

Mrs. William Jones And Bill

By

Edgar Wallace

Freeditorial 

MRS. WILLIAM JONES AND BILL

1. — MRS. WILLIAM JONES AND—BILL

HER eyes were sleepy eyes, he noted that much, though as a rule he never looked twice at a woman, save in the cause of art. And her mouth, at the moment he was observing her, struck him as being lazy. He had never heard of a lazy mouth before, but that is just how it occurred to him. It was parted—"fly- catching"—he described it afterwards.

Yet she was quite an adorable person, with the figure that men make up stories about, that is to say, she had no definite figure at all, but there was just enough of her to occupy clothes, so that they seemed to fill the right amount of space.

The eyes were blue, dark blue, almost violet. The eyelashes (so he saw, being

sophisticated) had the appearance of having been made up, they were so dark, whilst her hair was so-so, well not exactly fair—veiled gold (whatever he meant by that, and it certainly conveys a rough sense of subdued glory) was the colour he jotted down on his tablet.

For the rest, features conformed to the outstanding excellences, and neither discounted nor enhanced them. All this Bill Jones saw from his barn-like bedroom, which was on the ground floor of Ten Pines Hotel, which in turn was situated in the middle of a pleasant valley between sea and marsh.

The big windows of the room opened on to a broad and shady veranda, and it was on this "stoep" that the unaccountable lady reclined, her heels elevated to the veranda rail.

It was not a lady-like attitude. Miss Beryl Foster, who had come to Ten Pines every summer for twenty-nine years, and who occupied, by arrangement and tradition, the cheapest bedroom in the hotel, and the only easy-chair in the hotel parlour, said that in all those twenty-nine years she had never seen a lady in such a posture.

Miss Foster spent her days upon the veranda, knitting savagely a shapeless something which looked like a bath mat, but was probably something else. She knit with an air of gloomy courage which suggested that she was being punished for her sins, and recognised the justice of her punishment.

To Bill Jones the unaccountable lady was a fascinating object, transcending in picturesqueness the amber rocks that stood in amber pools, entirely surrounded by blue-green waters that foamed in chinese white about their bases.

Bill Jones was a good man but a bad artist. He was handsome in a rugged kind of way, and his name was really Bill Jones, his father having been born both Jones and eccentric. And he had christened or caused to be christened his infant son, just plain "Bill."

"You mean William?" said the officiating clergy.

"I mean Bill," said Bill's father firmly.

"And what are the other names?" the clergyman demanded anxiously.

"Jones," said Bill's father.

And so "Bill Jones" he was christened, and the clergy shivered as it pronounced the fateful words.

Bill really did not mind. The name fitted him. He was as tough as luck and as hard as lines, to apply the sayings of the slangster. He could box, swim, ride,

leap, throw things, run and tackle. He could not paint. Obviously, the kind of pictures for which he was designed were not the kind of pictures designed by him. Nature lagged behind his palette. He belonged to a select art club, the members of which told one another at stated intervals, that they were ahead of their time. And it was probably true, for who knows what shape and colour things will take in a million years?

But Bill Jones differed from all other bad artists in this respect—he knew he was a bad artist. He knew that his visit to Ten Pines had nothing whatever to do with art study.

He looked at the beautiful girl and sighed.

"Oh lord!" he prayed, "if I were only an artist—what a head and ankle!"

Bill was away when she arrived. He had taken his colour-box and a small canvas out on to the lake.... there was a "right light," and he remembered how amazingly beautiful was the patch of young alders and rushes at the western corner.

A man, even a poor technician, might make a great picture of that. So he took his paint-box and punted across the water. He also took a line and tackle, for the pike fishing hereabouts is very good.

When he returned with four pike (one a nine-pounder) and a virgin canvas, Mrs. Carmichael, the landlady, regarded him curiously. She did not explain her mystery. And Bill found no solution until....

He was going to speak to the unknown lady. Up to now he had not dared to do more than admire in a furtive, public-spirited and detached manner the rare feast of beauty which fortune had brought to him. And Providence was on his side, for as he walked leisurely along the front of the veranda, the little high-heeled shoe which had been perched upon the rail fell almost at his feet.

"I'm awfully sorry."

Beauty was charmingly confused, put out a white hand to take the shoe, and Bill's heart sank. There was no especial reason and certainly no intelligent reason why his heart should sink at the sight of a new wedding ring upon the proper finger of her hand.

"It must have fallen off," said Beauty more calmly, as she emptied the sand from its interior.

Bill was inclined to agree and, being unusually tongue-tied, the acquaintance might have ended then and there.

"You're an artist, aren't you?" she said. "How lovely it must be to paint

beautiful pictures."

"It must be," agreed Bill honestly. "I'm sorry I've never had that experience."

She frowned.

"But you are the artist? Mrs. Carmichael pointed you out to me and said you were the artist, and asked me if I knew you. As she didn't tell me your name _____"

"My name is Jones," said Bill modestly. He thought that it was not a thing he need boast about anyway. "Bill Jones."

Her mouth opened in a luscious O.

"William Jones!" she said hollowly.

He nodded.

"Bill, to be exact," he replied. "I haven't the pleasure——"

She hesitated only for the fraction of a second. The whole conversation was irregular, and not even the fortuitous circumstance of their occupying adjoining rooms justified this sudden exchange of intimacies.

"My name is Mrs. William Jones," she said rapidly. "My husband is a traveller."

"Indeed?" said Bill politely, and wanted to ask her whether at this precise moment her husband was fulfilling his professional duties.

"He's a chauffeur, I mean," said the girl, clearing her throat.

Bill was not shocked. He had known some very good chauffeurs in his time. He had also known some very bad ones. He hoped that she had not married a bad one. It would be dreadful to think of that frail and beautiful lady being married to a man who took cross-roads at top speed without sounding his klaxon.

Still he was depressed. The fact that her husband was a chauffeur had nothing whatever to do with the cause of the depression. He was depressed that she should marry anybody whether he was a traveller or just an ordinary stationary individual, such as a policeman on point duty or a commissionaire outside a picture palace. Her offence was that she was married at all.

"He is away just now," said Mrs. Jones unnecessarily.

"Perhaps," said Bill, whose manners in moments of crises were irreproachable, "you would like to walk along the beach?"

"I should very much," said Mrs. Jones demurely, and she came down to him, under the very eyes of Miss Beryl Foster, who knitted even more fiercely, and later made a clacking sound as the landlady appeared in the doorway and beckoned her with the blunt end of a knitting needle.

"It is as I thought," she said, "they are a honeymoon couple!"

"Whatever makes you think so?" said the landlady hopefully.

"They're a honeymoon couple who have quarrelled on their wedding day. She went her way and he went his. It was probably over a question of relations. All my friends quarrel over their relations."

"But——" began Mrs. Carmichael.

"He couldn't bear to have her out of his sight, so he followed," said Miss Foster romantically. "Did you notice how they pretended not to know one another—my dear!"

She twisted her face up into what with a little practice would have been a smile.

"She threw her boot at him as he passed," said Miss Foster startingly.

"Her boot?" said the incredulous Mrs. Carmichael, "but she only wears shoes."

"Well, shoes or boots, it doesn't matter," rejoined Miss Foster impatiently. "Anyway she dropped her shoe right in front of him, and of course he had to pick it up... they're reconciled."

She pointed, this time with the sharp end of her knitting needle, at the two as they strolled along by the seashore. They were at that moment passing Lover's Rock, so called because it occurred without excuse in the very middle of a smooth stretch of beach. Lovers might shelter themselves from the gales that blew in those months when no lovers were within a hundred miles. It might as truly have been called Fat Man's Rock. However...

"You see!" said Miss Foster thrillingly. "Now mark my words—oh, drivel and blink!"

With these ladylike curse words did Miss Foster announce the dropping of certain stitches from her too adventurous needle.

And in the meantime.

"I am an artist in the sense that I am not colour-blind," confessed Bill, "otherwise I am sheer false pretence. Fortunately I have a father who is sufficiently fond of his children and well enough off to indulge them in their abnormalities."

"Have you any brothers and sisters?" she asked, interested.

"No," admitted Bill, "I'm the only children. Do you like Ten Pines?"

She shrugged her dainty shoulders.

"I didn't know there was such a place until I came here," she said. "Of course, I could have gone to Newport, but—this is an out-of-the-way place, isn't it?"

Bill nodded gravely.

"You wanted to be alone?" he said gently.

"No, I didn't," she answered; "I'm bored to death. There's an awfully rowdy man sleeps in the next room to me who gets up at unearthly hours and whistles and drops his boots on the floor when he goes to bed. Those kind of people _____"

"I am the man next door," interrupted Bill, more gently still. "I hadn't the slightest idea that I was worrying you, Mrs. Jones. There's a woman who lives on the left of me, Number 22, I think, who snores abominably——"

"I live in 22," said the girl icily, "and I don't snore because I don't sleep. I haven't slept a wink since I've been at this place. I'm too worried to sleep and too much of a lady to snore."

Bill agreed.

"When is your husband coming?" he ventured to ask..

He knew he had committed a faux pas by the look she gave him.

"Is it necessary to tell about my husband?" she asked frigidly. "He is a subject I never care to discuss."

They walked along in silence for a long time, and Bill, who was not a society man and was not perfectly certain in his mind whether one did discuss husbands with wives, sought vainly in his mind for another and a more pleasing subject. Art he had exhausted in three sentences.

"Who is your father?" she asked suddenly.

"My father," said Bill vaguely. "Oh, he's a man named—named Jones."

"I should have guessed that, but what does he do for a living besides calling himself Jones?"

"He owns some factories—motor-car factories, I believe," said Bill. "I will even go so far as to admit that I know, but the proper pose of the merchant's son is his ignorance of the means by which his parents subsist."

She nodded gravely, and he wondered whether the mention of his father's sordid employment had touched a chord which brought back to her the memory of her absent husband.

Presently she sighed.

"My father is in rubber."

"You surprise me," said the polite Bill. "I have never had a father in rubber. It must be rather jolly."

Again she eyed him suspiciously.

"Did he recommend you to Ten Pines?" said Bill hastily.

"Ten Pines!" The scorn in her voice. "He's never heard of Ten Pines, and he has not the slightest idea I am here."

A little pause.

"I ran away to get married."

"The devil you did!" said the admiring Bill.

"Yes, I ran away," she replied complacently. "Father wanted me to marry a friend of his—a man in the iron trade, and of course I ran away."

"You did perfectly right," said Bill warmly. "I can imagine nothing more revolting than being married to a man in the iron trade. Did your husband run away with you, that is to say, did he come on first, or did he drop you half-way?"

She stopped and faced him squarely.

"My husband has certain duties to perform, and being a man of honour he is performing them," she said. "He had to give a month's notice to his employer, and naturally I wouldn't hear of him leaving without notice."

She turned and walked back toward the hotel, and Bill paced by her side, his hands behind him, his mind very full of her difficulties.

"Does your father know the chauffeur?" he demanded.

"No." Her reply was very short and uncompromising.

"It was—a love match," she went on, speaking with difficulty. "I met him first at a ball, and then he drove me—round the park."

"Which park?" asked Bill, and she became a little exasperated.

"Does it matter which park it was?" she asked. "Any park."

"There are some parks better than others for driving round," murmured Bill apologetically. "And after that, you just got married to him?"

"That is what happened," said Mrs. William Jones, "and here I am."

Thereafter conversation flagged. She seemed worried about something. As they were nearing the hotel, Bill said with a sigh:

"I should love to paint your portrait."

"You can," she answered complacently.

"I said I should love to do it, I didn't say I could," said Bill. "Perhaps your husband will allow me——"

"You need not bother about my husband," and then, "will you walk back with me?" she asked hurriedly.

Bill turned and noticed that she was a little agitated.

"Mr. Jones," she said, "I have a confession to make. I have told you a lie. My husband is not a chauffeur but an artist. I wish he had been a chauffeur now."

"An artist?" said Bill. "Do you mean a paint and canvas artist?"

"You don't think I meant a music-hall artist, do you, or a trapeze artist?" she asked with asperity. "No, he's a painting artist. I'm awfully sorry."

"I'm sorry too," said Bill with sympathy.

"You've nothing to be sorry about." Beauty could be very violent when she wished. "Oh, what a stupid fool I was—I ought not to have made him an artist."

"Only the Lord makes artists," said Bill proudly.

"A chauffeur!" she said. "Of course he should have been a chauffeur!"

"I certainly think he'd have earned more money if you'd made him a chauffeur," agreed Bill, "but I don't quite follow your line of thought, Mrs. Jones."

"Oh, don't you!" she retorted darkly. "Well, perhaps you will!"

She did not come in to lunch. Bill went outside to the veranda and sat down to wait. It was a hot afternoon, and the cool breeze which blew in from the sea was of so zephyr-like and somniferous a nature that he had not been sitting there long before his head sank on his breast, and he passed out into the state

of existence where he painted beautiful pictures which were hung in great exhibitions, won innumerable gold medals, and earned for him a fame which was at least equal to that of his father's notorious "Jigger Eight."

He was awakened by being kicked. It was not a vicious kick. At the same time it was not a gentle one, being intended to arouse him to consciousness with the least possible waste of time.

"Hi," said a man's voice unpleasantly. "Wake up, my friend!"

Bill woke instantly and blinked up at a very tall man in a grey flannel suit and a terrible red complexion.

Bill's first impression was that he had met a creature of his dreams—a man who wore his face inside out. And then he saw that it really was a normal man with a normal white moustache and an abnormal bald head who was scowling down at him, and the stranger was accompanied by a younger man with a small face and a tiny black smear of a moustache. He wore a perfectly fitting morning coat, beautifully creased trousers, and his hair was glued back from his forehead.

Bill rose a little wearily, but wondering.

"Now, sir," said the red-faced man breathing through his nose, "perhaps you will accompany us to a place where we cannot be overheard."

He said this in a voice like a steam siren.

"May I suggest a desert island in the Pacific," said Bill, yawning.

"I want to talk to you, sir," roared the red-faced man. "I want an explanation from you, sir, and Mr. Duvine also wants an explanation, sir, and if he had my spirit, sir, he'd take you by the scruff of your neck and beat the life out of you. If I were twenty years younger——"

"And twenty degrees less apoplectic," murmured Bill. "Will you come with me to the beach. I see that your business is very urgent. I think an assignation near the True Lovers Rock would not be inappropriate."

He led the way to the very water's edge. The tide was going out. The sands, white-hot in the afternoon sun, were deserted.

"Now, sir," said the red-faced gentleman, "my name is Andrew Pollack."

Bill nodded and a momentary qualm came to him.

"You're not the man whose picture I painted? No, his name was—anyway it doesn't matter about his name, but I used up two tubes of carmine."

"I don't want to hear any of your infernal studio jargon," bellowed Mr. Pollack. "I want to know where is my daughter?"

Bill was genuinely exasperated.

"Have you come all the way to Ten Pines to ask me where is your wandering child to-night?" he asked.

"Where—is—your—wife?" demanded Mr. Pollack awfully, and for a second Bill dithered.

"My wife?" he asked in a strangled voice. "Do you mean my—my wife?"

"I mean my unhappy daughter," Mr. Pollack spoke with emotion. "The innocent girl upon whose empty mind you played. The girl—you dazzled her with your infernal art!"

Bill was fanning himself languidly with the brim of his panama hat.

"Thank you for those kind words," he said gratefully, "I knew that my art could daze, but I hadn't the slightest idea it dazzled."

"Don't trifle with me, sir, you have behaved like a scoundrel. You knew that my daughter was an heiress; you thought that you would get an income for life, eh?"

"Perfectly disgusting," murmured Mr. Duvine. "Very caddish in the extreme."

"How did you know I was here?" asked Bill, after a long cogitation.

"I tracked you, sir." Mr. Pollack put his hand in his pocket and took out a note-case, opened it fiercely, and violently snatching forth a letter, thrust it into Bill's face.

"I suppose you dictated that?" he said.

Bill took the letter and read.

"Dear Father,—I can never marry your horrible friend. I have decided to make my own life. I have long secretly loved Mr. William Jones, the eminent artist, and we were married to-day at the Registrar's Office by special licence. I am very happy, and my husband sends his kind regards, and please don't attempt to find me. I shall come back in two months.—Your loving daughter, Silvia."

"Now," said Mr. Pollack. "Let me have one word with you. My daughter has certainly money of her own, but she will not get a penny of mine. You hear, sir, not a cent, not a tenth part of a Russian rouble!"

"Kroner are cheap, too," said Bill helpfully; "you can get forty-four thousand

for a——"

"Don't argue with me!" howled Mr. Pollack. "You have ruined a young girl's life, sir. Celebrated artist!" He sneered audibly. "I've been asking the dealers about you. They say you're the worst artist in the world. They say that the name of Bill Jones is known and execrated from one end of the country to the other! They say——"

"Don't tell me what they say," said Bill peevishly. "They've said it to me, and I've accepted their verdict. I admit I'm a rotten artist, but I'm a good husband."

Mr. Pollack snorted.

"There is within me a whole wealth of unsuspected tenderness."

Mr. Pollack snorted still more loudly.

"Haven't you got a handkerchief?" said Bill, feeling in his pocket, "Of one thing you may be sure, that I shall never ask you for a penny, for Cynthia—I mean Sylvia. With my own two hands I will work for her, sharing," his voice broke, "the last crust of bread—the crumb for her and the knobbly bits for me."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Mr. Duvine mildly. "You really ought, sir. I think you've treated me most unfairly. It was simply a dastardly thing to do. It was really!"

"I don't think we can afford to waste any more time with you," said Mr. Pollack, and turned to the young man. "When you see my daughter, I hope you will tell her that I have cut her out of my will, and out of my heart. That neither she nor her mountebank husband will ever darken the doors of my house."

"I only want to say..." began Bill.

"Faugh!" said Mr. Pollack, and left him standing by the big rock.

Bill watched them out of sight, saw them mount the car before the Ten Pines Hotel, and then he turned and walked slowly round the rock.

The girl who was sitting in its shade looked up with a scared face.

"Have they gone?" she whispered.

"They have gone," said Bill.

"I was so frightened," she admitted. "I thought Father would strike you to the earth."

"To the sand," corrected Bill. "No, he didn't. He kicked me once, but what's a kick more or less?"

"I thought it was very decent and kind of you," she said. "But there was absolutely no need for you to rattle on about sharing your last crusts with me, because I'm not married to you, and I'm not married to anybody."

"I rather gathered that from your uncertainty of the morning," said Bill. "In fact, you invented your husband in order to choke off Duvine—and I can hardly blame you. As to being married at all, that is another matter. You are married to a respectable young artist——"

She stared at him.

"Married?" she said incredulously. "I'm not married!"

"You're married to me," said Bill calmly. "Do not forget Miss Pollack that I have also a name to lose. I cannot have Mrs. Carmichael pointing the finger of scorn at me or allow my name to be bandied about as an unmarried husband. We boys have our rights."

"But——" she gasped. "We're not married."

"For the moment we're not married, I admit," said Bill. "Your ruddy parent—I beg your pardon, your parent is under the impression that we are. If he should discover that we are not," he clasped his brow, "oh heavens, what would happen to my good name?"

"I've got a pretty good name, too," she said wrathfully. "You have made a mess of things!"

Bill staggered.

"I?" he said.

"Of course you've made a mess of it," she retorted viciously. "Why didn't you tell Father that you weren't married to me? How dare you associate my name with yours?"

Bill recovered himself very slowly.

"It's my name," he protested; "you haven't a name at all in the matter; you're the spurious Mrs. Jones! I, at least, am a genuine Jones."

"Anyway, you should have told him that you weren't married," she said more mildly; "you should have explained that it was all a girlish freak."

"Never," said Bill Jones indignantly; "I've never been guilty of a girlish freak, and I'm too old to start now. I'm afraid, Sylvia, we've got to find a way out that

meets not only with the approval of your father but of mine. We Joneses have our feelings, although we do not express them so hectically as you Pollacks. So, Sylvia——"

"Do you mind not calling me Sylvia. My name is Miss Pollack."

"Your name is Mrs. Jones. Mrs. William Jones," said Bill severely. "I've already forgiven you for calling yourself William instead of Bill. I detest Williams."

She sat down on the sand again. She felt unaccountably helpless.

"What am I to do?"

"I'll go into town to-morrow morning," he said, "get the necessary licence, and, at the identical office, where you married the artist, who was afterwards a chauffeur, but who is, alas, an artist after all, we will regularise a position which is at present embarrassing to me, and one which I trust will never become generally known."

"I'd sooner die than marry you," she said briefly. "I don't know you. I've only spoken half a dozen words to you."

"What better preparation for a happy married life?" asked Bill. "Retain that habit."

"Anyway, I'm not going to marry you," she said, taking up a handful of sand and threw it at the unoffending sea.

Bill sighed and sat down by her. He, too, took up a handful of sand and poured it from palm to palm absent-mindedly.

"You are really a bad artist. Father said so."

"Couldn't you take my word?" he asked reproachfully.

"Father hates artists," she said, after a while.

"Then he can't hate me," said Bill. "Besides, he'll get used to me in time."

"I could never be happy with a man like you," she said thoughtfully; "you're not serious enough, and you take too flippant a view of life—and don't make your hands messy with that sand."

He threw the sand away obediently and wiped his hands on his trousers. She groaned.

"I admit I am not so serious-minded as you," said Bill. "To have been consistent you ought to have married a professor of mathematics. Why choose

an artist? Heaven knows we have quite enough——"

"Don't talk rubbish; you know I'm not married—yet," she added.

Bill edged a little closer.

"You've seen me at my worst, Sylvia; I'm not always painting. I play a pretty good game of tennis, but that is about the only important occupation I have in life. My principal hobbies are loafing round Europe, alternated with long spells of theatre-going. I know a jeweller's on the Rue de la Paix, who sells better pearls than any other jeweller you can name."

"Devoux?" she said instantly.

He nodded, and she looked at him, with a new admiration.

"What kind of motor-cars does your father make?" she asked. "Are they the sort which one can rely on... for long trips...."

"A honeymoon trip?" he suggested.

"Any kind of trip," she said recklessly.

He put one arm round her and with the other searched his pocket. Presently he found the new catalogue of the Jigger Eight which his father had sent to him that morning.

"Listen to this, honey," he said.

2. — THE ADVENTURES OF GEORGE

I

GEORGE GREGORY SANWORTH was regarded as the fool of the family. The Sanworths were a remarkably clever family; some people even went as far as describing them as brainy. Cuthbert Sanworth was a barrister of some note; Torre Sanworth wrote a history of Peter the Great, which was accepted by the Sanworth family as the last word upon the reign; Christopher Sanworth was also a barrister, but made an income by writing satirical verse for a society paper; Grace Sanworth wore pince-nez, and was an authority on prints and old furniture; and the old man Sanworth was an authority on most subjects, and it was admitted even by his children, that he was a genius.

But George was a fool, having no gifts save that of knowing a good horse when he saw one. He dabbled, in a shy way, with chemistry and metallurgy, but he never referred to these accomplishments, knowing that he was the fool

of the family.

There was no Mrs. Sanworth. The task of presenting to the world such a galaxy of genius had exhausted her desire for life, and she died when George was a very small boy, possibly heart-broken in the discovery that this last addition to the Sanworth family was a mistake and something of a failure. George knew he was a fool, because the family used to sit round and tell him so. Sometimes the information used to come in epigram, which he only vaguely understood, sometimes with brutal plainness, which made him grin uncomfortably, for he was a little sensitive.

In such an atmosphere, George Gregory Sanworth lived for ten years, for he had been exactly ten when, by the unanimous vote of the breakfast table, he had stepped into the position which is vacant in every family.

He accepted the situation philosophically, found some quiet amusement in it if the truth be told, for he had the beginnings of a sense of humour, and might, under more favourable conditions, have shone as a humourist of the dry variety. He had no friends, no lasting friends at any rate. Friendship could not outlive the exposure of the family. If he brought a boy home to dine, the guest began his visit in embarrassment, and took leave in contempt, so George had nothing in the world but his own inside thoughts, his bunsen burner, and his assorted chemicals. When he was twenty-one the Sanworths became absorbed with a breakfast-table problem. How should George invest his money? He had £600 left in trust by a maternal uncle, and on his twenty-first birthday there was a solemn signing of papers ("Write your name where the pencil mark is," said the lawyer), a great comparing of original drafts and sworn copies ("Put your initials against the words, 'unless the said George Gregory Sanworth should predecease me,'" said the lawyer fretfully), and, after many days, the transference to the legatee's account of a sum which in a mysterious fashion had dwindled to £564, 3s. 4d.

"And now," said the family, after dinner had been hurried through that night, "and now what shall be done with the money?"

George wriggled uneasily in his chair and murmured vaguely that "it was all right where it was."

"Stuff!" said the family. "Nonsense! rubbish!—how like George to leave his money in the bank, nibbling away at the capital from time to time!"

"A friend of mine would take George into his office," said Torre Sanworth thoughtfully; "if any man could turn George into a useful member of society, Falling could."

"Who is Falling?" demanded the resentful legatee.

A shriek of scornful merriment greeted his inquiry.

He did not know Falling! Falling, the pioneer of the village industries—the man who taught agricultural labourers the art of repoussé work!

Grace Sanworth, recovering from her paroxysm of amusement, remembered that Falling was not a very good business man—now that she came to think of it. Why not "put" George with Kalesteine?—everybody knew these famous art dealers were commercially sound; "and really, these art people make an awful lot of money."

"I can imagine," said Cuthbert—and waited for a silent audience——" I can imagine nothing more tragic than the spectacle of George buying a chromolithograph and——"

"Before you people go any further," interrupted George, "I'd like to say that I have decided to go abroad."

There was a dead silence, and George went very red.

"I'm going abroad," he repeated doggedly.

Another silence, and Sanworth père settled his glasses on the bridge of his nose.

"May I ask why?" he demanded, with ominous blandness.

"Because I'm jolly well going," said George illogically.

"An excellent answer," said Mr. Sanworth; "but not sufficiently illuminating—why?"

"Because," said George, after a pause, "I'm tired of all you clever devils, and I'm sick of hearing you gas at me from morning to night."

"The worm," said Cuthbert, sotto voce, "has turned."

"I'm tired of listening to people trying to be clever...epigrams... quotations from the poets... rotten," he ended disconnectedly.

Thereafter the attitude of the family toward George was one of chilly politeness.

He made his preparations for departure unassisted by the advice or encouragement of his outraged relations. He was not asked what his plans were, and did not volunteer any information.

Only at breakfast on the morning of his departure did his father ask him a question.

"What time do you leave?"

"At four o'clock."

"Indeed," said Mr. Sanworth courteously. "I hope you have a good voyage—I suppose you have taken the precaution of booking a berth—I noticed your boxes were labelled 'Cape Town?'"

George regarded that reflection upon his intelligence as an unfriendly act, and wisely said nothing.

"If I start arguing with these beggars, I'm done," said he to himself.

There was no other leave-taking. George went alone to Waterloo, and no farewell telegram awaited him at Southampton.

"A rum family," mused George, watching the circling light of St. Catherine's from the stern of the Walmer Castle.

He shook his head, touched gingerly his breast pocket where five crisp bank notes for £100 each were snugly hidden, and smiled.

"A rum family," he said again, and, whistling a vulgar little tune, he went below to dress for dinner.

§ II

George found a metallurgist in Johannesburg who was a great metallurgist indeed, albeit young. He was a tall, youngish man with a pair of steady blue eyes that looked at you with infinite calmness. He was a man after George's own heart, because he had no small talk, no repartee, and had only the vaguest ideas as to what was happening in that world which was outside the realms of chemistry. They spent a delightful evening discussing the effect of cyanide of potassium upon gold-matrix, and finished up by reminiscences, which, if they were put into book form, would be intitled "Crucibles I have met."

"And," said the eminent metallurgist, at parting, "if I can help you in any way, please let me know."

"I think I shall manage," said George confidently. "I shall just browse round prospecting, and making assays in my tin pot way, and if I strike anything real good, I will let you know."

Did the faintest of smiles illuminate the face of the eminent metallurgist at the idea of George discovering "anything good" in a country every inch of which had been prospected? It is possible, but George did not notice it.

He went west, beyond Klerksdorp, and worked his Way down to Fourteen Streams; he went north beyond Petersburg and came to the Crocodile River,

near Tuli Drift; he went east, by way of Caroline. He went into the bad, low country and found malaria.

For eighteen months, he clipped and pounded, and washed various unpromising chunks of rock, and grew a straggling beard, and learnt to speak Cape Dutch.

Sometimes he found the colour of gold and assayed his find solemnly, writing long reports to the young metallurgist in Johannesburg.

The members of the Sanworth family knew nothing about him because he did not write long reports to them. They spoke of him ironically; it seemed a correct attitude to take up toward George.

Two years after George had left the parental roof, he struck the farm Vogelfontein by Brakdorp, and out-spanned his two mules of "Farm (497) Vogelspruit."

He took coffee with the owner of the farm, shook hands—a solemn ceremony—with the farmer's four sons and seven daughters, and received permission to prospect.

George had a theory about gold reefs which need not be particularised, because it would not interest the nontechnical reader, but it had to do with the "dip" of a reef in relation to the presence of dolomite or something of the sort. Frankly, it was a ridiculous theory, as ridiculous as the idea widely held in a less enlightened age, that a stone might be discovered which had the effect of transmuting metals. Yet, seeing this, a monk discovered gunpowder.

George Gregory Sanworth began his fantastic operations by cutting a section of a ridge at random.

He intended, by some wearisome process of triangulation based upon the character and bearing of the strata he discovered, to arrive at a spot beneath which, at the distance of 3000 feet, the gold-bearing reef would be discovered. He had worked his theory before, but had never found gold.

For two long days, aided by his Kaffir boys, he dug and dug. He was not looking for gold in that particular spot. I would impress this fact upon you. But he found it.

A more prosaic happening could not be imagined than the discovery of the Sanworth Reef.

George, smoking a short briar pipe, squatting on the ground, slowly twirling his metal pan... a hot sun blazing overhead, and the smell of frying bacon...

"Hullo," said George, with a perplexed frown, "Hullo!... well, I'm blest..."

colour..."

He put down the dish and stood up. His pipe had gone out, and he lit it with a sun-glass, which was a long process, and gave him time to think.

Thinking very deeply, but very clearly, he walked slowly back to the farm.

"You've got gold here," he said.

"Ja," the farmer smiled and nodded; "you buy the option."

(He had made an income for years from impetuous and optimistic prospectors who had found "colour," but, then, they had never happened upon the Sanworth Reef.)

George eyed him suspiciously.

"I tell you there's gold here," he repeated—he was a very honest young man.

"Ja—plenty of gold," said Cootze pleasantly; "you buy the option for two hundred pounds for one year, then I will sell you the farm for ten thousand—that is cheap."

George bought the option, and went off to Johannesburg, carrying with him sacks full of specimens.

The youthful-looking metallurgist was greatly interested, and he and George spent one hilarious evening discussing a new process for recovering gold from slimes.

More to the purpose, George was introduced to a stout man who had a suite of offices on the top floor of a palatial building in Commissioner Street. He was a florid gentleman who wore a big white waistcoat, frayed at the edges from many laundry operations, and whose only jewellery was in the form of a gunmetal watch fastened to his person by a leather guard. He did not look like a millionaire as he sat there in his office, chewing a quill toothpick and regarding the roofs of Commissioner Street through the open window with a strained and troubled stare.

George told the story of his discovery: exhibited his option, displayed his specimens on the table, and produced his assays:

"Interestin', very interestin'," said the millionaire mechanically.

"My own theory is," said George, "that the main reef is continued in a line parallel..."

"Very interestin', very interestin' indeed," said the millionaire, intently regarding a bold sparrow who had perched perilously on a neighbouring

chimney-pot.

George talked and talked until he was out of breath, and then:

"Very interestin'," said the stout man. "I will send a man down—good mornin'."

George left the presence a little chilled.

He spent a pleasant week in Johannesburg, evolving an altogether new and preposterous theory in relation to gold-bearing quartz, a theory which, as the young metallurgist told him afterwards, was opposed to all known mineral laws.

Then one day, when seated in his bedroom at Heath's Hotel, surrounded by the debris of rejected data, a message came to him, and, in obedience to the summons it contained, he climbed again to the top floor of the palatial premises in Commissioner Street and discovered the millionaire with the same waistcoat—he identified a rust spot near the second button-hole—staring over the heads of the population.

"Sit, sit down," said the stout man, without removing his gaze from the window. "That Vogeispruit proposition—very interestin'."

He shook his head slowly, and repeated the information that it was indeed very interestin'.

"Our man saw it—proved it—what do you want?"

George was taken aback.

"Hey?" he said hesitatingly.

He really did not know what he wanted.

"Lucky young feller," said the millionaire, with a sigh, as though George's fortune was a matter for regret; "devilish lucky young feller—what do you want?"

George was silent.

"Suppose we float it: suppose it pans out all right"—it was the millionaire's turn to hesitate. He was evidently a man of no great command of language.

"Here!"

He swung round suddenly, and stared at George.

"We'll buy a half share; pay you half in cash and half in script, what d'ye say?"

"All right," said George weakly.

"All right," repeated the other, looked at his watch, shook it, and put it to his ear. "All right—have to buy a new watch. It's more than half-past seven, I'll swear. Now Mr.—er—forget your name, come along on Saturday, and we'll fix things."

"Excuse me," said George nervously "what do you think—how much——?"

The stout man looked long and earnestly at George's boots.

"Hundred thousand cash, hundred thousand shares—is it a deal?"

George nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

III

George Sanworth became almost a millionaire without any other than a few interested persons becoming aware of the fact. It is an astonishing thing that even in this age of enterprising pressmanship, one may do or be anything short of criminal without the world being any the wiser, always providing that you say or do nothing that is unconventional. Thus you may be the greatest scientist in the world, and just so long as you preserve a normal view on men and things, you will attract less attention than the obscure "professor" who gives his opinion, in the largest type, that stage fright was bacteriologically curable by the application of some especial virus.

George Sanworth did nothing fantastic: he did not give a dinner-party in Johannesburg, he did not tip the waiters at Heath's with £100 notes: he did not order a special train to carry him to Cape Town, nor make extravagant outlays on flowers for the decoration of his cabin.

So he came back to England inscribed on the list of passengers as Mr. G. C. Santworth. The fact that his name was spelt wrongly being conducting proof of his obscurity.

One grey dawn he found himself standing in his pyjamas watching the restless white light of St. Catherine's trembling and dying on the far horizon ahead.

"A rum family," he said, for the wheeling light awoke a memory.

He landed at Southampton, directed the dispatch of his worn luggage, and came to Glazebro' by way of London.

The family was at dinner when he arrived unheralded, and it was only natural that they should put an altogether wrong construction upon the unexpected apparition of this brick-red young man—he had shaved off his straggling beard—in the shabby suit.

Consternation, suspicion, a little contemptuous amusement, all the emotions evoked in a well-balanced family that finds itself suddenly confronted with A Problem, and that the problem of the returned Prodigal, were evidenced in the reception afforded to George.

"Oh, sit down, sit down!" this, testily from Sanworth senior; "I suppose you want something to eat——"

"Why didn't you let us know you were coming?" this resentfully from Grace.

"Brown paper parcel under his arm—packing-cases coming by water—huge boxes of gold—ropes of pearl—diamonds by buckets—pieces of eight—wonderful—very," murmured Tone.

George, bubbling over with his news, ready with one glowing word to light the train of the mine, went suddenly cold. In a moment he lost all sense of embarrassment more than that he lost his awe of the family.

"Do you know, George," said Christopher Sanworth easily—he had a mop of red hair and he was poisonously bland—"your return reminds me of a little story told the other night by Eugene Thebier at a dinner——"

"I don't care what you say to me," said George, "so long as you don't read me any of your rotten poetry, but I would rather you shut up for about ten minutes whilst I tell you something. Is there anybody in this bunch of fricassed genius who has made a study of the stock markets?"

There was an awful silence.

"Because," said George slowly and without flurry, "if there is, he will know that Sanworth Reefs are at 10 1/4."

"What is that to do with us?" snapped his father.

"I hold a hundred thousand shares in that company—that's all."

He got up from the table, rolled his serviette and stuffed it untidily into a napkin ring.

"You are jolly clever," he went on; "but I'm a millionaire and can afford to be a fool. I'm tired of you, sick to death of you, all you're words and messy little penny-a-line phrases. I came back here because I wanted a home, a real home, and I find I have returned to the same old monkey house."

It was not a great speech—it lacked dignity, subtlety, and was, moreover, unfilial to a degree, but George, standing by the open door, his broad shoulders hunched, his hands thrust defiantly into his trouser pockets, was without respect.

As afterwards related by members of the family, in his eyes was an "insane glare," but this may be a pardonable exaggeration due to the extraordinary impression his conduct conveyed.

"I'm going now," he said, "and I don't want to see any of you again, or to read your toshy verse (Christopher shuddered), or to hear about your punk prints (Grace shivered), or to learn of your histories cribbed from other fellers' books (Torre went pale and frowned terribly). I think there ought to be a real home somewhere for a chap like me, and I'm going out to find it."

He slammed the door behind him, caught the edge of his coat between door and handle, opened it roughly, and slammed it again.

His exit lacked dignity.

IV

When a man who is young, pardonably angry, and moreover a millionaire, strikes that part of London which begins at Aldwych and runs westward to Bayswater, lurid happenings are almost inevitable.

George, with his much labelled luggage on the top of a four-wheeled cab—he was in no mood for taxi-cabs, being out of sympathy with civilisation—trundled over the bridge from Waterloo Station mentally reviewing his position.

He felt horribly lonely, and cautiously reckless. That is to say, he felt that convention demanded of him some proceeding of an outrageous character; at the same time he was anxious to avoid that variety of excess which would eventually bring him discomfort. Dissipation, he told himself, was not his "line of country"; intoxicating liquors made him ill; he had no taste in food—his favourite dinner was roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, with rhubarb tart to follow—and he disliked intensely anything approaching ostentation.

He drove to an hotel in Arundel Street, engaged a bed and a sitting-room, and strolled out into the Strand.

It was then a quarter to twelve, the theatres were closed, but the Strand was

alive with people homeward bound, and in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross it was distinctly crowded. People thronged the side walk, and there were wild little rushes for each motor-bus that jarred itself to a standstill before the station.

He was an idle and a thoughtful observer of struggling humanity for five minutes, then he resumed his journey westward, crossing Trafalgar Square to Pall Mall.

How might a man spend a million pounds? What extraordinary happiness might he find in its possession? He could equip an expedition to discover the South Pole.... George did not want to discover the South Pole; or found a hospital... or race horses... George shook his head.

He was crossing Pall Mall, and a motor-car, flying along toward St. James' Street, squeaked warningly. George was no judge of pace, beside which he was immersed in his problem.

The mud guard of the car caught him, and threw him toward the pavement, and an unsympathetic lamppost received him coldly.

He was lying in a very pretty room. The window was open, and outside he could hear the clip-clop of horses, and the honk-honk of motor-horns.

He was disagreeably restricted.

That sentence describes his sensations. There was a strap or something that restrained the movements of his right arm, and a veritable pillow of some hard substance fastened to his right side. With admirable calm-ness he diagnosed his injuries—broken ribs, fractured arm. What about his head? He moved it gingerly, and to his great relief nothing happened. Yet there was a dressing of some kind affixed—"Superficial injuries," he concluded, and lay quietly enjoying the experience of being alive—a sensation peculiarly the possession of men who have already decided in their minds that they are dead.

"Now, my friend, you must take some of this."

The room was dark, save for a shaded lamp, and the nurse was very pretty: she held a feeding-cup in her hand, and George shuddered.

"I'm sorry," he said in a very hoarse voice; "but I've just had dinner."

The girl smiled, stooped, and put a cool hand under his head and lifted it slightly.

"That is a much more reasonable statement to make than the one you made yesterday," she said.

He frowned. What did he say yesterday? She guessed the thought that was in his mind.

"You know you were very cross yesterday," she said, and put the spout of the feeder to his lips. "You said you'd discovered a new motor-car mine, and it was worrying you terribly, because every time you blew up the rock you spoilt the varnish of the car."

He grinned guiltily.

"I don't remember saying anything yesterday," he said. "How long have I been here, and what hospital is this?"

"You have been here nearly a week, and this isn't a hospital," was the answer. "This is my house, and I knocked you down on Saturday night."

He thought awhile, ordering the matter to his satisfaction.

"Oh, did you?" he said, and fell asleep....

"I think that you are strong enough now to tell me who your friends are."

It was morning again. He had a sleepy recollection that a strange nurse had re-made his bed and sponged his face, but this was the pretty one back again.

"I have no friends, only relations," he said, unconsciously paraphrasing an ancient joke. "I am a millionaire," he added unconsequently.

"Indeed?"

The polite incredulity annoyed him; she was humouring him, and he had no wish to be humoured. Later in the day she gave him details of the accident.

"We were coming back from the theatre. The chauffeur tried to avoid you, but you weren't looking; you bent our radiator."

"Your radiator bent me, too," said George, and the girl laughed.

I do not think that George had ever made anybody laugh in his life until that moment, and the sensation was pleasing.

"Are you a real nurse?" he asked.

Her eyebrows rose at the impertinence.

"I haven't asked you whether you were a real millionaire," she remarked maliciously.

"Oh, but I am," he said, with considerable warmth; "a hundred thousand in cash, and a hundred thousand in shares—and the shares are at ten pounds—"

you jolly well reckon that out——"

"If I had thought you were a millionaire," she said coldly, "I should have sent you to a hospital—I hate millionaires."

George regarded her with stern reproach.

"You are very uncharitable," he said, and relapsed into silence, a deeply injured young man.

It annoyed him still further when, later in the day, she gave some hint of her own prosperity. She was a nurse because she loved nursing. She was especially blessed with the goods of this world, an orphan, and the matron of St. Agatha's Nurses.

"Matron!" murmured George derisively; "and I suppose," he said tartly, "that when you're short of a patient you take out your car and knock one down."

"You're very rude," she said, with a great severity.

There was another long and unfriendly silence.

"I say," he said after a while, "what is wrong with me?"

"You've a broken rib or so; you've fractured the radius of your right arm, and, from later symptoms, I should imagine you have a slight concussion."

She was reading a book, and did not look up as she reeled off the calamitous inventory.

"Indeed?"

George was very polite; he tried to remember all the beastly clever things that his worthy family had fired at him on occasions, and failed.

"In—deed," he repeated, but could think of nothing more cutting. He contented himself by analysing her features, and found an unaccountable pleasure in the discovery that they were faultless.

She was twenty-five, he judged. Her eyes were big grey eyes, and her eyelashes were very dark. Her complexion was perfect; her nose was straight; her mouth and chin were adorable. (He gave up intelligent analysis at this point and fell into vague rhapsodies.)

The directors of the Sanworth Reef Gold-mining Company (Ltd.) sat in council at their offices in Dashwood House. There was the identical millionaire, with the identical white waistcoat (George would have hailed the rust spot near the second button-hole as an old friend), who sat at the head of the table staring out of a window, obligingly opened for the purpose, and there were other millionaires more expensively clad.

One of these was very angry. He had a hot red face, and a hot red tie, and an apoplectic carnation in his button-hole.

The board meeting had been called because George Gregory Sanworth had, of a sudden, disappeared as from the face of the earth, and because George Gregory Sanworth held one hundred thousand shares in the richest gold-mining corporation of the East Rand.

All sorts of things might have happened to him, but it is fair to remark that the personal well-being of the gentleman was of less consequence to the directors than the knowledge that "Fizz" (Frickerburg, Zemer & Zust Ltd., that financial colossus) were endeavouring to secure control of the company.

"With due respect, Mr. Chairman," said the red man offensively, "I submit that Mr. What's-his-name—Sandworth—should never have been lost sight of: we've traced his people, they don't know where he is; we've been to his bankers, they don't know where he is; we've found his hotel, they don't know where he is. Its bad management."

"Very interestin'," said the Chairman softly; "most interestin'—one of the most interestin' things I've ever known."

"It comes to this," said the purple man explosively; "here's a young man with a hundred thousand shares carrying influence which might easily become control of the company, and he's wanderin' about loose—an' if Frickerburgs get hold of him an' buy him out for a couple of million——"

"Interestin' problem," agreed the man with the white waistcoat; "intensely interestin' ; idea bein' that if we got hold of him and persuaded him to hold his shares, or sell 'em to the company, the "Fizz" people wouldn't bother."

There was a little man at the far end of the table—a little man with a bald head, black side-whiskers, heavy black moustache, and black-rimmed eyeglasses. He had the appearance of being in mourning for a distant relative.

"Why not detectives, Mr. Chairman?"—his voice was unexpectedly deep—"why not detectives? A friend of mine in the City told me confidentially that

"Fizz" had got a couple of smart men looking for Sanworth in addition to all his relations. Why not we, or us, as the case may be?"

Eventually it was Resolved:

THAT the board authorize the employment of two private detectives to trace Mr. G. C. Sanworth, and that a sum of £100 be voted for that purpose.

George was sitting up in a deep chintz-covered armchair, his legs spread luxuriously on a rest. He was whistling a little tune when his nurse came in.

He thought she was unusually pale, and certainly in the grave eyes that surveyed him steadily there was more than a hint of trouble.

She closed the door behind her, and glanced a little apprehensively at the open window.

"Aren't you sitting too—too near the window?" She asked.

He shook his head.

"The desire for a hurried departure has long since disappeared," he said flippantly; "your increasing civility has made Bloomsbury——"

"This isn't Bloomsbury," she corrected, not without a show of hauteur.

"It is near enough," he said.

"We are Mayfair in the telephone book," she insisted.

"So is Pimlico," he taunted; "so are bits of Chelsea and bits of Camden Town. Don't pin your faith to the telephone book——"

He might have gone on indefinitely, but something in her face stopped him.

She drew a low chair forward and sat down near him.

"Mr. Sanworth," she said, speaking quickly, "I want to say something to you. When we picked you up we found in your pocket a great deal of money——"

"I have every confidence in your honesty," he said graciously.

"Please don't joke—there was a lot of money, but nothing by which we could identify you. I—we—did not stop to consider who you were, Sister Rose and myself; we brought you here, because—because we were distressed by the accident, and because we felt that, having been responsible for the mischief, it was——"

"Up to you?" he suggested.

"Up to us," she accepted unsteadily, "to do all we could to save your life."

She hesitated again and looked at him, and the pain in her eyes deepened as she spoke.

"You have jested about being a millionaire," she said, and her voice was very low, "and I—I nearly believed it—but now... I know."

She dropped her eyes and did not see the look of blank astonishment on his face.

"Yes?" he said, when the silence had continued for nearly a minute.

She sat with clasped hands, her face averted.

"Last night—for two nights—this house has been watched by detectives." She turned a sorrowing face to his and shook her head slowly. "Oh, you poor boy, what have you been doing?"

You will remember that for six weeks nurse and patient had met and talked and half-confided, one in the other.

"What have I been doing?" He was puzzled. "Let me see; I once——"

"I don't want to know!" She rose hastily with hands extended, as if to hold at arm's length the story of his fall. "But you must go away from here." She was speaking rapidly, wildly almost. "When it is dark I will drive you from the mews to the railway station—I will take you to Dover and put you on board the steamer—you are well enough to travel."

She left him speechless.

Later in the day he decided to go through with the adventure in "the spirit in which it was meant," to apply the vague formula he himself employed.

When it was dark that night, she came in a sober nurse's uniform and helped him to dress. Though the evening was decidedly warm, she wrapped him in a huge overcoat, and muffled his neck with wrappers; she had also purchased a pair of blue spectacles.

"I shall look an awful guy," he grumbled.

She bit her lips and said nothing, and George Gregory Sanworth likened himself unto an arrant worm.

The drive to the station in a brougham with drawn blinds was an ordeal, for neither spoke.

She had reserved a carriage for him.

"Walk as though you're ill," she whispered fiercely, as he strode along the platform.

Those who watched a tall man with blue spectacles and muffled to his eyes, walking vigorously one moment and hobbling desperately the next, saw also the nurse, and drew their own conclusions.

"How far are you coming?" he asked, when the train had started.

"To Dover," she said shortly.

"Where am I to go?"

"I have taken your ticket to Paris." There was a long silence.

"I'm not going."

She turned on him with wide-opened eyes.

"But you must!" she gasped.

"I'll stay and face it," he said doggedly. "I don't know what I've done, but I can't get more than seven years for it, unless," he added thoughtfully, "I am wanted for murder."

She shrank a little from him, and he wanted very much to kick himself.

The train slowed at Doovertown Station, and stopped. Two men came walking carelessly along the length of the train; they had almost passed the carriage, when one clutched the other's arm and turned back.

George swore under his breath, for he recognised the red hair and the aggressive moustache of his brother, and, since he had discarded his blue glasses and had removed his wrapping, he knew that his brother had recognised him.

"Hello! I say!"

Christopher Sanworth fumbled at the handle of the carriage, and, with a bound, George was at the window.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Came down on the same train—thought I saw you at Charing Cross. I say, you're wanted, old man—everybody's looking for you—let go that handle, old fellow——"

"A slight mistake," said George calmly.

"Oh, rot; you're George Sanworth, I'm——"

"A slight mistake," repeated George; "my name is Higgins, and I've never met you before in my life."

"Rubbish—don't be a goat. You're George Sanworth—I say, George, old man——" The train was moving slowly and Christopher continued a disjointed conversation, running alongside. "Your company wants you—they're in a great state of mind—wondering what became of you—put detectives on to find you—you're a millionaire twice over——"

George unkindly pulled up the window, and turned to meet the amazed and terrified face of the girl.

"Mr. Sanworth!" she gasped. "It—it isn't true?" He nodded.

"You're not——"

He shook his head. In her distress she held her cheeks with both hands.

"What have I done?" she said, half to herself.

"What have you done?" repeated George sternly. "You have compromised me in the eyes of The Family—you have made me deny a loving brother—you have branded me"—his voice shook with emotion—"a criminal, and you have attempted to drive me from my native land. Moreover——"

He stopped, as the train stopped at the ocean platform.

"There's a train back to London in half an hour," he said practically, "and if there isn't we will have a special."

He led her along the stone platform in the direction of the town.

It was by the special train he returned to London. She was very pale, very silent, and inclined to be annoyed.

"The fact of it is," he said, a trifle incoherently, "my family—can't stand 'em. I was looking for a new family when you picked me up, or knocked me down, as the case may be. I want a new family. If I hadn't met you I should have advertised for one. Will you—will you be a family to me? I know I'm not worthy, and all that sort of thing, but nobody ever is. I hate being in love; I think if you married me you might awe me..."

He said all the wrong things, but he said them so earnestly, so wildly, that...

In the course of time the Sanworth family received an invitation to George's wedding, and, having read it, the Sanworth family frowned. In the bottom left-hand corner was the significant notification:

"No Speeches."

3. — ACCORDING TO FREUD

No record of prior magazine publication under this title found

THE real seven ages of man's conscious existence may be divided into the periods when he wishes to drive a locomotive, when he wants to be a detective, an Adonis, a soldier (or sailor), a millionaire, a prime minister, and a boy.

Bennett Audain never got beyond the second period, but realised some of the others, for he had been a soldier; he was undoubtedly good-looking and, as unquestionably, a millionaire.

The right kind of obsession is an invaluable asset for a young man of great possessions, and to current crime he devoted the passionate interest of the enthusiast. He was both student and worker; he had as great a knowledge of the science which is loosely described as "criminology" as men who had gained fame in its exposition; he certainly understood the psychology of the criminal mind better than any police officer that ever came from Scotland Yard—an institution which has produced a thousand capable men, but never a genius. Indefatigable, patient, scientific in the sense that science is the "fanaticism for veracity," which is the scientist's basic quality.

"It is queer that a fellow like you should take up psycho-analysis. I should have thought it was just a little off your beat." Sir Joseph Patterly looked critically through his glass of port, and added: "This is a good wine. Your father laid it down, of course. What a rare judge!"

They were dining together at Bennett Audain's house in Park Lane. The big room was dark, save for the shaded lamps on the table and the soft glow that flushed the Persian rug before a dying fire.

Bennett had a nervous smile, charming in its diffidence.

"That is a popular label for a queer new system of mind-probing," he said. "I am not accepting or rejecting the Freudian philosophy, and I'm not enough of a doctor to understand his theory of neuroses. I merely say that those responsible for the detection and prevention of crime might, with profit, employ the theory of idea—association."

A gust of wind blew a pattering of rain against the curtained window.

"Humph!" said Sir Joseph, and looked at his watch.

Bennett laughed softly.

"I knew you would look at your watch when you heard the rain," he said, and Sir Joseph stared.

"Why?"

"Association of ideas," said the other calmly. "I know that Lady Friendly is a very sick lady, and that you are going to Friendly's at ten o'clock. The rain reminded you of the journey. Sir Joseph"—he leant across, coming from the dusk of shadow into the yellow light—"if I could get the right man to question, I would save your brother exactly a million!"

The great surgeon frowned horribly.

"Poor old Jim," he said, in his gruffest tone. "He has been caught. But he was a fool to underwrite the whole consignment—a mad fool. But, my boy, the best and cleverest police officers are working on the case. What could you do—by psycho-analysis?"

He got up with a sigh.

"I'll come back after I have seen her ladyship—I hope we can avoid an operation..."

He went on to talk shop to one who had spent three years at Guys' to get an insight into the medical side of the profession which he loved.

It was eleven when he returned. Bennett sat huddled up in a big chair before a fire of cedar logs, and the room was fragrant.

"What could you do?" asked Sir Joseph, without preliminary. "When I was at the Friendly's, I phoned to Jim—her ladyship is much better by the way—and the poor old boy is frantically anxious that you should help. He's got a big opinion of you."

The other man did not reply for a minute, then he stretched his silk-clad feet to the blaze with a luxurious little grunt.

"On the 18th of September," he recited, "the steamship Phoenician Prince left New York for Southampton. She is a vessel of 18,000 tons, one of two, the property of the Balte Brothers, Septimus Balte and Francis Balte being the partners who control the stock. On board were five million in British, French, and Italian notes, which had been redeemed from the American money market and were being consigned to the Anglo-American Bank of London. These were packed in six tin cases, soldered air and water tight, and enclosed in stout wooden boxes. They were deposited in the strong room which is on the port side of G Deck. Its door opens into a cabin which is occupied in extraordinary

circumstances by a quartermaster.

"On this occasion one of the owners was on board, Mr. Francis Balte, and because of the importance of the consignment he had the quartermaster's cabin fitted up for his own use. During the day, and when Mr. Balte was absent from the cabin, it was occupied by his personal steward, whose name I cannot recall for the moment——"

"Deverly," said Sir Joseph.

"Exactly, Deverly. Mr. Balte kept the key of the strong-room in his possession. It never left him day or night. On the night of the 26th, the purser went to Mr. Balte with certain documents relating to the money. Mr. Balte opened the doors of the strong-room, and the purser checked the packages. The door was closed and locked. There was no bathroom attached to the cabin, and Mr. Balte used an ordinary sponge bath, which was brought in by the steward, together with a dozen small towels. These were used to lay on the floor, with the idea of saving the carpet, which had been newly laid—in fact especially for Mr. Balte's comfort. The steward went in later, took away the bath and six towels, the other six being unused."

"Why do you insist upon the towels?" asked Sir Joseph curiously. "I heard nothing about those."

Bennett smiled.

"I have interviewed the steward," he said, "and the loss of the towels seemed to him to be the 'funniest' part of the whole proceedings. The next morning, as the ship approached the Needles, the purser came down, accompanied by half a dozen seamen. Mr. Balte was asleep, but he got up and handed the key of the strong-room to the purser, who opened the doors, to find—nothing."

Sir Joseph groaned.

"Jim should never have underwritten such a vast amount," he said, his mind reverting to his ruined brother. "But how do you explain it? The ship was searched from end to end—every inch of it. The steward was on duty in the alleyway outside—he sat with his back to the door, dozing, he admits. It was impossible for anybody to get through the port-hole, supposing, as was the first theory of the police, that a man let himself down over the side and scrambled through the port. Did you try your psycho-analysis on the steward?" He added the question dryly.

Bennett nodded.

"It produced nothing, because he had nothing to conceal. He was full of the mystery of the towels—six towels and six boxes of gold! But in one respect he

was very informative. He distinctly heard in the middle of the night a sound like that of a watch or clock being wound up—' Creak, creak, creak.' He gave me a wonderful onomatopoeia——"

"Eh?" said the startled surgeon.

"Sorry," said Bennett. "It means the employment of words to represent sounds—anyway, he creaked!"

"What on earth was it?"

"Heaven knows. He heard it six times faintly but distinctly. He says so now, but he also says that he thought it might have been the creaking of gear—one hears strange noises on board ship. And we come again to the fact that six towels were missing. To my mind that is significant. The boxes were very heavy, by the way, many of the notes were of small denomination and had been subjected to hydraulic pressure in the packing to get them into as small a compass as possible. Roughly, each box weighed 140 lbs. with its iron clamps and bands;"

Sir Joseph was interested.

"I never realised that paper money had weight," he said. "How many five-pound notes could an ordinary man carry?"

"A strong man could carry £100,000 worth," replied Bennett, "but he would not care to carry that amount very far. So there it is, Sir Joseph. Somewhere in the world is a clever thief in the possession of nearly a third of a ton of negotiable paper."

Sir Joseph brooded gloomily.

"The loss falls on the underwriters—Jim is involved to the extent of nearly a million, and that means ruin. I wish you'd see Balte," he said suddenly. "Poor chap, he is distracted. They say Septimus is nearly off his head—he isn't particularly strong anyway. He has been away from the business for a year, rusticated in Devonshire somewhere."

"Where is Francis now?"

The surgeon started, as well he might, for the question was shot at him with unexpected violence.

"I'm sorry—only I had an idea." Bennett Audain was apologetic to a point of panic. "I—I get a little explosive at times, which is terribly unscientific——"

"But is human," smiled the other. He got up. "I wonder if he is at the Elysium Club—he plays bridge there when he is his normal self."

"There is a phone over there." Bennett pointed to the shadows. "It is rather late, but perhaps he'll come round."

Balte was at the club.

"He's on his way and very anxious to talk to you." Sir Joseph returned to the fireside. "Heavens, what a night!"

The rain was swishing savagely at the windows. The ceaseless broom-like sweep of it across the panes, the faint tick of the enamel clock on the high mantelpiece, and the wheezy breathing of the surgeon were the only sounds in the room until Balte came with a clatter.

He was a stout man of thirty-five, fair and ruddy of face, and he brought into the shadowy room something of his own inexhaustible vitality.

"Glad to come, doctor," he said. "Pretty wild night—eh. I'm damned if it has stopped blowing since I arrived. Old Sep writes that he was in Torquay yesterday, and the sea's absolutely breaking over the front—tramcars drenched and wrecked. Funny, being wrecked in a tramcar."

He put red hands to the blaze and rattled on.

"Dreadful thing—eh, Audain? What's the use of the police—eh? What's the use of 'em? Want men like you—full of up-to-date ideas."

"Ever heard of Freud?" asked Bennett, his chin on his clasped hands, his absent gaze on the fire.

"Freud, no. German, isn't he? Nothing to do with the Germans, old boy, after that beastly war. They sunk three of our ships, by gad! Who is he anyway?"

"A professor," said Bennett lazily; "and an authority on the mind—why don't you sit down, Balte?"

"Prefer standing, old boy. Stand and grow better—eh? What about this Hun?"

"He interprets dreams——"

"Ought to be in the police; that's where he ought to be—interpreting some of those pipe dreams they have," he chuckled.

"I will tell you what I am getting at," said Bennett, and explained.

Mr. Balte was amused.

"You say one word and I'll tell you a word it suggests?" he said. "That's a kid's game—used to play it when I was so high. You say sugar, I say sweet, next fellow says orange, and so forth."

"You see, Balte," interrupted Sir Joseph, "Audain thinks he can get at your subconscious mind. He believes that he can even tell what happened when you were asleep."

Mr. Balte pulled at his nose and looked down. He was thinking.

"Try, old boy," he said. "I don't believe in it, but if you can get hold of any information that will save Sir Joseph's poor old brother—you don't know how I feel about that, Sir Joseph... go ahead."

"Sit down."

Mr. Balte obeyed. His china blue eyes were fixed on his interrogator.

"Ground," said Bennett unexpectedly.

"Eh—or—er—earth," responded the other.

"Dig."

"Garden."

"Hole."

"Er—I nearly said 'devil,'" chuckled Mr. Balte "This is funny—like a game!"

But it was an earnest game with Bennett Audain.

Presently:

"Shares," he said.

"Slump." It came promptly, one word suggested by the other. Balte added: "Everything is slumping just now, you know..."

They went on quickly. Bennett recited the days of the week.

"Monday?"

A grimace—the faintest from Balte.

"Er—unpleasant—starting the week, y'know."

Bennett shot out the days.

"Friday?"

"Calendar—thinking of a calendar, y'know."

"Key?"

"Wi—door!"

He got up.

"A silly game, Audain." He shook his head reproachfully. "Admit it. I can't play games—too worried. Poor old Sep is half off his head, too."

"Where is Septimus?" asked Bennett.

"At Slapton—pike fishing. Rum how people can sit in a punt all day... fishing. Well, what are you going to do, Audain? Can you help us? The police—pshaw!"

"Will you tell me this," asked Bennett. "Are you a heavy sleeper?"

The stout man shook his head.

"Do you sleep late in the mornings?"

"No, up at six, bright and jolly," he paused. "Now I come to think of it, I was very sleepy that morning. Drugs—eh... do you think I was drugged—chloroform and that sort of thing?"

"No," said Bennett, and let him go. The doctor shared his car and, left alone, Bennett Audain sat for an hour by his fire until the butler came significantly and asked if there were any instructions for the morning.

Then he went to bed.

At seven o'clock the next morning he called a justly annoyed police inspector from his bed. Fortunately, Bennett knew him very well.

"Yes, Mr. Audain, his trunks were searched," Mr. Balte insisted.

"How many trunks had he in the cabin?"

The inspector, cursing such matutinal inquisitiveness, answered:

"Four."

"Four? Big ones?"

"Yes, sir, pretty big and half empty."

"Did you smell anything peculiar about them?"

The inspector wagged his head impatiently. His legs were getting cold and the bed he had left was entrancingly warm.

"No, sir, I did not smell them."

"Good," said Bennett's cheerful voice.

"The worst of these amateur detectives is that they jump all ways at once," said the inspector as he shuddered back to bed.

"M' m," said his wife, on the border-line of wakefulness.

Bennett at his end of the wire gloomed out of the window into the grey, moist morning, on to the stark uneasy branches of park trees.

The hour was 7.5. Essential people had not yet turned in their beds; even the serving-maids and man servants had scarcely blinked at the toilsome day. Bennett Audain went back to the remains of his breakfast and wished, when he had had Francis Balte under examination, he had said, "Paint." Mr. Balte would surely have responded "See."

Mr. Balte had a large house at Wimbledon. He was a bachelor, as was his brother. He was a simple man; as also was his brother. They had inherited considerable property at a time—the last year of the war—when property had a fictitious value. The cream of their father's estate had been swallowed by the Treasury in the shape of death duties. Their skimmed milk was very thin and blue in the hungry days of the great slump. Stock-holders in Balte Brothers Incorporated Shippers, and they were many, watched the shrinking of profits indignantly. The last general meeting of the company had been a noisy one. There was one fellow in particular, a bald man with spectacles, Francis had noted miserably from his place on the platform. A , violent, intemperate man who had talked of a change of directors, especially of managing directors, and he had received more "hear-hears" than had Francis when he had expressed the pious hope that trade would improve and shipping return to its old prosperity.

It was Sunday morning and Francis sat in his library. It was a room containing many shelves of books which he had never read, but the bindings of which were in the best taste. His elbows were on the table, his fingers in his untidy hair, and he was reading. Not the Sunday newspapers, his usual Sunday's occupation. These were stacked, unopened on the little table by the easy-chair. It was a book, commonly and commercially bound, and the more he read the more bewildered he grew. A little shocked also, for this volume was embarrassingly intimate.

Thus his brother found him. Septimus, lank and bent and short-sighted, glared through his powerful glasses at the studious figure and sniffed.

"Got it?" he asked.

Francis closed the book with a bang.

"It is all medical stuff," he said. "Audain is a bit cranky. Going?"

The question was unnecessary. Septimus was muffled to the chin, his fur gloves were under his arm and his big racing car was visible from the library window.

"If there is anything in this Audain stuff, let me know. I've read something about psycho-analysis—I thought it was for shell-shocked people. So long."

"When will you be back?"

"Tuesday night—I've written the letter."

"Oh."

Francis stirred the fire thoughtfully.

"Create a bit of a stir your resigning from the board," he said. "I wish..."

"Yes?"

"No, I don't. I was going to say that I wished it was me. Better you. Everybody knows you're in bad health... warm enough?"

"Ay," said his brother, and went out pulling on his gloves.

Francis did not go to the window to see him off. He bent over the fire uncomfortably, jabbing it unreasonably.

It occurred to him after a long time that his brother had not gone. He put down the poker and shuffled across to the window—he was wearing slippers. There were two cars in the road, bonnet to bonnet, and a man was standing by the seated Septimus. They were talking.

"Audain," said Francis and meditated, biting his lip. Presently Septimus went off and Bennett Audain came briskly up the path. Francis admitted him.

"Energetic fellow," he cried. His voice was an octave higher than it had been when he spoke to his brother, his manner more virile and masterful. He was good cheer and complacency personified. "Come in, come in, you saw old Sep? Poor old chap."

"He tells me that he is resigning from the shipping business." Bennett was warming his hands.

"Yes, he's going to the South of France, old Sep. Going to buy property. Queer bird, Sep. But he was always a land man, farms, houses... anything to do with land... very shrewd."

Bennett glanced at the table and the other anticipated.

"'Interpretation of dreams,' eh?" he chuckled. "You've got me going on Freud. Don't understand it—of course I understand what he says about dreaming and all that... but that game of yours... eh?"

Bennett changed the subject, Francis wondering.

"Yes, it is not a bad house," he agreed amiably.

"A bit bourgeois, but we're that kind. Quaintly constructed—would you like to see over it?"

A home and its attractions can be a man's weakness. In a woman, its appointments are the dominating values; architecture means no more than convenience. And Bradderly Manor was a source of satisfaction to Francis. They reached the wind-swept grounds in time because there was a workshop in which old Sep laboured. It was to him what laboratory, studio, music-room, model dairy, and incubatory are to other men. It was a workshop, its walls lined with tool cabinets. There was a bench, an electric lathe, vices, drills... an oak panel with its unfinished cupids and foliage testified to the artistry and workmanship of Septimus Balte.

"Always was a wonderful workman, old Sep," said Francis in admiration. "Do you know, he was the inventor of a new depth charge that would have made his name if the war hadn't finished"

"That's it, is it?"

Francis looked round.

Bennett had taken from a shelf a large paint can. It had not been opened. The manufacturer's red label pasted on the top of the sunken lid was unbroken.

"That's what?"

Bennett held the can for a second and replaced it.

"Luminous paint," he said, "Lefevre's—he's the best maker, isn't he?"

Francis Balte said nothing. All the way back to the house he said nothing. Bennett followed him into the library and watched him as he filled a pipe from a jar which he took from the mantelpiece.

"Well?" he said miserably. Bennett saw tears in his eyes.

"The two things I am not sure about are," Bennett ticked them off on his fingers: "One, was John Steele the cause. Two, why the towels?"

The stout man puffed furiously, and all the time his eyes went blink, blink,

blink.

"Friday—Calendar, that's how you knew. You wouldn't think I'd fall so easily. But you must have known all about it, or why should you know I meant the Racing Calendar?"

"I guessed. I did not know that you and your brother had a stud of horses and raced them in the name of John Steele. That was easy to discover. When I decided that it was the Racing Calendar you meant, the official journal of the Jockey Club, I went to the publishers and got the register of assumed names."

The pipe puffed agitatedly.

"No—we lost money on racing, but that wasn't it, bad business, over valuation of assets. Poor old Sep!"

He sunk down in a chair, the pipe dropped from his mouth and he wept into his big red hands.

"I have no interest in punishment," said Bennett Audain, and Sir Joseph spluttered indignant, "but—buts!"

"In solution of curious human puzzles, yes," said Bennett, as he sipped his tea and noted joyously the first splashes of green that had come to the park trees in one night, "but not in punishment. If you like to put it that way, I am unmoral. Your brother received his money?"

"Of course he did—the six boxes arrived at his office yesterday morning. But, my dear fellow, justice..."

"Twiff!" said the other inelegantly. "Let the police make their discoveries. Then you will know the story. You promise to treat what I say as a professional secret, or I shall tell you nothing, Sir Joseph."

"I am getting old and inquisitive," he said. "Well. I promise."

Bennett laughed very softly.

"It is good to be alive when the buds are breaking. Sir Joseph. I feel a very happy man. Suppose you wanted a clockwork contrivance made, where would you go to get the work done? Look up the classified directory. No mention of clockwork makers, or makers of mechanical toys. Yet there are ten people in London who do nothing else. There is a man named Collett in Highbury who made a sort of time bomb during the war. I went to him after I had learnt that Septimus Balte was working on war inventions. I found that by patient inquiry. It is queer how soon people have forgotten all things pertaining to the war."

"But why did you inquire about clockwork at all?" asked the surgeon.

"Creak!" mocked Bennett. "Do you remember how the steward had heard a noise, six noises, as of a watch being wound? Well, I found Mr. Collett a secretive, furtive man, but reasonable. He had made a simple water-tight machine. It operated a large spool which was held in position by a catch and released three hours after it had been set. Is that clear?"

The doctor nodded.

"Why water-tight?" asked Bennett. "The spool itself was outside, and presumably was designed to work in the water. Attached to the steel box containing the mechanism were two iron bolts, one at the top above the spool, one at the bottom. Now what was attached to the spool? Nothing but ten fathoms of stout light cord, a double length of it. Now do you see?"

"No," admitted the puzzled Sir Joseph.

"Then I will explain further. At the end of the cord was a small cork buoy, probably covered with canvas and certainly treated with luminous paint. The towels" he laughed. "I ought to have thought of the use to which they would be put, but I had not seen the cabin. And the strange thing is, that when I put myself in the place of Francis, it never occurred to me that if boxes weighing 140 lbs. and clamped with iron were pushed through a porthole, the brass casings of the port would be scratched—unless the boxes were wrapped in cloth of some kind."

"Then he threw the boxes into the sea!" gasped the old man, sitting back.

Bennett nodded.

"First he wound up the mechanism, threw that and the buoy out of the porthole—the box being attached by a short length of chain to the under-bolt of the clockwork case, then he heaved up the money box and pushed that after. They sank immediately. No belated passenger leaning over the rail would see a luminous buoy floating back. Nobody saw those buoys but Septimus, waiting in his motor-boat twelve miles south of Slapton Sands. And he did not see them until the three hours passed and the spools, releasing the buoys, they came to the surface. Then he fastened a stouter rope to one of the double cords and rove it through the bolt... he salvaged all six boxes in an hour, which isn't bad for a sick man."

Sir Joseph shook his head helplessly.

"How did you guess Balte was the thief?" he asked.

"Guess?" Bennett's eyebrows rose. "It wasn't a guess—who else could have stolen the boxes? In fiction the thief is the last man you suspect. In fact, the thief is the last man you'd acquit. The police always suspect the man who was

last seen near the scene of the crime, and the police are generally right. I knew half the Balte secret when the word 'key' suggested 'wind,' and 'Monday'—the day racing men settle their bets—suggested 'unpleasant.'"

He looked at his watch.

"Francis and 'poor old Sep' should at this moment be boarding the Rotterdam at Plymouth," he said.

4. — BONDAGE

No record of prior magazine publication under this title found

THE first two waking hours of Larry Fairing's day were hours of mental and physical misery.

The prison mail was delivered at eight o'clock, and at ten minutes after that hour the warder who acted as his valet brought into his bachelor quarters the morning tea and a small packet of personal letters—letters which the recipient dared not examine until a cold shower had restored something of his manhood. Then, with an effort of will, more consciously exercised than the little grip of heart that had sent him over the top at zero hour in old days of war, he seized the mail and turned over the letters, his heart beating thunderously.

Patricia seldom wrote to the prison; when she wrote at all, her letters were addressed to the County Club. Perspiration rolled down his face as he finished his inspection and found no note from her. It was a relief, even if the last letter was from Jim—Jim the unfortunate, with his tale of hard luck and his frantic request for fifty—"send it by wire before the banks close, old boy..."

It wasn't worth while. These mornings of agony, of remorse, of bitter self-reproaches and fears, and the horrible hours of depression that followed. He needed a shock—something tremendously unheaving; something that would bring him to his senses. When a man admits that much to himself, he is far gone in weakness.

Well, the shock had come, and it had effected no change. It had arrived in the shape of a scrawled note from Jim, full of "for God's sakes," and "I must have been mads," and the young Governor of Shagford County prison had stared, white-faced, at a letter dispatched a few minutes before a detective had tapped Jim Fairing on the shoulder and had said, "I want you."

Larry had read and had appreciated to the full the grim irony of the situation,

and then had taken from his desk a small silver box full of white powdery forgetfulness, and had sniffed the nearest pinch of the "snuff" and thereafter could laugh at the jest which life had played on him. Yet he could view his own folly with horror and loathing. An abysmal despairing horror in cold, hard mornings; a benignant and impersonal horror later in the day. There were moments when he felt neither horror nor fear, but sagged beneath the weight of his own self-pity—a pitiable, singultient, blubbing thing, that bore no resemblance to anything human.... when behind the locked doors of his quarters, he wept and gibbered his weak woe.

The gateman who passed him out of the prison only saw a good-looking gentleman a little haggard and pinched, but wholly master of himself; the habitués of the County Club saw a very self-possessed man of twenty-seven, who had an excellent war record, and had had charge of a military prison in France—that is how he came to be in the Prison Service.

What did Patricia Warren see? The thought that she would one day see him as he was set him shivering.

Curse the degenerate French doctor who had introduced the drug to him, curse him, curse him!... Once he had started for France to seek him out and kill him, but the effect of the dose that inspired the plan had worn off before he reached Newhaven.

Then one morning when he was away from the jail, two prisoners were brought from London to serve the first portion of their sentences. He heard about the fight when he came back. How one had sprung at the other and half killed him before the warders had clubbed him to quiescence. These were the men—the chief warder handed him their papers.

"H'm," said Larry, his face going of a sudden bleak and old as he read.

That afternoon he came from his quarters, unlocked the door of the outer lobby, and walked down the broad and spotless corridor, from whence opened the offices of the prison and the Justices' room. He snapped back the lock of a door at the farther end of the passage and passed into the great hall. A warder, sitting at a high desk which commanded a view of three radiating wards, rose to his feet and saluted, and the man in prison clothes, who was assisting him in his work of distributing library books, stood stiffly to attention.

"No. 7 party—one man, all correct, sir," the warder reported.

Larry Fairing nodded.

"What has happened to the man Stelling?" he asked.

"He has been taken to the punishment cells, sir," reported the warder. "The

doctor has just been to see him."

The Governor nodded again and went on. His master key brought him to a short flight of stone stairs at the bottom of which was another ward, brightly clean, but darker than its fellow above. A warder, sitting on a stool, rose and brought his hand jerkily to the peak of his cap.

"One man in punishment cells, all correct, sir."

"I want to see him," said the Governor.

The warder crossed to one of the narrow yellow doors set deeply into the wall.

"He's in irons, sir; chief warder's orders," he said. "I shouldn't go in to him if I were you, sir. He's been using insulting language to everybody."

"What is he?"

"Convict, sir: three years: I hope you can get him transferred to Princetown—they tame lions there!"

The door swung open and the Governor walked into the punishment cell. It differed in no respect from other cells save in its equipment. A sloping plank bed, a log of wood set firmly in the concrete floor instead of the ordinary stool, and a papier-mâché dish and cup were its contents.

The man who squatted on the low plank bed looked up with a scowl, and meeting the Governor's eyes, dropped his own and gazed stolidly on the manacles about his wrist and the bright steel chain that fastened ankle to ankle.

His age was probably twenty-five; unshaved as he was, and in the coarse garb of servitude, he looked forty.

"Any complaint?" asked the Governor.

"None," growled the other.

"Say 'sir,'" rapped the warder.

"Let him alone; now, Stelling, are you going to behave yourself?"

It sounded feeble to Larry, but he could think of nothing else to say.

"Yes, sir," was the answer.

The Governor turned to the warder.

"Go and find Mr. Venn, please," he said, and the man saluted and went off, though it was the chief warder's hour of recreation, and as likely as not he would not be in his quarters.

When his footsteps were echoing in the hail above, Larry spoke:

"It's a queer joke... sending you to me, Jim."

The prisoner's irons rattled as he moved uneasily.

"I'm sorry, Larry, but I couldn't exactly object, could I... Larry, I wasn't in the swindle, honest to God! Felton led me into it... I nearly killed the swine this morning."

"So I see," said Larry dryly; "does he know your real name?"

"No... I was always Stelling to the gang. Larry, if I only had a chance to get away to Australia, I'd cut out that crowd. There is a man in Australia who knows me by my real name, and he has a daughter... I'm... I'm fond of her, Larry..."

His voice choked.

"I'll do the time, but keep Felton away from me—I'm not spinning a more-sinned-against-than-sinning yarn, but I had none of the money they took from the poor boob; I admit I played cards with him and jollied him along."

Larry nodded. He had forgotten the circumstances of the crime, though he had a dim idea that it was an elaborate swindle by which a confiding South African financier had been relieved of his money.

"You'll be brought before me in the morning," he said, "and I have to give you a dose of punishment cells. I'll get Felton sent to another jail."

The chief warder was descending the stairs.

"You can take the irons off this man, Mr. Venn" said Larry carelessly; "bring him up to my office to-morrow morning."

"Very good, sir."

The easy-going chief warder had expected a reprimand, for prisoners are not ironed except by order of the Governor.

"Oh, Venn," said Larry, turning on the stairs, "we had better keep these fellows separated whilst they are in Shagford—they are not to work in the same party."

He went back to his rooms and lay down on his bed, for his head was throbbing, and he was sick at heart.

He dozed and dreamt, and his dreams were of Pat Warren... well worth the fight he must make. That she was an heiress interested him not at all. It was

the loveliness of her, the melting sweetness of her; her grave, old-fashioned grimness that filled his mind. Worth fighting for... he would take the beast by the throat and strangle it; this beast that had overcome him—but had not yet mastered him. He made a splendid future, and planned within the compass of thoughts a new world, a new Larry Fairing who would laugh at those black days of torment.... Into the rosy atmosphere of his dreams came a thunderbolt.

"Eh?" he said, struggling to his elbow.

"It was left here, sir, ten minutes ago. The man would not wait; he said there was no answer."

He took the letter from the warder's hand; it was from Patricia, the first he had ever received at the prison. His knees trembled as he stood up, and the hand that tore open the flap of the envelope was shaking. He carried the blue sheet of paper to the light, and blinked at it:

"Will you meet me at the railway station? I want to see you. There is something important I want to tell you. I have been trying to make up my mind all day to write you this letter. I am sure this will not come as a surprise to you, after what happened last night."

He put the letter down.

After what happened last night? What happened? He had gone to Frenchan Park to dinner, a tête-à-tête dinner, for her aunt was visiting a sick relative. What happened? He remembered the dinner; dimly remembered returning to his quarters. He had awakened with no unusual sense of depression. He found a difficulty in breathing, and mechanically his hand stole to the bureau where the little silver box was hidden. No, no! not to-day; he must not do it, he must not, he dare not! Now must be the beginning—he must start the period of reformation at some time. He dressed carefully, studiously keeping his mind away from the silver box. Yet he lingered in the room, and hated himself for his hypocrisy, hated more the leering devil who stood behind him and who whispered "one little pinch, you must brace up... it will be suicide if you see her without the confidence which that alone can bring." He shook off the thought, walked to the door, stood irresolutely, then came back, and, deliberately opening the bureau, took out the box...

There was a lot to be said for that act, he told himself, as he walked briskly to the railway station. He certainly felt more in the humour to defend himself from any charge she might bring against him. What had he done to offend her.

She was waiting for him on the side-walk before the bare entrance to the station, and he saw that her car was drawn up some little distance away.

"I am catching the 5.30 to town," she said, "and we have just half an hour; I

am sending my boxes on, and I thought I would pick up the train at Melton."

"Where are you going, Pat?" he asked.

"I am going to town; I am shutting up Frenchan Park," she said briefly.

They had left Shagford and were passing into the country before she told what was in her mind. Suddenly she gripped his hand.

"Oh, Larry, Larry," she sobbed, "why do you? Why do you?"

"Why do I what?" he asked, licking his dry lips.

"You were mad last night—mad, mad! You told me the most absurd things. You said you had an uncle who was leaving you a million."

"Good God!" he gasped, "did I? I must have been drunk."

It was an effort to say as much. She shook her head.

"You were not drunk, Larry; I have seen you like that before. It has worried me terribly. Larry, do you take drugs?"

"No," he said.

She gripped him by the shoulder and turned him round.

"Look me in the eye. Doctor Valet said that when a man or a woman takes drugs, they lose all sense of honour, all desire to speak the truth. Tell me, Larry—no, look at me—do you take drugs?"

He held himself to the truth, but it required a supreme effort.

"Yes," he said huskily, "I got into the habit in France."

She sank back in the corner of the limousine, her lips trembling.

Five minutes later :

"I thought it was that," she said quietly.

"But I will give it up, I swear I will," he said eagerly. "Pat, there isn't anything in the world I wouldn't do for your dear sake."

"Haven't you been trying for my sake to give it up?" she asked, her grave eyes on his.

He did not answer that, preferring silence to a lie.

"What chance is there?" she said, bitterly, "for you and I? You mustn't see me again, Larry; not until you can come to me and say 'I have not touched drugs

for a year'—for two years, Larry! We're both you. The separation will not kill us."

Her words came to him like the knell of doom.

"Give me a chance," he pleaded; "give me a month—in a month I'll have the thing beaten..."

She shook her head.

"No, no, it must be two years. You trust me?" She put her hand in his. "You know I will be true to you and will wait for you; you know that, don't you, Larry? We can't marry now—you know that, don't you? It will kill me and it would ruin you. You have got to fight this monster."

"But you could help me," he almost whined. "Pat, can't you see what a help you could be?"

"I have been helping you all along, Larry," she said. "You have had me to come to, you have had whatever influence I can exercise, and I have known you for three years. Larry, don't you see"—she laid her hand on his knee, and her white face was upturned to his—"that it is because you drug that you are satisfied with things as they are? Satisfied to take this position, the Governor of a jail—a position only held by old men. You have talents, genius; you are not going to stay in a backwater all your life. Oh, I know it is a very responsible Government post, that hundreds of men would give their heads to stand where you stand, but it isn't your work, is it, Larry?"

He fell naturally into the mental attitude of one who has been unnecessarily hurt. The effect of the little pinch of white powder was wearing off, and his brain was growing numb.

'I'll write you," he said thickly, but she stopped him.

"Don't even do that. Trust me, Larry; come to me in two years' time and say 'I have not touched drugs for one year.' Fight it, my boy."

He stood on Melton Station staring blankly as the tail of the express vanished out of sight.

The tragedy had come upon him with stunning suddenness: he could not realise what had happened.

That night he took a more cheerful view; he would make a good fight. He would go to her with his splendid record. Dear little girl... he would show her... and, of course, the whole thing was too preposterous. He, a grown man, in the power of a miserable drug like one of those besotted and effeminate creatures who had been pointed out to him when he was a kid, as horrible

examples of the degeneracy of the age.

It would be a simple matter, he smiled, and after all, Pat was right; this practice was one of the easiest to give up, if one gave one's mind to it.

He felt all these cheerful things under the influence of a double dose which he took after dinner.

The next morning he awoke horribly; he had to sit at the desk of justice and award punishments for breaches of the prison rules; and, so acting, saw his brother and the treacherous Felton separately.

That afternoon he made an excuse to go to the punishment cells, choosing a time when the warder in charge was at tea.

"Jim, I want you to help me."

The prisoner looked at the white-faced man and frowned as he listened to the incoherent confession.

"Drugs!" he said, staring; you don't mean, Larry, that you take drugs? I had no idea——"

"I got into the habit in France," said his brother impatiently. "Jim, you know these people in the West End, and drug-taking people aren't novelties in your set; what is the cure?"

The convict was silent, fingering his hairy chin. "Do you want the truth?" he asked. Larry nodded, knowing what the truth would be. "There is no cure; you can put a man in hospital and keep him away from the drug for a week or two, and when he is released, maybe he'll go straight."

"And after that?"

The convict shrugged.

"After that, he goes back to the dope. But you've got some sort of mind, Larry; you don't mean to tell me that you're going to lie down to that kind of trash?"

"Isn't there anything I can take? Any medicine?" asked the other desperately. "I could sound the prison doctor, but I'm scared of his guessing."

"What is the drug you take?"

Larry told him, and his brother looked serious.

"That's the worst of all," he said, "you poor devil." He shook his head. "And here I was envying you yesterday, envying you in your comfortable quarters whilst I sat in this dark cell."

"But, Jim, I've got to fight it!" the man wailed. "I've got to; it means more than you imagine. It isn't only my life and my soul that's at stake, it is the happiness of somebody that I'd die to serve."

"There is only one way of giving up drug-taking, and that is not to take any more," said Jim. "There is no easy way to reformation, Larry; you ought to go to an institution where they would keep you from the stuff. But you'd have to stay a jolly long time, let me tell you."

The Governor of the jail shook his head wearily. "You're not exactly a cheerful counsellor," he said.

He slammed the cell door savagely and locked it; then he went back to his quarters to begin the single-handed fight.

It began well; it ended inevitably. He dosed himself in order that his mind might be clear to find an easy way to renunciation. He was like a man who got drunk to discover the way to temperance.

He fell asleep that night in paradise; he was in hell when his servant brought his tea and a telegram. He opened the wire with nerveless fingers.

"Fight the good fight," it said.

Fight what good fight? He had no consciousness; no definite entity at that hour; he was sheer animal, with certain human accomplishments. He could read.

"Fight the good fight," he read, and puzzled over the words.

Later:

"You are not looking particularly well lately," said the prison doctor, eyeing him keenly.

Doctor Houseman had strolled into the office to make his report.

"I am not feeling up to the mark."

"Why don't you take a holiday? This is a rotten job for a young man. I often wonder you took it. By the way, that man who was committed for execution is a nervous wreck; he is going to give us trouble, and I suggest dosing him with minute grains of bromide."

"Execution," frowned Larry; "oh, of course, the man who came in yesterday."

It was the first execution that the jail had known during his governorship, and he had looked forward in some dread to the ghastly business. Now he was indifferent. Later in the morning he went in to the condemned cell and saw the

prisoner, an agricultural labourer of low mentality, who had become intensely religious.

The weeks that followed held more of terror for the occupant of the Governor's quarters than for the low-browed man who slept in the big double cell, watched by warders day and night, for he at least had hope, and Larry Fairing was without hope entirely.

He passed a sleepless night on the eve of the execution; the prisoner slept well. A pinch of the drug brought him alert, and almost cheerful to meet the under-sheriff and to conduct him through the dread ceremonial.

Yet so inured was he to the operations of the drug that the effects had passed away before the solemn procession was formed, and as he walked behind the prisoner to the scaffold, he had an insane desire to loosen the strapped hands and take the man's place. He stared at the motionless figure on the trap with hungry envy, and when it fell with a clang, and the executioner put out his hand to steady the swaying rope, he looked down at the curved figure with a savage grin.

"You are out of it," he muttered....

The doctor took his arm.

"My dear Fairing, you must lie up for a day or two," he said. "I suppose this is your first execution."

"No, I have seen several—shooting," said Larry jerkily. He had been shocked that morning by a terrible realisation; it was that Patricia Warren was becoming less and less a factor in his reformation. She had no power to arrest the hand that groped toward the bureau cupboard; he seldom thought about her. He sat down with his head in his hands and thought the matter out. Thought it out cruelly and painfully throughout that afternoon, and then he went down to the cells and saw his brother.

"The Governor's interested in that fellow Stelling," said the warder in control of the wing.

The chief warder nodded.

"Yes, new Governors always are interested in prisoners; he'll get out of that after he has been in the service a few years. Why, bless you, I wanted to talk to every prisoner I saw when I first joined. I thought they were the most interesting people I had ever met!"

The interview between the Governor and Convict Stelling was a long one, and, at the end, Larry sent for his subordinate.

"I am going to lie up for a day or two in my room; I have been rather run down. I shan't want to see the doctor or anybody else. You can carry on."

"Very good, sir."

Larry kept to his room for four days, and in all that time no razor touched his chin.

Shagford Jail was worked on the patrol system. At night all guards were withdrawn from the main prison wards, which were visited every hour by the warder on night duty, who patrolled the wards and their landings, and recorded his presence by means of two time clocks.

The guard-room was against the gate, and between the wards and the guard-room was the Governor's quarters.

On the fourth night, the warder, sitting smoking a forbidden pipe in the darkness, heard the door of the Governor's house close, and put away his pipe in some haste.

"It's all right," said Larry's voice. "I'm going round the prison."

"Shall I come with you, sir?"

"No, thank you."

The warder in the half-darkness saw dimly the figure of his superior as it went up the steps of the main hail, heard the snick of the lock and the thud of the door as it closed behind him. Half an hour passed, and the man on the gate had notified the patrol that it was the time for his hourly inspection, when he heard the door from the wards close, and saw the familiar figure in the tan trench-coat come down the steps.

"Is that you, sir?" he asked.

"Yes. Good-night."

The door of the Governor's house slammed.

At five o'clock in the morning, just as it was getting light, the Governor came out of his house and walked across the courtyard to the big gates.

"I'm going out for a walk," he said. "I can't sleep."

The gate opened and slammed after the solitary figure.

The gateman shook his head at the patrol.

"He's the most curious Governor I have ever seen."

"He's young," said the other tolerantly, "and I've got an idea he drinks a little bit too much, though I must confess I have never seen him the worse for liquor."

"Whoever gets the worse for liquor," asked the gateman pathetically.

At eight o'clock that morning, when Larry's servant took him in his tea and letters, he found the room empty and the bed undisturbed. There was a note addressed to the man on the table. It contained a sum of money, and the curt intimation that the Governor would not be back for a few days. There was also a letter to the chief warder telling him to carry on.

That afternoon a telephone message came through from the Prisons' Office in London, announcing the fact that Captain Larry Fairing had resigned his appointment, and that his successor was on his way to Shagford.

A third letter was addressed to the prison doctor; he found it on his desk when he came to medical inspection that morning.

"Dear Doctor" (it ran),—"I am clearing out for reasons which you will understand when I tell you that the man Stelling, in No. 7 cell, is my brother. Obviously it is impossible to remain Governor of the jail, and though I dare say things could be arranged satisfactorily, I think it better if I made a sudden departure. I have sent my resignation to the Commissioners, and shall be away from the county for two years."

"Good Lord," said the astonished doctor, and put the letter in his pocket. "No cases this morning, Venn?"

"Only one, sir, the man in No. 7 wishes to see you."

"In the punishment cell? Stelling," said the doctor, startled.

"Yes, sir. He has been asking to see a medical officer all the morning. He has given us a lot of trouble, that fellow. The Governor has been very patient with him."

The doctor understood the reason why patience was exercised.

"I'll come down," he said. He was curious to see the Governor's brother.

It was an ironical situation, thought the medico, while his warm Irish heart was stirred to sympathy.

The warder opened the door of the cell and the man stood up. Dr. Houseman was seeing Stelling for the first time, for although he had passed him on his entry to the prison, he had not taken much notice of him; and there was in his face a distinct resemblance to the Governor.

"Well," he said, "what do you want?"

"Doctor," the man's voice was hoarse and trembling, "for the love of God, give me a little cocaine! I must have it, doctor, I really must ; I am suffering the curses of the damned."

"Cocaine?" The prison doctor looked at the man open-mouthed. "You're a drug-taker, eh?"

"Yes, sir ; if you will give me just a little——"

"Not on your life," interrupted the doctor grimly. "You have been here for a month without it, and you have broken the habit, my lad."

"I must have it—I must, I tell you," almost screamed the prisoner. "Don't you see what I'm suffering? don't you see?" His hand shook as with palsy.

"That will do," said the doctor sternly, and signalled to the warder.

The doors clashed upon a frenzied man, clawing at the steel panels, howling his agony.

A week later came an inquiry from outside the prison, which the doctor answered. He knew Patricia Warren slightly, and had some idea that an engagement had been pending between the doctor and the girl.

"DEAR MISS WARREN,—I cannot tell you any more news about the Governor, except that a warder who was at this prison, but was afterwards transferred to Winchester, saw the Governor on the Australian mail-boat Modic. Apparently the warder had gone on board to say good-bye to some friends who were going to Australia, and he recognised the Governor pacing the saloon deck. He was curious enough to look at the passenger list, and found that Captain Fairing was travelling as Mr. James Fairing. Beyond that I know nothing. In his letter to me he told me he was going away for two years."

The writing of this letter was interrupted (though this Patricia Warren could not know) by the urgent call of the hospital warder, who summoned him to deal with the half-crazy occupant of a padded cell.

"My boy," said the doctor between his teeth, as he jabbed a hypodermic needle into the Thing's arm, "if you get through your sentence, you will bless the day you were ever put into prison."

Two years later, a tall, bright-eyed man stepped into the Governor's office at Dartmoor Jail, wearing a tweed suit that did not quite fit him.

The old Governor looked up.

"Well, Stelling, you are going out this morning?"

"Yes, sir," said the other cheerfully, "and a very pleasant day it is."

"I hope you'll go straight now, my boy," said the old man, "and," he added significantly, "that you will not return to those beastly drugs." He wagged his finger at the smiling ex-convict. "You were a wreck when you came here; now you will be able to give Dartmoor Prison an excellent testimonial. It is the healthiest spot in England!"

The Governor passed across the table a sum of money that the convict had earned during the period of confinement, and put out his hand.

"Good luck to you, Stelling."

The prisoner stopped to shake hands with the gate-man who guards that terrible steel grille behind which so many hearts have broken, and stepped blithely down the road to Princetown Station.

He reached Plymouth in the afternoon, and without hesitation stepped into the car that awaited his arrival in the station yard. The girl, who was hidden from view in one corner, took his hand and held it without speaking.

"I had your letter saying you would be waiting for me here," said Larry. "It was wonderful of you, darling; who told you, Jim, of course?"

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

"I had a long letter from him a few months after—after you disappeared. He told me how you came to his cell, and how you took his place whilst he went out free. It was a wonderful struggle, a glorious struggle, and you've won!"

He held her hand more tightly.

They were doubling back, and presently they reached the end of the wild moor. The car hummed along the deserted white road, swinging to the right to avoid Princetown.

Larry tapped the window and the limousine stopped.

Far away in the distance he saw the grim, grey huddle of buildings which are called Dartmoor Prison. He looked and nodded.

"Good-bye—bondage!"

And the girl who watched him knew that he did not speak of the bondage of bolts and bars.

5. — THE SOCIETY OF BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE

A MAN who calls his unprotected and innocent children "Theodora" and "Belarius" displays alike a lamentable lack of taste and a singular ignorance of history. For you may purchase the fourth volume of the *Decline and Fall* for a few trashy pennies, and, applying yourself to the work of the great phrase-maker, you may discover that Theodora hated the great general. In addition to which, Theodora was not nice.

Stopford Leader was Superior alike to the teachings of history and the misfortunes of ignorance. (If here and there I drop insensibly into the pompous diction of Gibbon, it is because I have been diligently reading him to discover who Belarius was anyway.)

He was the senior partner in the legal firm of Marythew, Marythew, Carter, Wounding & Marythew. Lawyers frequently have styles and titles like this. But Carter and Wounding and two of the Marythews no longer walked the broad pavement of Bedford Row, or strutted through the flagged corridors of county courts. Unless even in heaven stout, middle-aged men of law may strut, they strutted no more.

In the fulness of time Mr. Leader gave up his practice and himself retired to manage his not inconsiderable fortune (curse this Gibbon style!) and the home direction of those estates in Alberta which in his foresight and prudence he had so providentially accrued.

He was a happy and indeed contented man at that period of his life when this record of adventure opens. He had sold his Alberta property—or practically sold it—to a Canadian landowner for a sum beyond his wildest dreams.

"And when Mr. Meekly's signature is on the deed"—he rubbed his hands at breakfast one morning—"I think—I rather think, Belarius, that I shall offer no insuperable obstacles to your purchasing the two-seater which has attracted your wayward fancy, nor shall I demur at the expense involved by your contemplated London season, my dear Theodora."

Mr. Leader talked like that, and even Gibbon might be excused if he turned in his grave.

"Meekly—what a perfectly ghastly name!" said Belarius, glaring across the table. "It doesn't sound a bit Wild-Westish."

"What is he like, father?" Theodora was normally curious.

Mr. Leader smiled.

"He is a rich man of uncertain age. It is strange that your interest in him should have its complement in his interest in you."

"In me?" Theodora purred.

"In her?" asked the expensively educated Belarius, nearly dropping his eyeglass from sheer incredulity.

Mr. Leader nodded.

"That is so. He intends settling in London, and has, I believe, purchased a villa in Park Lane, and here, in the luxurious environment of social London, he, ever a student, as I understand, will devote himself to his favourite authors, and in the manner of the great arbiter elegantium, compose a history of his times."

"Good Lord! What a queer old johnny!" said Belarius.

(In his letter Mr. Meekly had said, "I want to settle down in London and get the hang of things," but Gibbon would have put it differently.)

Mr. Stopford Leader was a serious-minded man, slightly bald, and believed in the law up to a point. He realised that the law covered a great number of delinquencies, and felt that it ought to be strengthened in such matters as trespass, impertinent servants, and overcharges by tradesmen.

Belarius, tall and thin, slightly myopic—he probably wore a monocle in his cradle—was so chock-full of romance that he had no time to be serious; and if he was serious at all, it was a kind of romantic seriousness. He sighed for the Middle Ages, when johnnies owned castles, and knights in armour went galloping the jolly old forests, rescued ladies who were tied to trees (the ladies must be beautiful, but any old kind of tree would serve), and if any beastly bounder gave you an odd spot of cheek, out came your jolly old two- cylinder sword and—biff!

Belarius was called Bill for short. Theodora, who objected to the abbreviation "Dora," accepted the shortening to "Thera," which sounded good and meant nothing. Thera has an added importance in this history, because she was really the founder of the Great Order.

It was after Jim Bellamy's parent had been howled down at the Town Hall at a by-election that the great idea took shape.

There was in the town of Bulborough certain anarchistic elements. Anaemic young men who proclaimed their originality by wearing no hats but a quantity of loose hair, communistic barbers, frankly bolshevist errand- boys—these had

gathered in force on the night Mr. Bellamy made his great appeal to the free and enlightened electorate of Bulborough, pointing out to them that the only chance of the country's salvation was his return to Parliament.

To make the outrage more monstrous, he was supported by Mr. Stopford Leader himself. And neither gentleman had been allowed a hearing. Groans, catcalls, the ringings of bells, boos, moans, and other demonstrations of disapproval had punctuated the speeches of each orator, and the meeting (to quote the Bulborough Herald, with which was incorporated the Woodhollow Courier and Advertiser) "broke up in disorder, and pandemonium reigned."

Mr. Leader was struck by a dead cat as he came out of the hail; a virago shook her fist in the face of May Knollys, Thera's dearest friend, and indeed it seemed that the revolution was at hand. Pale but brave, Mr. Leader went back to his beautiful house at Hillchurch and got into telephonic communication with the War Office.

It was the third night after this when the great idea took shape. There was a secret meeting in Bill Leader's study. He called it his study because it was the place where he slept in the afternoon. The door was locked; the servants were forbidden under any circumstances to approach nearer than ten paces to the closed oak.

"The whole trouble is," said Bill, who had voted himself into the chair, "that the present system of dealing with these jolly old blighters is altogether wrong and rotten."

"Hear, hear!" said the beautiful May Knollys. "Bill, you've said a mouthful! When that wretched woman shook her fist at me, I couldn't help thinking of those terrible creatures—I forget their French name—who used to sit in front of the guillotine, knitting their husbands' socks. And that's another proof that there is such a thing as reincarnation. I had a distinct recollection of the Place de l'Opera... the big guillotine with the noose hanging——"

"Oh, do shut up about your reincarnation," interrupted her brother. "And nobody was ever executed on the Place de l'Opera—anyway, there are no nooses to guillotines, you poor fish! Now what's the idea, Bill?"

"A secret society," said Bill solemnly. "Something with a snappy name. The Sons of Vengeance—how does that strike you?"

"Rotten!" said three voices at once.

Thera thought that a secret society was a great idea.

"I'm sure daddy will help us," she said. "He's got awfully strong views about justice, and I remember reading a book when I was a mere child, about three

or four or five men who set themselves out to rectify the inequalities of the law."

"Don't introduce any crackjaw phrases into this perfectly friendly meeting," said Bill impatiently. "We've got to move, and we've got to move jolly quick! We've got to make our name fearfully terrifying. Things have got to happen to-night—perfectly extraordinary things. And all that the jolly old victim discovers when he wakes up dead in the morning is a bit of paper stuck on his chest, with a skull and crossbones drawn upon it and the word 'Vengeance'—something like that. I'm perfectly sure that the society would be a success."

They sat in silence for a long time, clenched fists to mouths, each conspirator frowning darkly.

"I've got it!" said Thera suddenly. "That 'Sons of Vengeance' idea, Bill, is wrong. Besides, it's too melodramatic, and people would laugh their heads off. What we need is an innocent title that doesn't mean anything at all about vengeance——"

"And therefore is all the more terrible," nodded May. "When we were in China there was a perfect association called 'The Happy Sons of the Buttercup.' They used to cut people's throats and do all sorts of jolly things."

Her brother's lips curled in a sneer.

"If you really want to get a laugh, let's call ourselves 'The Happy Sons of the Buttercup' or some such rot. What about 'The Society for Preventing Anarchists'?"

"Hold hard," said Bill, smiting his brow. "I've got it—' The Society of Bright Young People.'"

They looked at one another.

"That's good," said Thera slowly. "'The Society of Bright Young People.' Now who shall we start on?"

"Mrs. Ligham, the greengrocer's wife," said May promptly. "Couldn't we lure her to a wood and frighten her terribly? A woman who'd threaten a young, innocent girl... well, really, something should happen to her."

"She didn't," snarled Jim; "she only threatened you. We don't want to deal with these small fry; don't you agree, Bill?"

Bill agreed; for there was born in the back of his mind a great idea. He raised his hand to silence three people all speaking at once.

"Doboski," he said simply.

Jim frowned.

"Do-who-ski?" he asked. He was not a whale on contemporary politics.

Thera nodded eagerly.

"The very man, Bill. Doboski is the head of the Lithonian revolutionary party," she went on rapidly, "and he's coming to Bulborough to lecture on the art of revolution."

Four pairs of eyes sparkled.

"Hold hard," said Bill, who had assumed the rôle of dictator and master-strategist. "We can't go leaping around until we have formed this society properly. Jim and me are to be trusted" (Jim had been expensively educated, as has been remarked before), "but you three girls will probably go blabbing our secrets all over the town. What about an odd spot of swearing—signing your names with your life's blood, what?"

"You don't get any life's blood out of me, Bill," said Thera icily. "Ink is my favourite writing fluid, and a 'J' nib is to be preferred to any other. And if there's any bad language, May and I will, of course, refuse to have anything to do with your—my society. It is mine; I invented it."

"Don't let's wrangle," said Jim. He was rather a fat young man and inclined to be testy. "Now we ought to have objects and plans——"

"Half a mo'," said Bill, and produced a fountain pen. "Our first object is to regenerate the world."

"You'd better put that down in case you forget it," said Thera.

"Don't sneer, Theodora," said her brother sternly. "Everybody has his jolly old ideals to live up to. Number two: to crush anarchism——"

"In all its branches," added May; "especially women anarchists with fat arms."

Bill paused and frowned down at the paper.

"How many 'k's' in 'anarchist'?" he demanded.

But nobody was quite sure, so Bill employed two.

An hour passed before the *raison d'être* of the Society of Bright Young People was finally agreed. Another hour before secret signs and passwords were reduced to writing. (If you put one hand upon the top of your head and a finger under your chin, it meant "Do not speak to me: I am under observation.") As the clock was striking eleven, the first meeting of the Brights was finally dissolved, after an unseemly wrangle as to who should be Chief of Operations.

But once the Society was in being, the rest seemed easy. The doomed Doboski, ignorant of the fate which awaited him, had by his agents plastered the town of Bulborough with announcements of his forthcoming lecture. Even Bulborough stirred uneasily; and when Harry Rickaby, who was chief assistant at a fish shop off High Street, made his appearance in the street on a Saturday evening, carrying a large red flag, and followed by other restless elements of the population, it was felt that world events were touching Bulborough very nearly.

Though Harry's demonstration was cut short by the arrival of his irate mother in search of the red tablecloth he had borrowed without permission, there were wise old men who shook their heads and agreed that Something was Going to Happen.

Up at Hillchurch the disorder occasioned by the arrival of Harry's mother in search of her household property was magnified into a riot. Mr. Leader's chauffeur had a sister who brought the laundry on Saturdays, and she came with an incoherent story of rioting, of baton charges by the police, and a street that ran with blood. Mr. Leader listened gravely.

"There is little doubt," he said, "that, primed by the poison of popular education, and incited to insane fury by the demagogic oratory of their shoddy tribunes, the proletariat, unmindful of the blessings which have accrued under the beneficent sway of the Town Council, of which I have the honour to be Chairman, are seeking in rapine the remedy for their own sloth. I shudder to think of what will happen on Wednesday."

Belarius and his sister exchanged secret glances, and Bill went so far as to scratch both ears at once, which meant "There will be doings on Wednesday." Thera, a little hazy as to the secret signs, thought it was a signal to her that he wanted to speak to her outside, and, making an excuse, she went into the corridor and waited there ten cold minutes for a fellow-conspirator who did not come.

"And your signal said as plainly as anything 'Come outside,'" said the exasperated girl. "I think these secret signs are silly, and I'm not going to take the slightest notice of any more."

Bill raised his eyebrows.

"You know the penalty for disobedience of our laws?" he asked ominously.

"Pish!" said Thera, and snapped her fingers.

The plan in regard to Mr. Doboski was simple and effective. The Bulborough train stopped at Lynewood Halt, two miles out of the town, for the collection of tickets. Lynewood itself lay a few hundred yards from the station, and was

on the estate of Jim Bellamy's father.

"My idea is that we'll keep him there till morning, then rush him away before daybreak to Welborough, leave him stranded in the street, and there you are!"

"The great thing," insisted May, "is to bandage his eyes. If you don't bandage his eyes, he'll see where he's going, and then the grease will be on the spirit stove, my boy!"

"Don't worry about his eyes," growled her stout brother. "I'm going down to the woodman's hut to put on a new padlock; and the main point is that, whether he's bandaged or unbandaged, he mustn't see us. When will the robes be ready?"

"To-night," said Thera promptly. "May and I are working like slaves. The cloaks will be silk for the girls and cotton for you boys. We are not quite sure about the eyeholes..."

The Reception Committee of the Red Brotherhood had hired a band for Wednesday evening. Mr. Doboski was to arrive at seven o'clock, half an hour before his meeting, and he was to be greeted by the proletariat guard on the platform. He was to address his meeting and leave by the eleven o'clock train for London; and in preparation for the hectic scenes which would follow his arrival, the whole police force of Bulborough was assembled—both of them.

At ten minutes to seven the London train came noisily to Lynewood Halt, and the one solitary ticket inspector, beginning at the far end, began his long and toilsome examination. At the darkest part of the platform—which was every part except where one oil lamp burnt—Bill Leader waited, his overcoat buttoned to his chin, a black slouch hat pulled down over his eyes. Swiftly he walked along the platform, oblivious to the snow which was falling, and fortified against the keen north-easterly wind by a heavy overcoat (the Society had agreed that a black hood and robe would excite attention, even at Lynewood Halt), and presently he saw his man: a tall, dark man, wearing a fur cap and a short, poky beard. Viewing him from a discreet distance, Bill could picture the tyrant sitting at his tribunal, sending processions of men and delicate females to the rigours and horrors of Siberia. There he sat, snug in his fur-lined coat, the big collar pulled up above his ears, his cruel eyes brooding over an evening newspaper opened at the sporting page.

Bill's resolution, which had been waning during the period of his wait, took a new strength. He walked to the carriage door and jerked it open.

"May I see you, please?" he asked curtly.

"You want to see me?" said the man in surprise, He spoke with a foreign accent.

"They have sent a car for you," mumbled Bill behind his collar, his hat still pulled down over his eyes.

The stranger jumped up, pulled down a bag from the rack, and followed Bill on to the platform. Not a word did the Avenger speak as he turned into the country lane where a closed car was waiting, and with the car three shivering conspirators huddled together on the front seat.

"Will you get in, please?" asked Bill, and the man in the fur coat obeyed.

In another second the car was driving swiftly, if erratically (Jim Bellamy's teeth were chattering, but that was probably due to the cold, and his steering was not of the surest, even in normal spins).

"That's nice of you to send a car," said the foreigner. I haven't a great deal of time; I'm taking the train back to-night and going on to the Continent to-morrow."

Bill sat quaking at his side as the car shot through a gateway and bumped and swayed over the cart track leading to the woodman's hut.

"This is a pretty poor road," said the stranger in surprise.

"It's good enough for you," stammered Bill. It required a terrible effort to say this, but once it was said the old spirit of adventure, dormant in the bosom of most men who found themselves alone in a dark wood on a stormy night with a savage and remorseless enemy, sparked up again.

Before the man could answer, the car stopped. Thera jumped down and pulled open the door.

"Come out," she quavered, "you horrible man!"

In the reflected light from the headlamps the stranger saw a revolver that trembled so violently that at first he imagined, by some sleight of hand, she was holding two.

"What's the great idea?" he asked, as he stepped slowly down to the ground.

"Go in there." She pointed to the yawning door of the woodman's hut.

"A hold-up, eh?" He laughed softly. "All right, sister, if that's the idea."

"And don't call me 'sister,'" she stormed. "You know jolly well that all that sister and brother nonsense is sheer hypocrisy."

Jim Bellamy, frozen to the wheel literally and figuratively, felt it a moment to add his voice to the chorus of condemnation.

"You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself," he bleated.

The stranger looked round; there was another cloaked and masked figure ahead of him. She also held two, and possibly three, revolvers in one hand.

"Well, if this doesn't beat the band! Who are you folks, anyway?"

"We're the Society of Bright Young People," said May tremulously.

"Yes, that's what we are." Bill here asserted his position as leader. "We're going to rid the world of thugs and crooks and anarchists, Mr. Doboski."

The stranger laughed; it was a horrible, blood-curdling laugh. If May's revolver had been loaded, she would have fired it off in sheer nervousness.

"Go in there."

A storm lamp was burning on the table of the little hut, revealing its unpleasant interior. There was an old chair, a table, and little else save peeling wallpaper.

The plan was to follow him in, search him for documents of a compromising character, bind him hand and foot, possibly gag him, and if he gave trouble, to stun him with a well-aimed blow from the butt of a pistol. This was Thera's idea, and she had deputed the job to her brother.

But nobody seemed disposed to follow the tall stranger into the ill-lit interior.

"Go on!" hissed May, pushing her brother forward.

But Mr. James Bellamy, who was well brought up, stood aside to let a lady pass.

"Go on, search him!" Bill's voice was hollow. "It won't take you two twinks, old bird."

"Search him yourself," said Jim under his breath. "My job was to drive the car."

It was Thera who braced herself up and walked into the hut.

"I'm going to search you," she said, "and please don't let me have any of your monkey tricks."

She was at some disadvantage, because the hood which covered her face had slipped round so that she could only see out of one eye.

"Excuse me," said the stranger politely, and readjusted the hood. "You were saying?"

"I'm going to search you."

At that moment a puff of wind closed the door with a bang.

Jim tried to open it.

"What's wrong with this door?" he hissed.

"Why, I thought you were going to put on a padlock?"

"Couldn't get the right kind of padlock," mumbled Jim Bellamy, tugging at the knob with shaking hands. "I fixed a new spring lock—did it all this morning, and did it jolly well."

"Well, open it."

"Eh?" Mr. Bellamy scratched the portion of the hood that hid his nose.

"Unlock it!" said Bill frantically. "You can't leave Thera in there with that horrible man!"

Jim Bellamy went limp.

"I haven't brought the key," he said faintly.

And then Thera's voice sounded from inside.

"Open the door, please."

"You open it," yelled Jim. "You can do it from inside."

She tried, and, ordinarily, might have succeeded; but Mr. Bellamy was not a good locksmith, and he had so fastened the catch that when, under the force of the wind—and nothing else could have closed it—the door had slammed tight, it was immovable.

"I'm afraid you're a prisoner too. What have you been doing—running a revolution?" asked the bearded enemy blandly. "Or maybe you've been a traitor to the gang?"

"Open the door!" gasped Thera, kicking at the door.

"Jim's gone to get the key," bellowed a voice outside.

"Which was Jim?" asked the interested stranger. "The gentleman who lured me, or the bird at the wheel?"

"The bird at the wheel," she snapped, before she realised her vulgarity.

Mr. Doboski whistled.

"Well, I fear you'll have to sit down and make yourself comfortable," he said, and slowly stripped off his overcoat, laying it on the back of the chair.

He went out of the room to the little scullery that adjoined, and returned with an armful of wood, which he threw into the bleak grate.

"There's no reason why we conspirators should freeze to death," he said.

"Can't we get out of the window?" she asked, in a panic.

"They're barred," was the laconic reply. "I've never seen a cuter little prison."

He struck a match and kindled the heap of wood into a roaring flame.

"That's better." He looked round the room. "One chair—that's yours. I'll sit on the table. Do you live around here?" he asked politely.

"Of course I live around here," snapped Thera, throwing a malignant glance at the man. "It is because we wish to save our people from the misery of a revolution that we are doing this."

The stranger looked at her long and earnestly.

"I'd like to have a little peep at you," he said. "Do you mind taking off the _____"

She hesitated, then, realising something of the ridiculousness of her appearance, and not averse to his seeing the type of woman he had to deal with, she whisked off the black hood.

"My!" His mouth opened. "Well now, isn't that the best of luck! I've always thought I should be kidnapped—bandits held me up once in the mountains, but they were just ugly, coarse, sordid men, with common whiskers—I guess none of them had seen the inside of a bath for a month. Give me this kind of brigandage every time!"

"I don't want you to insult me with your compliments," said Thera haughtily.

"Was that a compliment?" he asked earnestly. "Anyway, we won't argue that matter. I came down here expecting to be disappointed—and I'm not. I came expecting to see a girl who's beautiful in her poppa's eyes, and I knew she was going to give me the everlasting hump. And here I've been kidnapped and held up by unlawful loveliness——"

"I wish you would be good enough not to address your remarks to me," said Thera coldly.

The stranger looked at his watch.

"And now they've got to get that door open. I've some important business to do in Bulborough, and I must catch the eleven train back to town."

She smiled contemptuously, though she never felt less like smiling in her life. She wished now she had taken Bill's advice and loaded the revolver, which she still gripped in her hand.

"You're staying here till the morning," she said. "It will be death to you to attempt escape from this wood," she added heroically.

The hour that followed seemed like an eternity. From time to time Bill squeaked an inquiry or an injunction through the keyhole. In moments of great excitement he had the habit of transposition.

"If he gets shoot, fresh him like a dog!" Or, "Touch a head of her hair, Doboski, and you die!"

But the man standing before the fire showed no disposition to touch her or even to get fresh. His sorrowful eyes were on the blazing logs, and Thera wondered what drama, what tragedy, lay behind his revolutionary tendencies. After a long silence he turned his head.

"Young lady, you've either robbed me of a great pleasure or a great disappointment. Ever been in love?"

Thera bridled.

"This is not the moment to discuss such matters," she said icily "I understand that in Russia——"

"Ever been in love with a dream—a conception? Never seen her... only heard scraps of talk about her. Her father thinks she's wonderful, and has mentioned her, and out of these fragments I have constructed a wonderful girl, not unlike you."

Thera shrugged. It seemed a conspirator-like thing to do.

"I was seeing her to-night—and now I shan't."

"Perhaps she is lucky," said Thera, with spirit; "and mixed marriages are never happy."

"Are you married?" he asked, and she snorted.

At that moment Bill's voice howled.

"If he shoots you, touch him! Father's here!"

"Maybe I ought to be grateful to you," the man went on. "I shall never know."

"Perhaps she wouldn't love you," said Thera, thoroughly interested in spite of the impropriety of the occasion. "Girls are always expected to fall in love with men who are keen on them. There's a man named Meekly... a horrible, anæmic Canadian whom father knows. He's always writing about me. And, of course, when I see him——"

At that moment a key grated in the lock and the door swung open. Bill, very white (except for his nose, which was very red), dashed in savage-eyed.

"Doboski!" he said wildly.

"Doboski?"

Mr. Leader, who had been brought over by the distracted Jim Bellamy, stood in the background and surveyed the scene.

"Surely...!" He came forward with outstretched hand to the bearded man. "Surely it is my friend, Mr. Meekly! Theodora, this is the gentleman I have so often spoken to you about."

"So I gathered," said John Meekly, "but I'm not anæmic."

The Society of Bright Young People looked at one another, and one by one they stole forth into the darkness.

6. — THE KING AND THE EDITOR

No record of prior magazine publication under this title found

THE King read the letter again with a suspicious frown.

"It has afforded us infinite pleasure to learn of Your Majesty's acceptance of our invitation, and such resources as our ever-hospitable and peace-loving land can offer for Your Majesty's entertainment shall be realised. We would proffer the respectful suggestion that Your Majesty should so time your arrival at our capital as to admit of our receiving Your Majesty with those marks of affection and respect due to the overlord of the ancient states of Atopia and Monterio, and we permit ourselves to further suggest that the 17th of October would fulfil our desires in every regard."

The King read the letter, carefully folded it, and as carefully placed it in the breast pocket of his uniform jacket.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered young man, with hair inclined to curliness, a

clear blue eye, and an alertness of action that had earned for him at Eton the nickname of "Rap."

This may or may not have been a shortening of his name, for in those days he was no more than Count Richard Raptoryski, and his chance of succeeding to the three hundred square miles of territory which constituted the Kingdom of Atopia, and the four hundred and twenty-five square miles of untamable mountains that bore with it the "karlship" of Monte 'Rio, was somewhat remote. Influenza removed one man who stood between him and the throne, and revolution two others (it was a great mistake on the part of his predecessors to impose an income tax on the mountaineers of Monte 'Rio), and suddenly there had come to a young man on a far-away Scottish golf links a summons to kingship.

He had read the imposing document, with its impressive seal, with that same suspicion with which he now read the King's letter. Then he had slowly walked back to the club-house and had drunk a whisky and soda—the respectful messenger watching him in some awe.

There had been a dozen men in the room, boastful young men talking of their handicaps, and one had said:

"What's up, Rap—broken a club?"

He shook his head solemnly.

"Old friend," he said, "I'm a king."

That was all.

"That's a curious thing," mused the other; "poor old Gill of Guys used to have the same kind of hallucinations. In his case it was drink."

"Don't be an ass," begged the King, "and for Heaven's sake, don't be flippant before the gentleman with the whiskers"—he alluded to the rapt messenger at the door—"because I'm not quite sure whether he's the Prime Minister or the Local Postman. I'm a king, Piggy. My cousin George has—er—popped off, and I'm a royalty and I feel horribly upset."

"Have another drink," said the practical Piggy, and His Majesty complied.

But that was ages and ages ago—nearly two years.

It seemed to His Majesty of Monte 'Rio that there had never been a time when the cares of kingship had been absent from him. He could hardly remember the time when he did not wear uniforms and attend Cabinet Councils, and review armies, and collect taxation.

Monte 'Rio was part of his being, and he had joined vigorously in the fight against absorption.

For there were evil-minded Chancellors in Europe, who looked with a longing eye upon Monte 'Rio—not because of its commercial possibilities, or because of its revenues, but for the very substantial reason that it afforded the domination of Lower Sindonia, and of the Eastern Steppes.

The country was a huge natural fortress, with heaven-made ramparts, trenches, pitfalls, culs de sac—there was not an invented fortification known to military science that was not here provided, a hundred times more formidable than ever human brain conceived or human hands erected.

The King paced the well-worn carpet of his study, his head on his breast, his hands clasped behind him.

Charles of Woldberg, Emperor and War Lord, had invited him to Rustenberg, and Adolph, most powerful Kaiser of Eastern Europe, was to form one of the Imperial party.

He stopped and looked out across the sunlit town that lay beneath the Palace windows. "The city of the river" was very beautiful, with its white buildings, its great grey church with its one lofty spire. In a jumble of white and green ran the river, twisting and turning between mossy quays to the distant sea. Far away on the horizon the blue hills of Monte 'Rio proper, shimmered in the hot autumnal air.

The King turned from his contemplation and rang a bell. A servant in a faded livery answered the call.

"You will inform His Excellency Count Schiffer that I desire his presence."

The man bowed and retired.

Soon the door opened to admit the Chancellor.

He was elderly and bald, and his gait was a little unsteady, his eyes perceptibly vacant. He bowed and nearly fell, but jerked himself into an erect position and stood swaying a little.

"Schiffer," began the King, then stopped. "You've been drinking," he accused.

"A li'l," admitted His Excellency, tearfully; "a little glass of cognac—maybe two. The grass tax, Y'r Majesty—oh, these cursed peasants!"

He shook his head mournfully.

"Grass tax!" said His Startled Majesty; "what the devil do you mean, Schiffer? Do you mean to tell me that these horrid blight—people haven't paid their

grass tax?"

"Alas!" mumbled the old man, his bald head wobbling in his dejection. "Alas! I sent two Commissioners to the hills——" He completed his tale of woe in incoherent rumblings.

The King turned pale.

"What money have we got?"

"In English money—since Your Majesty has never taken kindly to our Monterian coinage—we have exactly ninety English pounds."

"Good Lord!"

The King paced the apartment agitatedly.

"Our salary——" he began.

"Paid in advance, and the household vote, and the privy purse vote, and the army vote."

"Have we spent all that?" asked the King in an awestricken whisper, and the Chancellor nodded.

"You bought a motor-car—I put it into the army estimates as 'engines of war,' but it took all the army vote and a part of the prison vote

"But Schiffer," protested the King, "I must have money! The whole future of these realms depends upon my meeting Their Majesties at Rustenberg. There must be a special vote——"

"There was a special vote," said the lachrymose Chancellor ominously —"Entertainment and Diplomatic Services, £900'—you spent that on the new golf links."

"Did I?" faltered the King guiltily.

"You did," said the Chancellor.

Richard of Monte 'Rio thought deeply, biting his knuckles to aid the exercise.

"Can't we fine somebody something?" he asked vaguely.

The Chancellor shook his head.

"The judges want all the fines they can get to pay the court expenses," he said with a despondent gesture; "then, again, nobody cares two straws about a fine, and when people are sentenced to pay one hundred krone or go to prison for forty-two days, they impudently demand prison."

"Well?"

"Well," said the Chancellor unsteadily, flicking a crumb of bread from his sleeve, "they know we can't afford to keep 'em in prison."

The King drew a long breath.

"And this is the country I gave up golf for!" he said bitterly. "Can't we confiscate something?"

The Chancellor shook his head.

"We can't even afford a revolution," he wept afresh at the thought of the country's limitation.

"Don't snivel, Schiffer," said His Majesty sternly; "and, please, don't sniff. Where is Mr. Wall?"

"Your Majesty's Secretary," said the moist Schiffer, "is engaged at Hôtel de la Paix on—on State affairs."

"He's playing billiards," said the King despairingly; "heavens! what a country! what a people! Where one's very pals round on one, and the decrepit officers of State are engaged in a conspiracy to veil their wrongdoings."

"Command Mr. Wall, Your Excellency," he said with sudden dignity, and the Chancellor withdrew with a stately, if uncertain, obeisance.

Mr. Michael Wall came into the presence a quarter of an hour later, very hot, for he had run all the way through the hilly streets to the Palace, very cross, for he had had abominable luck, but quite prepared to be placated by the news that there had been an unexpected influx to the treasury.

"Now where the dickens have you been, Mike?" said the King, with some irritation.

"Your Majesty is aware," began the ruffled secretary.

"Shut the door, and don't be an ass," said His Majesty, "and drop 'majestising' me. Mike, I'm in a hole."

Mike said nothing. He was a fresh-coloured young man with yellow hair and reflective eyes that shone behind spectacles. He had a trick of whistling to himself that was annoying, but the world's main grievance against him was his frankness.

He admitted he was frank; indeed, he took quite an unnecessary amount of pride in this doubtful accomplishment, and accepted the unpopularity that followed the practice of his curious virtue as the transpontine villain of

melodrama accepts the execrations of the gallery as a sort of compliment.

"I'm in a hole," repeated the King, with relish; "in the dev-il of a hole."

"What about the grass tax?" queried the secretary, staring out of the window and talking at his companion.

"The grass tax," said the King shortly. "I have remitted."

Mike whistled a slow movement from Chopin.

"Leave the 'Dead March' alone," begged the King, "and help me out of my fix. Mike, I've absolutely got to go to Rustenburg. Uncle Fatty's got a terrific function on, and old Dolfy's coming from the East, and I simply must turn up." He said this very impressively, but Mike did not seem impressed. "It will cost hundreds," he said, with caution.

"Thousands," corrected the King impatiently. "It will cost a couple of thousands. I simply must invest in a new kit, and then there's the Palace tips and the decorations for the various chaps who hang round you in palaces. You can't get even the simplest Order of the St. Agatha under a fiver apiece, and even that's buyin 'em by the dozen, and I suppose I shall be expected to give a couple of Brilliant Stars of Monte 'Rio——"

"If you'll permit me to say it," said the spectacled young man, still addressing his remarks to the window, "you've got yourself to thank for all this. I believe in being frank; I know you think it's a fault, but when a king, on £3000 a year, spends half his income——"

"Now, do shut up and don't be a sandy-thatched gibberer," pleaded His Majesty. "I do not want any of your decline and fall philosophy; I want money."

Mike relapsed into a staring silence.

"Tax something," he suggested, "or borrow it."

"There's nothing to tax and there are no money-lenders who'll touch my paper, since I persuaded the Diet to shorten the period of the Statute of Limitations."

"And made it retrospective," added the secretary thoughtfully.

"And made it—for certain reasons—retrospective," admitted the young king with an embarrassed cough.

"We might," he went on, "coerce Atopia. They have had a very prosperous tourist season—by the way, where's the army?"

"He's on leave," said the solemn Mike, and the King writhed.

"I wish you wouldn't exercise your dubious wit upon the armed forces of the Crown," he said acidly; "we——"

"I've got it!"

Mr. Michael Wall became of a sudden animated.

"I've got it—you'll have to marry!"

"Eh?"

"You have to marry—get a dowry—repair the fallen fortunes of your house. Everybody's doing it, why shouldn't you?"

"My dear, good, well-meaning friend," said the King, with a show of irritation, "one can't do that sort of thing when one's a king. I can't go touting for heiresses. It is all arranged by ambassadors and people——"

"Marry a princess, a tip-topper." Mr. Wall was quite excited at the idea. "There are lots of 'em about—make a grand alliance—what about the Princess Marie-Elise?"

The King gasped at the cold-blooded proposal.

"Marie-Elise!"

The only daughter of Charles of Woldberg, most potent sovereign, and likely as not already betrothed!

"You're an ass," he said helplessly.

"Why? Why shouldn't you? Do you think that Monte 'Rio is such a tin-pot kingdom that it is a presumption——"

"Stop!" commanded the King, speaking with emotion. "Stop, Mike! Poor we are, ungenerous and ungrateful we are, but not—not tin-pot."

He shook his head emphatically and walked to the window. "As to presumption," he said, speaking across his shoulder, "it is an honour for any house to be allied to this ancient house of Zippilin-Monte 'Rio——"

"I'm sure," murmured the encouraging Mike.

"We will ask our cousin's hand," he went on loftily, and a little dreamily; "we will offer her—what is she like?"

"Rippin'," said the enthusiastic Mr. Wall, and the King nodded.

"We will demand her hand," King Richard of Monte 'Rio went on, speaking with firm assurance, "and——"

Two knocks came to the door, and Schiffer entered. There was a triumphant gleam in his eye.

"I have to announced to Your Majesty, that the Diet at this morning's sitting _____"

"Yes, yes!" said the King eagerly.

"Has in its wisdom voted an ice-breaker for our harbour at Saix."

"Thank Heavens!" said His Majesty, with fervour.

The secretary eyed him accusingly, but the King did not meet his gaze.

"So Your Majesty may, now go ahead with your preparations, and I have taken the liberty of instructing the Court tailor to call upon Your Majesty at three o'clock this afternoon...."

Mr. Michael Wall, Private Secretary and Candid Friend, waited until the Chancellor had withdrawn.

"Where is the money coming from?" he demanded, and the King looked a trifle uneasy...

"After all," he wound up a long explanation, "they do not really require an ice-breaker on a river where the temperature never falls before fifty degrees, and the money will be much better employed——"

"Speaking frankly," began Mr. Wall with great seriousness.

"Come out to the links," said His Majesty hastily; "I'll go you a round before lunch."

7 — CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

No record of prior magazine publication under this title found

LEW WITHERSYNE's magnificent car developed engine trouble at the lodge gates of Pelford Manor just as Lord Pelford came walking through those same gates.

"Very annoying indeed," said Lew, smiling despite his misfortune; "but happily I am not bound for anywhere in particular. I'm just loafing through England sight-seeing."

Fine snow was falling, and the countryside was white. Lord Pelford made a little grimace.

"Not exactly the weather or the season one would choose for touring," he said, and Mr. Withersyne laughed.

His laugh was one of his greatest assets—that and his rich baritone. The chaplain at Dartmoor, whatever might be his sorrow at the iniquity which brought an old face back to "B" Hall, was always glad to welcome Lew back to the choir.

"I chose the winter and prayed that it would snow good and hard," he said, and explained to his puzzled audience. "For twenty years I have spent my Christmas in the hottest part of South-West Africa. Blazing sun—sand so hot that it shrivels up your boots—glaring plumbago on every bush, so bright that it nearly blinds you: you won't wonder why I am very nearly the happiest man in England to see real honest-to-heaven snow!"

He was a classy talker, specialising in romantic conversation. Lord Pelford was interested. In his youth he had travelled extensively; had wandered under scorching suns and knew something of the ache for grey skies and scudding snow-clouds.

"Perhaps you will lunch with me?" he suggested. "I know South Africa rather well."

Lew, most perfect of "timers," glanced along the road and saw that his confederate, who had signalled the appearance of his lordship on the drive, had disappeared (Lew had been shivering in the cold, waiting for the coming of his victim), and, after a moment's hesitation :

"That is most kind of you," he said, "but I feel that I am rather taking advantage of your..."

"Not at all," replied the hospitable peer, and Lew went slowly up the drive by the side of his host, leaving his mechanic to tinker at an engine which required no mechanical assistance whatever.

"Yes, I love Christmas at home. I've got a great scheme to go slumming on Christmas morning—the itch for that Haroun al Raschid feeling that every rich man has, I suppose. I don't know the ropes very well. The only slum I know is Whitechapel, and they tell me that is a highly respectable business quarter—not a bit slummy."

Lord Pelford laughed.

"I know that feeling, but I have never been able to afford that indulgence. My name is Pelford—I am Lord Pelford."

"The Earl of Pelford?"

Lew stopped dead and surveyed his companion in amazement. His lordship was a little gratified.

"Well, now... I've heard of you," said Mr Withersyne. "You are a director of a number of companies, aren't you? How queer! I once very nearly wrote to you asking if you would accept a seat on my London board."

Lord Pelford murmured his appreciation of the compliment.

"I'll be perfectly frank with you," said Lew. "It was my hope that if I told you my name, it would be unfamiliar to you. I am John Elmer."

Before the other could recover from his astonishment, Lew went on:

"Nobody knows that I am in England; there have been certain irregularities here which made my pleasure trip a real necessity. Confidential information about a new property I am developing has leaked out—Heaven knows how."

He proceeded to explain. It was a derelict mining company, the Kalahari Extension. The shares were at waste paper prices (as his lordship knew). Lord Pelford knew more than this: he was well aware that John Elmer was something of a recluse who lived in a five-hundred-pound house in the centre of the Kalahari and never came to England. The City said that Elmer was a millionaire ten times over, that he was an autocrat who dismissed London managers for the slightest irregularity.

Pelford surveyed the rugged features of his guest with a new and a keener interest.

"I have taken every Extension share off the market," Lew went on. "Why? Well... I'll tell you. I have discovered that the richest reef I own runs under the Extension Company's property. That, of course, I tell you in confidence. And the one thing I do not wish anybody to know is that I am in England. Now about this Haroun al Raschid business——"

"I think I can help you there," said his lordship. "My daughter is very interested in welfare work. No, she's in Paris just now, but I'm sure when she returns she will be only too happy to help you. I am very much interested in your new company, Mr. Elmer...."

All through lunch and the greater part of the afternoon Lew talked. He spent the night at Pelford Manor and the greater part of the next day. And when, in the evening, reading his financial paper, he saw a paragraph which stated that Mr. John Elmer was paying one of his rare visits to London and was staying at Harridge's Hotel, he was rather amused. Mr. Elmer's presence in England was not quite so secret as he had desired. Lew did not see the paragraph at all. He

was too busy fixing his get-away. For it was perfectly true that he had bought every available share in the Kalahari Extension Company. He had bought them from a dealer who specialised in dead stock, at the rate of a shilling a thousand shares, which was not a high price for stock in a company which owned a few hundred tons of rusted machinery, an abandoned shaft, and an irrecoverable overdraft.

Unless a man is a hardened philosopher—and that no sentimentalist can be—Christmas Day in London without friends, with no more cheer than the best of hotels can give him, and no other means of filling his time than counting the pedestrians from his bedroom window, is perhaps the most depressing experience that life can offer.

John Elmer's philosophy was strictly local in its expression. It was in evidence once on the sun-washed Kalahari desert, when the last drop of water was gone, and fifty miles lay between him and the nearest wash-hole; he displayed a certain stoicism when a Southern Angola tribe had caught him and made preparations for his torture; and as stolid an indifference when the Portuguese Government all but ruined him by the repudiation of a concession to mine in the forbidden territory. All and any of these experiences he had borne with outward and inward fortitude.

And now, with the greater part of four millions to his credit in the books of the Bank of England, with scores of stamp batteries thundering, with four mines working to his great profit, he felt poorer, more unhappy, certainly more lonely than that day when, bootless and ragged, with a month's growth of beard, he was staggering through the suburbs of Vryburg after his first exploration, a record of failure behind him.

Elmer lifted the window a little higher and leant out. Below was the desert of Brook Street. One taxi-cab crawled despondently along the kerb, a man and a woman were walking towards Park Lane, and far away to the right, in Hanover Square, there was a solitary milk-cart. A drizzle of rain was falling; the skies overhead were grey and menacing; it was rawly, sourly cold.

Christmas Day! He drew his padded dressing-gown tighter round him and stalked dejectedly into his ornate sitting-room, where shaded lights and soft colours and the red glow of a fire gave the illusion of cheerfulness.

Floor-waiter and valet had wished him a mechanical "Merry Christmas!" and had been automatically tipped for their automatic courtesies. There was nothing to do but to pull up a comfortable arm-chair to the fire and read the day away.

He had not been in England for twenty-five years. He knew nobody except his agents and the members of the small committee of management, and these

were more or less employees; and though they might have bidden him welcome to their homes on this day of days, he would have been as much "out of it" as he was in the luxury of his suite in Brook Street.

He took up a book and tried to read, but after a minute put it down and glanced at the clock. The hour was half past ten. He had dressed, intending to go out, but changed his mind. Putting his hands into the pockets of the gown, his fingers came into contact with a thick folded pad of notes that he had drawn from the bank on the previous day. A newspaper advertisement of a sale of antiques, hastily read, had been the cause, but he had arrived at the sale-rooms to discover that auctioneers have a little more intelligence than to offer valuable furniture for sale on Christmas Eve, and that the auction was to be on 24th January.

He took out the notes, counted them absent-mindedly running the edges through finger and thumb. Six thousand pounds: fifty-nine notes of a hundred, and twenty of five.

He had hardly put the money back in his pocket before there was a discreet tap at the door and a page-boy came in.

"Merry Christmas, sir!" he piped.

"I've given you a pound already," growled John Elmer.

"I know, sir. Will you see the young lady from Suttons?"

Elmer stared round at him.

"What young lady from Suttons?" he asked. "Who are Suttons?"

"The dressmakers, sir. She said she had an appointment ; she's got a parcel for you."

He leant back in his chair and gaped at the youth.

"She has a parcel for me, has she?" And then, on an impulse: "Show her up."

Suttons the dressmakers apparently kept their employees busy even on this grisly festival.

He expected to see a red-nosed errand girl follow the page into the room, and he was more than surprised, he was aghast, when he rose to his feet to meet the prettiest girl he had seen since he had been in England. Not only was she pretty, but, though he knew very little of women and their attire, he saw that she was expensively dressed. Grey eyes, a perfect skin glowing with health, a hint of dull-gold hair under the closely fitting hat, and a figure that seemed familiar to him (he remembered afterwards that pastel drawing by a famous

Austrian artist that adorned the walls of his sitting-room in the Kalahari); all these were bewildering enough, but her first words took his breath away.

"Good morning, and a merry Christmas, Mr. Elmer! I am Mary Pelford, and I have managed to get the dress after an awful lot of trouble. I had to drag that wretched woman of Suttons from her bed in Putney. She swore she would deliver it last night in Cheyne Gardens, and I waited up till midnight. And, of course, she'd forgotten all about it... thought it was for New Year's Eve or some such nonsense."

She was looking at him seriously as she spoke, an anxiety which was half relief, as though, behind the forced gaiety of her words, was a trouble which could not be wholly hidden. And then, before he could recover his balance, she went on impulsively:

"I'm so awfully glad to find that you're a real person. I was terribly worried, when daddy told me about... well, about investing fifty thousand pounds in your company. You see, Mr. Elmer, father is awfully... 'simple' is the word. And a most unbusinesslike man... and we're really very poor."

John Elmer might find his philosophy no proof against a bedraggled London on Christmas Day, but he was a man with a rare presence of mind.

"Your father is—er..."

"Lord Pelford... you stayed with him last week," and suddenly he saw her face grow white. "You are Mr. Elmer, the millionaire, aren't you?"

He nodded smilingly.

"Let me take that box," he said, relieving her of the package she carried. "And won't you sit down? What is in here?"

He rattled the box as he spoke.

"That is the Santa Claus dress." She was looking at him doubtfully, suspiciously. "You were going to St. Michael's Mission to give away... things to the children. Father said you arranged with him that I should take you."

He smiled again. It was very rare for John Elmer to smile twice in one day.

"And, of course, I'm going—though I have no toys to—er—distribute. I'm sure they would much rather have money."

She looked dubious at this, having all a welfare worker's dislike for that kind of charity.

"Will you take tea with me?" he asked gently. "We people who live in the Colonies are wedded to the eleven o'clock tea habit."

When he had rung the bell, he went on apologetically:

"I am such a very busy man, and have so many interests, that for the moment the shares I sold your father have slipped my mind. Will you tell me what they were?"

"Kalahari Extensions," she said promptly. "You remember you told father that you had found a reef, or something of the sort, running under this property?"

He stared at her, so astonished that she took alarm.

"Isn't that so, Mr. Elmer?"

"Yes, yes," he said hastily. "Quite right. The reef runs from my property under the Extensions area. So your father bought fifty thousand shares?"

"A hundred thousand," she corrected. "You told him, you remember, that they would be worth three pounds a share."

He nodded. His mind was working rapidly.

"Has he paid me for these?" he asked.

"Why, of course," she said, startled. "He gave you a cheque for fifty thousand pounds. Don't you remember, the banker would not pay until father went down to see him?"

"Yes, yes, of course," murmured John Elmer, and stared moodily into the fire.

She was untying the string which bound the parcel, and presently she took off the cardboard lid and exposed the bright scarlet robe, expensively trimmed with white rabbit fur, a large silvery wig, and a big white beard, and laid them on the carpet before his dazed eyes.

"Do I wear those?"

"Not now, of course," she laughed. "But when you get to the hall, you can dress in the vestry. But I don't like the distribution of money ; isn't it possible to get toys—anywhere?"

"I don't know; it's likely. I seem to remember passing several toy- shops, but whether the people live on the premises——"

"There are shops open all over the town," she urged; "tiny little confectioners' shops that sell things of this kind."

"I'll be with you in one minute," said John Elmer, rising with alacrity.

He dived into his bedroom, changed his dressing-gown for a coat and heavy overcoat, and came back to find her sitting with her chin on her hands, a

puzzled frown wrinkling her smooth forehead.

"Do you know, you're not a bit like the photograph Collings took?"

"Who is Collings?" he asked.

"He's the gardener's son. Daddy gave him a snapshot camera for his birthday, and he took an awfully good picture of father and you as you came down the steps of Pelford Manor. I brought it with me so that I could recognise you if I saw you."

She opened her bag and took out a tiny photograph. He guessed that the tall, commanding figure was that of the girl's father. The man by his side was evidently the spurious John Elmer. But there was a certain rough likeness between himself and the swindler which might have deceived a careless observer. He took the picture from her hand.

"I don't know," he said thoughtfully. "It isn't such a bad likeness of me."

"It is you?" she asked breathlessly.

"Why, of course," said John. "And now, if you don't mind, we'll do a little shopping, and then heigh! for St. Michael's."

He could not remember when he had ever been quite in the same mood as he was that morning, as he drove from one tiny shop to another, collecting such remnants as had been left over from Christmas Eve, until the car was half filled, and they sat gingerly amongst ready-filled stockings, mechanical motor-cars, dolls, and the etceteras peculiar to Yuletide.

And John was a greater success at St. Michael's than he had ever dreamt he would be. The girl, watching the white-bearded man, surrounded and almost stormed by a yelling horde of children, felt her last doubts disappearing.

"That's that," he said, as he came back, dishevelled, to the little retiring-room and stripped the robe from his broad back.

"Did you enjoy it?" she laughed.

"I think I did," said John Elmer thoughtfully, "except when you insisted on keeping on the wrong side of the Christmas tree."

"Which is the wrong side of a Christmas tree?" she asked, puzzled.

"The side where I could not see you," said John, and the girl was not as displeased as he thought she would have been at the frank admiration of this almost stranger.

He was a little different from what she had expected. She had had hints of a

certain uncouthness momentarily revealed in his dealings with servants that she could not conceive in this gentle-mannered man.

"Will you come to dinner to-night at Cheyne Gardens?" she asked. "Unfortunately, father will not be there, but I am having a lot of young people to dinner and a dance."

"Your father is not in London?"

"He went to the South of France this morning," she said. "Mother is a semi-invalid and cannot endure the English winter."

"Then I'll come," he said promptly.

Again she looked at him, suspicion in her eyes.

"One would almost imagine that you did not wish to meet father," she said.

He chuckled.

"If it is not an impertinence, Lady Mary—I heard them calling you Lady Mary—this day of all days I do not wish to talk business," he said, readily enough.

He left her at the door of her house and, declining her offer of the car, took a taxi-cab to the Thames Embankment.

"Scotland Yard, sir?" said the cabman, with a note of respect.

"The very place to spend a happy Christmas Day," said John Elmer gaily, and the cabman thought he had been drinking.

He was fortunate in the time of his call, for there had been a bad murder in Sussex a few days before, and the chiefs of departments were in conference when he sent his name up to Superintendent Alford. He had met Alford in South Africa, when that officer had paid a fleeting visit to Bechuanaland for the purpose of extraditing a notorious American criminal. The uniformed constable came back and invited him upstairs.

"The Superintendent won't be very long, sir. The conference is breaking up," he said, as he ushered him into a bare and comfortless room which was typical of Scotland Yard. A few minutes later the red-faced Alford joined him and gave him a hearty greeting.

"I heard you were in London, Mr. Elmer," he said. "Now, what can I do for you? Have the boys been after you? They've a passion for millionaires."

John smiled.

"They have and they haven't," he said. "Can you tell me who this is?"

When he had taken the photograph from the girl, he had been careful to slip it into his pocket. The inspector carried the photograph to the light, took up a magnifying glass and studied the snapshot.

"I don't know the tall man; he looks to me like Lord Pelford. But the little fellow is Lew Withersyne."

"Lew Withersyne?" repeated John thoughtfully. "Who is he?"

"He's one of the cleverest swindlers we've got," said Alford. "A sort of super-confidence man, very well read, and with a line of talk that would make Cleopatra part from her needle. Has he been after you?"

John shook his head.

"No, he has not been after me," he replied softly.

"After a friend of yours, perhaps?"

"Well"—Elmer hesitated—"I don't know. The reason I wished to see you is to ask you if I could be brought into immediate touch with him."

"You want to see him?" said the other in surprise.

John nodded, and the discreet superintendent asked no further questions, but with an excuse left the room and came back immediately afterwards with a tall young man, whom he introduced as Sergeant Atkins.

"Atkins thinks that we could pick up Lew at his sister-in-law's at Brockley to-day. He was seen in London yesterday, and one of our men tailed him to Victoria, where he took tickets for to-morrow's continental mail. We were discussing him this morning before you came, and wondering whether he was making a get-away or whether he was going to strike out on a new field."

"What is the Brockley address?"

"Atkins will go with you if you want to see him," said Alford, and, accompanied by the tall detective, John went speeding through the deserted streets of South London.

Half an hour's drive brought them to a very respectable road, composed of semi-detached villas, and the detective suggested that the cab should be stopped at the corner of the street.

"If we drive up to the door in a taxi, Lew will get scared and we'll lose him. Do you want him for anything particular?"

"No," said John Elmer.

"I wondered what he'd been doing. He was reported as driving about the Midlands in a swagger motor-car with two of his workers, but we've had no squeak—I mean complaint—so I suppose Lew didn't touch lucky."

At last they found the house, No. 59, and John knocked at the door, which was opened by an untidy-looking servant.

"Mr. Withersyne?" She looked back over her shoulder nervously. "No, I don't think he lives here."

"What do you mean—you don't think?" demanded Atkins in his best official manner. "Tell Mr. Withersyne I want to see him."

They waited five minutes before Lew Withersyne appeared in the passage. Although his manner was confident and even jaunty, his face went a little paler when he saw the familiar face of the officer.

"Good morning, Lew."

"Good morning, Mr. Atkins," said Lew, a trifle huskily. "Anything wrong?"

"Nothing particular, Lew. This gentleman wants to see you."

"I am Mr. John Elmer," said John, and now Lew's face really did change colour.

"Mr.—Mr. Elmer?" he stammered.

"Put on your coat and just step outside for a moment. I wish to have a private talk with you, my friend."

"I don't know you, I've never heard of you——" the man began to bluster, but Atkins cut him short.

"I don't want you, Lew. If I did, I shouldn't have argued. Mr. Elmer wishes to speak to you on a private matter."

Lew followed the detective meekly to the side-walk, and Atkins withdrew to a discreet distance.

"Now, my friend," said John, "I don't want any argument. You sold to Lord Pelford one hundred thousand shares in Kalahari Extension at ten shillings per share. You bought them, I take it, at 'dud' prices——"

"Well, that's no crime, is it? Ain't they doing that on the Stock Exchange every day?" demanded Lew, careless of his speech in moments of crisis.

"That is no offence," admitted John, "but to represent yourself as being me is a felony."

"Have you told him? Do they know?" he asked, jerking his head to the watchful Atkins.

"Not yet. I want from you the sum of forty-nine thousand pounds, and I'm going to make you a sporting offer, Withersyne. How many of those shares have you got?"

"Eight hundred and twenty thousand," said the other.

"Have you got them here?"

"In my bag upstairs. At least, seven hundred and twenty thousand. I sold a hundred thousand to a—a gentleman."

"I'll take the rest," said John Elmer coolly, "and with it I'll take forty-nine thousand pounds in cash. Probably I have a criminal mind, but I feel that you're entitled to a thousand for all the trouble you took."

"Look here, governor," began the man, and then, as John beckoned the detective towards him: "I'll get it for you," he said, and disappeared into the house.

He was only gone for a few minutes. When he returned :

"Here's the money." He handed a package to John. "Don't count it," he urged fearfully, "or that busy will think there's something wrong. And here are the shares." He took a thicker bundle from his pocket. "They cost me——"

"I know what they cost you—about a penny a million," said John. "I see you've a blank transfer form there." He took a fountain-pen from his pocket and wrote rapidly. "Sign that," he said, "and then I'll give you a Christmas present."

Lew affixed his signature.

"The Christmas present I give to you," said John, "is a piece of advice: when opportunity knocks at your door, don't open the window."

"I don't get that," said the puzzled Lew.

"You will," said John Elmer.

Dinner was over; the sound of the gramophone came faintly to the two people who sat in the conservatory. The hand that the girl put up to her mouth was shaking as John Elmer told the story.

"Then—then he was a swindler, after all?"

"Yes, he was a swindler—in intent."

"And we have lost——"

"You have lost nothing. I have got the money back from this rascal, and I'll give you a cheque for the full amount to-night, or your father may keep the shares, which are extremely valuable."

She looked at him open-mouthed.

"Valuable? But you told me——"

"Sometimes," said John, "people tell the truth by accident. They hap upon a tremendous fact, never realising that the lie they invent is a singular truth. And the singular truth about Mr. Lew Withersyne's story is that our reef does run under the Kalahari Extension. And it is a valuable reef—so valuable," he went on, looking straight ahead of him, "that on the strength of my new acquisition I am thinking of building a real nice house, worthy of the beautiful situation of my present hovel; worthy of"—his lips were dry—"worthy of a wife who might like to spend an occasional winter in that sunny land."

Her cold hand went out and was crushed in his.

THE END

Freeditorial 

Liked This Book?

For More FREE e-Books visit Freeditorial.com