacred like a European’s. The cunning little face of Chang-hi,

first keen and furious like a startled snake, and then fearful, treacherous, and pitiful, became overwhelmingly prominent in the dream. At the end Chang-hi had grinned, a most incomprehensible and startling grin. Abruptly things became very unpleasant, as they will do at times in dreams. Chang-hi gibbered and threatened him. He saw in his dream heaps and heaps of gold, and Chang-hi intervening and struggling to hold him back from it. He took Chang-hi by the pigtail—how big the yellow brute was, and how he struggled and grinned! He kept growing bigger, too. Then the bright heaps of gold turned to a roaring furnace, and a vast devil, surprisingly like Chang-hi, but with a huge black tail, began to feed him with coals. They burnt his mouth horribly. Another devil was shouting his name: “Evans, Evans, you sleepy fool!”—or was it Hooker?

He woke up. They were in the mouth of the lagoon.

“There are the three palm-trees. It must be in a line with that clump of bushes,” said his companion. “Mark that. If we go to those bushes and then strike into the bush in a straight line from here, we shall come to it when we come to the stream.”

They could see now where the mouth of the stream opened out. At the sight of it Evans revived. “Hurry up, man,” he said, “or, by heaven, I shall have to drink sea-water!” He gnawed his hand and stared at the gleam of silver among the rocks and green tangle.

Presently he turned almost fiercely upon Hooker. “Give *me* the paddle,” he said.

496So they reached the river mouth. A little way up Hooker took some water in the hollow of his hand, tasted it, and spat it out. A little further he tried again. “This will do,” he said, and they began drinking eagerly.

“Curse this!” said Evans, suddenly. “It’s too slow.” And, leaning dangerously over the fore part of the canoe, he began to suck up the water with his lips.

Presently they made an end of drinking, and, running the canoe into a little creek, were about to land among the thick growth that overhung the water.

“We shall have to scramble through this to the beach to find our bushes and get the line to the place,” said Evans.

“We had better paddle round,” said Hooker.

So they pushed out again into the river and paddled back down it to the sea, and along the shore to the place where the clump of bushes grew. Here they landed, pulled the light canoe far up the beach, and then went up towards the edge of the jungle until they could see the opening of the reef and the bushes in a straight line. Evans had

taken a native implement out of the canoe. It was L-shaped, and the transverse piece was armed with polished stone. Hooker carried the paddle. "It is straight now in this direction," said he; "we must push through this till we strike the stream. Then we must prospect."

497 They pushed through a close tangle of reeds, broad fronds, and young trees, and at first it was toilsome going; but very speedily the trees became larger and the ground beneath them opened out. The blaze of the sunlight was replaced by insensible degrees by cool shadow. The trees became at last vast pillars that rose up to a canopy of greenery far overhead. Dim white flowers hung from their stems, and rosy creepers swung from tree to tree. The shadow deepened. On the ground, blotched fungi and a red-brown incrustation became frequent.

Evans shivered. "It seems almost cold here after the blaze outside."

"I hope we are keeping to the straight," said Hooker.

Presently they saw, far ahead, a gap in the sombre darkness where white shafts of hot sunlight smote into the forest. There also was brilliant green undergrowth, and coloured flowers. Then they heard the rush of water.

"Here is the river. We should be close to it now," said Hooker.

The vegetation was thick by the river bank. Great plants, as yet unnamed, grew among the roots of the big trees, and spread rosettes of huge green fans towards the strip of sky. Many flowers and a creeper with shiny foliage clung to the exposed stems. On the water of the broad, quiet pool which the treasure-seekers now overlooked 498 there floated big, oval leaves and a waxen, pinkish-white flower not unlike a water-lily. Further, as the river bent away from them, the water suddenly frothed and became noisy in a rapid.

"Well?" said Evans.

"We have swerved a little from the straight," said Hooker. "That was to be expected."

He turned and looked into the dim, cool shadows of the silent forest behind them. "If we beat a little way up and down the stream we should come to something."

"You said—" began Evans.

"He said there was a heap of stones," said Hooker.

The two men looked at each other for a moment.

"Let us try a little down-stream first," said Evans.

They advanced slowly, looking curiously about them. Suddenly Evans stopped. "What the devil's that?" he said.

Hooker followed his finger. "Something blue," he said. It had come into view as they topped a gentle swell of the ground. Then he began to distinguish what it was.

He advanced suddenly with hasty steps, until the body that belonged to the limp hand and arm had become visible. His grip tightened on the implement he carried. The thing was the figure of a Chinaman lying on his face. The *abandon* of the pose was unmistakable.

499The two men drew closer together, and stood staring silently at this ominous dead body. It lay in a clear space among the trees. Near by was a spade after the Chinese pattern, and further off lay a scattered heap of stones, close to a freshly dug hole.

"Somebody has been here before," said Hooker, clearing his throat.

Then suddenly Evans began to swear and rave, and stamp upon the ground.

Hooker turned white but said nothing. He advanced towards the prostrate body. He saw the neck was puffed and purple, and the hands and ankles swollen. "Pah!" he said, and suddenly turned away and went towards the excavation. He gave a cry of surprise. He shouted to Evans, who was following him slowly.

"You fool! It's all right. It's here still." Then he turned again and looked at the dead Chinaman, and then again at the hole.

Evans hurried to the hole. Already half exposed by the ill-fated wretch beside them lay a number of dull yellow bars. He bent down in the hole, and, clearing off the soil with his bare hands, hastily pulled one of the heavy masses out. As he did so a little thorn pricked his hand. He pulled the delicate spike out with his fingers and lifted the ingot.

"Only gold or lead could weigh like this," he said exultantly.

500Hooker was still looking at the dead Chinaman. He was puzzled.

"He stole a march on his friends," he said at last. "He came here alone, and some poisonous snake has killed him—I wonder how he found the place."

Evans stood with the ingot in his hands. What did a dead Chinaman signify? "We shall have to take this stuff to the mainland piecemeal, and bury it there for a while. How shall we get it to the canoe?"

He took his jacket off and spread it on the ground, and flung two or three ingots into it. Presently he found that another little thorn had punctured his skin.

“This is as much as we can carry,” said he. Then suddenly, with a queer rush of irritation, “What are you staring at?”

Hooker turned to him. “I can’t stand—him.” He nodded towards the corpse. “It’s so like—”

“Rubbish!” said Evans. “All Chinamen are alike.”

Hooker looked into his face. “I’m going to bury *that*, anyhow, before I lend a hand with this stuff.”

“Don’t be a fool, Hooker,” said Evans. “Let that mass of corruption bide.”

Hooker hesitated, and then his eye went carefully over the brown soil about them. “It scares me somehow,” he said.

501 “The thing is,” said Evans, “what to do with these ingots. Shall we re-bury them over here, or take them across the strait in the canoe?”

Hooker thought. His puzzled gaze wandered among the tall tree-trunks, and up into the remote sunlit greenery overhead. He shivered again as his eye rested upon the blue figure of the Chinaman. He stared searchingly among the grey depths between the trees.

“What’s come to you, Hooker?” said Evans. “Have you lost your wits?”

“Let’s get the gold out of this place, anyhow,” said Hooker.

He took the ends of the collar of the coat in his hands, and Evans took the opposite corners, and they lifted the mass. “Which way?” said Evans. “To the canoe?”

“It’s queer,” said Evans, when they had advanced only a few steps, “but my arms ache still with that paddling.”

“Curse it!” he said. “But they ache! I must rest.”

They let the coat down. Evans’ face was white, and little drops of sweat stood out upon his forehead. “It’s stuffy, somehow, in this forest.”

Then with an abrupt transition to unreasonable anger: “What is the good of waiting here all the day? Lend a hand, I say! You have done nothing but moon since we saw the dead Chinaman.”

502 Hooker was looking steadfastly at his companion’s face. He helped raise the coat bearing the ingots, and they went forward perhaps a hundred yards in silence. Evans began to breathe heavily. “Can’t you speak?” he said.

“What’s the matter with you?” said Hooker.

Evans stumbled, and then with a sudden curse flung the coat from him. He stood for a moment staring at Hooker, and then with a groan clutched at his own throat.

“Don’t come near me,” he said, and went and leant against a tree. Then in a steadier voice, “I’ll be better in a minute.”

Presently his grip upon the trunk loosened, and he slipped slowly down the stem of the tree until he was a crumpled heap at its foot. His hands were clenched convulsively. His face became distorted with pain. Hooker approached him.

“Don’t touch me! Don’t touch me!” said Evans, in a stifled voice. “Put the gold back on the coat.”

“Can’t I do anything for you?” said Hooker.

“Put the gold back on the coat.”

As Hooker handled the ingots he felt a little prick on the ball of his thumb. He looked at his hand and saw a slender thorn, perhaps two inches in length.

Evans gave an inarticulate cry and rolled over.

Hooker’s jaw dropped. He stared at the thorn for a moment with dilated eyes. Then he looked at Evans, who was now crumpled together on the ground, his back bending and straitening spasmodically. Then he looked through the pillars of the trees and network of creeper stems, to where in the dim grey shadow the blue-clad body of the Chinaman was still indistinctly visible. He thought of the little dashes in the corner of the plan, and in a moment he understood.

“God help me!” he said. For the thorns were similar to those the Dyaks poison and use in their blowing-tubes. He understood now what Chang-hi’s assurance of the safety of his treasure meant. He understood that grin now.

“Evans!” he cried.

But Evans was silent and motionless now, save for a horrible spasmodic twitching of his limbs. A profound silence brooded over the forest.

Then Hooker began to suck furiously at the little pink spot on the ball of his thumb—sucking for dear life. Presently he felt a strange aching pain in his arms and shoulders, and his fingers seemed difficult to bend. Then he knew that sucking was no good.

Abruptly he stopped, and sitting down by the pile of ingots, and resting his chin upon his hands and his elbows upon his knees, stared at the distorted but still stirring body of his companion. Chang-hi's grin came in his mind again. The dull pain spread towards his throat and grew slowly in intensity. Far above him a faint breeze stirred the greenery, and the white petals of some unknown flower came floating down through the gloom.

THE END