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SELECTED
ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

SELECTED ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

EDITED WITH NOTES

BY

M V WEDGWOOD HEATH, I R G S,
Cambridge Teacher's Diploma

LAHORE

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PREFACE

This selection of English stories has been made from the work of well-known authors who have an established reputation in the field of short story writing. Not every novelist is able to write a short story successfully --many are so much accustomed to the larger canvas that they find it difficult to adapt themselves to the smaller space of the miniature--but those whose stories are included in this volume are master-craftsmen who have done much to perfect the art of short story writing in English.

The individual stories have been chosen for their clearness of style, suitability of language and usefulness of idiom, combined with a sufficient plot interest to hold the attention of the student.

M. V. WEDGWOOD HEATH.

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THE TAPESTRIED CHAMBER.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

Some business had carried General Browne upon a tour through the western counties of England, when he found himself in the vicinity of a small country town, which presented a scene of uncommon beauty, and of a character peculiarly English.

The little town, with its stately old church, whose tower bore testimony to the devotion of ages long past, amidst pastures and corn-fields of small extent, but bounded and divided with hedgerow timber of great age and size. There were few marks of modern improvement. The houses were old, but in good repair; and the beautiful little river murmured freely on its way to the left of the town, neither restrained by a dam nor bordered by a towing-path.

Upon a gentle eminence, nearly a mile to the southward of the town, were seen, amongst many venerable oaks and tangled thickets, the turrets of a castle, as old as the wars of York and Lancaster, but which seemed to have received important alterations during the age of Elizabeth and her successor. It had not been a place of great size; but whatever accommodation it formerly afforded was, it must be supposed, still to be obtained within its walls; at least, such was the inference which General Browne drew from observing the smoke arising merrily from several

of the ancient wreathed and carved chimney-stalks. The wall of the park ran alongside the highway for two or three hundred yards; and through the gates could be seen glimpses of woodland scenery. Other points of view opened in succession—now a full one of the front of the old castle, and now a side-glimpse of its towers; the simple and solid strength of the building seemed to show that it had been raised more for defence than for ostentation.

Delighted with the partial glimpses which he obtained of the castle through the woods and glades by which this ancient feudal fortress was surrounded, our military traveller was determined to inquire whether it might not deserve a nearer view, and whether it contained family pictures, or other objects of curiosity worthy of a stranger's visit. Leaving the vicinity of the park, he drove through a clean and well-paved street, and stopped at the door of a well-frequented inn.

Before ordering horses to proceed on his journey, General Browne made inquiries concerning the proprietor of the castle which had so attracted his admiration; and was equally surprised and pleased at hearing named a nobleman whom we shall call Lord Woodville. How fortunate! Much of Browne's early recollections had been connected with young Woodville whom, by a few questions, he now ascertained to be the owner of this fair domain. He had been raised to the peerage by the decease of his father a few months before, and the term of mourning being ended, was now taking possession of his paternal estate, accompanied by a select party of friends.

This was delightful news to our traveller. Frank Woodville had been Richard Browne's friend at school and college; their pleasures and their tasks had been the same; and the honest soldier's heart warmed to find his early friend in possession of so delightful a residence, and of an estate, as the landlord assured him with a nod and a wink, fully adequate to maintain and add to his dignity. Nothing was more natural than that the traveller should suspend a journey which was not important to pay a visit to an old friend under such agreeable circumstances.

The fresh horses, therefore, had only the brief task of conveying the General's travelling-carriage to Woodville Castle. A porter admitted them at a modern lodge, built in a style to correspond with the castle itself, and at the same time rang a bell to give warning of the approach of visitors. Apparently the sound of the bell had stopped the separation of the company who were bent on the various amusements of the morning; for, on entering the courtyard, the visitor saw several young men lounging about in their sporting dresses, looking at and criticising the dogs, which the keeper held in readiness to attend their pastimes. As General Browne alighted, the young lord came to the gate of the hall, and for an instant gazed, as at a stranger, upon the countenance of his friend, on which war, with its fatigue, and wounds, had made a great alteration. But the uncertainty did not last for more than a moment, and the hearty greeting which followed was such as can only be exchanged betwixt those who have passed together the merry days of careless boyhood or early youth.

"If I could have formed a wish, my dear Browne," said Lord Woodville, "it would have been to have you, of all men, here upon this occasion, which my friends are good enough to hold as a sort of holiday. Do not think you have been unwatched during the years you have been absent from us. I have traced you through your dangers, your triumphs, your misfortunes, and was delighted to see that, whether in victory or defeat, the name of my old friend was always distinguished with applause."

The General made a suitable reply and congratulated his friend on his new dignities, and the possession of so beautiful a domain.

"Nay, you have seen nothing it as yet," said Lord Woodville, "and I trust you do not mean to leave us till you are better acquainted with it. It is true, I confess, that my present party is rather large, and the old house, like other places of the kind, does not possess so much accommodation as the extent of the outward walls appears to promise. But we can give you a comfortable old-fashioned room, and I venture to suppose that your campaigns have taught you to be glad of worse quarters."

The General shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "I presume," he said, "the worst apartment in your house is considerably superior to the old tobacco-cask in which I was fain to take up my night's lodging when I was out in the wilds. There I lay, like Diogenes himself, so delighted with my covering from the elements, that I made a vain attempt to have it rolled on to my next quarters; but my commander would give way to no such luxurious provision, and I

took farewell of my beloved cask with tears in my eyes."

"Well, then, since you do not fear your quarters," said Lord Woodville, "you will stay with me for a week at least. Of guns, dogs, fishing-rods, and means of sport by sea and land, we have enough and to spare: you cannot pitch on an amusement but we will find the means of pursuing it. But if you prefer the gun and pointer, I will go with you myself."

The General gladly accepted his friendly host's proposal in all its points. After a morning of manly exercise, the company met at dinner, where it was the delight of Lord Woodville to display the high properties of his recovered friend, so as to recommend him to his guests, most of whom were persons of distinction. He led General Browne to speak of the scenes he had witnessed: and as every word marked alike the brave officer and the sensible man, who retained possession of his cool judgment under the most imminent dangers, the company looked upon the soldier with general respect, as one who had proved himself possessed of an uncommon amount of personal courage.

The day at Woodville Castle ended as is usual in such mansions. The hospitality was generous: the exercise of the morning required early hours, and not long after eleven o'clock the guests began to retire to their several apartments.

The young lord himself conducted his friend, General Browne, to the chamber destined for him, and it answered the description he had given of it, being comfortable but old-fashioned. The bed was of the

massive form used at the end of the seventeenth century, and the curtains were of faded silk, heavily trimmed with tarnished gold. But then the sheets, the pillows, and blankets looked delightful to the campaigner when he thought of his "mansion," the cask! There was an air of gloom in the tapestry hangings, which, with their worn-out graces, curtained the walls of the little chamber, and gently undulated as the autumnal breeze found its way through the ancient lattice-window. The toilet-table too, with its mirror, draped after the manner of the beginning of the century, with coloured silk, had an antique, and in so far a melancholy aspect. But nothing could blaze more brightly and cheerfully than the two large wax candles; if anything could rival them, it was the flaming faggots in the chimney, that sent at once their gleam and their warmth through the snug apartment, which, notwithstanding the antiquity of its appearance, was not wanting in the least convenience that modern habits rendered necessary or desirable.

"This is an old-fashioned sleeping apartment, General," said the young lord, "but I hope you find nothing that makes you wish for your old tobacco cask."

"I am not particular respecting my lodgings," replied the General, "yet were I to make my choice, I would prefer this chamber by many degrees to the gayer and more modern rooms of your family mansion. Believe me, that when I unite its modern air of comfort with its venerable antiquity, and recollect that it is your lordship's property, I shall feel in better quarters here than if I were in the best hotel London could afford."

"I trust—I have no doubt that you will feel yourself as comfortable as I wish you, my dear General," said the young nobleman; and once more bidding his guest good-night, he shook him by the hand and withdrew.

The General once more looked round him, and internally congratulating himself on his return to a peaceful life, the comforts of which were endeared by the recollection of the hardships and the dangers he had lately sustained, undressed himself, and prepared for a luxurious night's rest.

Here, contrary to the custom of this species of tale, we leave the General in possession of his room till the next morning.

The company assembled for breakfast at an early hour, but without the appearance of General Browne, who seemed to be the guest that Lord Woodville was desirous of honouring above all whom his hospitality had assembled around him. He more than once expressed surprise at the General's absence, and at length sent a servant to make inquiry after him. The man brought back information that General Browne had been walking abroad since an early hour of the morning in spite of the weather, which was misty and ungenial.

~~"The custom of a soldier," said the young nobleman to his friends: "many of them cannot sleep after the early hour at which their duty usually commands them to be alert."~~

Yet the explanation which Lord Woodville thus offered to the company seemed hardly satisfactory to his own mind, and it was in a fit of silence and

abstraction that he awaited the return of the General. It took place nearly an hour after the breakfast bell had rung. The General looked fatigued and feverish. His hair, the powdering and arrangement of which was at that time one of the most important details of a man's toilet, and marked his fashion as much as, in the present time, the tying of a cravat, or the want of one, was dishevelled, uncurled, unpowdered, and dank with dew. His clothes were huddled on with a negligence remarkable in a military man, whose duties are usually held to include some attention to the toilet; and his looks were haggard and ghastly to a peculiar degree.

"So you have stolen a march upon us this morning, my dear General," said Lord Woodville; "or you have not found your bed so much to your mind as I had hoped and you seemed to expect. How did you rest last night?"

"Oh, excellently well—remarkably well—never better in my life!" said General Browne rapidly, and yet with an air of embarrassment which was obvious to his friend. He then hastily swallowed a cup of tea and, neglecting or refusing whatever else was offered, seemed to fall into a fit of abstraction.

"You will take the gun to-day, General?" said his friend and host, but had to repeat the question twice ere he received the abrupt answer: "No, my lord; I am sorry I cannot have the honour of spending another day with your lordship: my post-horses are ordered, and will be here directly."

All who were present showed surprise, and Lord Woodville immediately replied, "Post-horses, my

good friend ! What can you possibly want with them when you promised to stay with me for at least a week?"

"I believe," said the General, obviously much embarrassed, "that I might in the pleasure of my first meeting with your lordship have said something about stopping here for a few days ; but I have since found it altogether impossible."

"That is very extraordinary," answered the young nobleman. "You seemed quite disengaged yesterday, and you cannot have had a summons to-day ; for our post has not come up from the town, and therefore you cannot have received any letters."

General Browne, without giving any further explanation, muttered something about indispensable business, and insisted on the absolute necessity of his departure in a manner which silenced all opposition on the part of his host, who saw that his resolution was taken, and forbore all further persuasion.

"At least, however," he said, "my dear Browne, since go you will or must, I should like to show you the view from the terrace, which the mist, that is now rising, will soon display."

He threw open a window and stepped down upon the terrace as he spoke. The General followed him mechanically, but seemed little to attend to what his host was saying, as, looking across an extended and rich prospect, he pointed out the different objects worthy of observation. Thus they moved on till Lord Woodville had attained his purpose of drawing his guest entirely apart from the rest of the company, when, turning round upon him with an air of great solemnity, he addressed him thus :

"Richard Browne, my old and very dear friend, we are now alone. Let me beg you to answer upon the word of a friend and the honour of a soldier. How did you in reality rest during last night?"

"Most wretchedly indeed, my lord," answered the General in the same tone of solemnity; "so miserably that I would not run the risk of such a second night, not for all the lands belonging to this castle.

"This is most extraordinary," said the young lord, as if speaking to himself. "then there must be something in the reports concerning that apartment!" Again turning to the General, he said, "For God's sake, my dear friend, be candid with me, and let me know the disagreeable particulars which have befallen you under a roof where, with consent of the owner, you should have met nothing save comfort!"

The General seemed distressed by this appeal, and paused a moment before he replied. "My dear lord," he at length said, "what happened to me last night is of a nature so peculiar and so unpleasant that I can hardly bring myself to detail it even to your lordship, were it not that, apart from my wish to gratify any request of yours, I think that sincerity on my part may lead to some explanation about a circumstance equally painful and mysterious. To others, the communication I am about to make might place me in the light of a weak-minded, superstitious fool, who suffered his own imagination to delude and bewilder him; but you have known me in childhood and youth, and will not suspect me of having adopted in manhood the feelings and frailties from which my early years were free." Here he paused, and his friend replied.

“Do not doubt my perfect confidence in the truth of your communication, however strange it may be; I know your firmness of disposition too well to suspect that you could be made the object of imposition, and am aware that your honour and your friendship will equally deter you from exaggerating whatever you may have witnessed.”

“Well, then,” said the General, “I will proceed with my story as well as I can, relying upon your candour, and yet distinctly feeling that I would rather face a battery of guns than recall to my mind the odious recollections of last night.”

He paused a second time, and then, perceiving that Lord Woodville remained silent and in an attitude of attention, he began, though with obvious reluctance, the history of his night adventures in the Tapestry Chamber.

“I undressed and went to bed, as soon as your lordship left me yesterday evening; but the wood in the chimney which nearly fronted my bed, blazed brightly and cheerfully, and aided by a hundred exciting recollections of my childhood and youth, which had been recalled by the unexpected pleasure of meeting you again, prevented me from immediately falling asleep. I ought, however, to say that these reflections were all of a pleasant and agreeable kind, grounded on a sense of having for a time exchanged the labour, fatigues and dangers of my profession for the enjoyments of a peaceful life.

While such pleasing reflections were stealing over my mind, and gradually lulling me to slumber, I was suddenly aroused by a sound like that of the rustling

of a silken gown, and the tapping of a pair of high heeled shoes, as if a woman were walking in the room. Before I could draw the curtain to see what was the matter, the figure of a little woman passed between the bed and the fire. The back of this form was turned to me, and I could observe, from the shoulders and neck, it was that of an old woman, whose dress was an old-fashioned gown.

I thought the intrusion singular enough, but never harboured for a moment the idea that what I saw was anything more than the mortal form of some old woman of the establishment, who had a fancy to dress like her grandmother, and who, having perhaps been dislodged from her chamber for my accommodation, had forgotten the circumstance, and returned by twelve to her old haunt. Under this persuasion, I moved myself in bed and coughed a little, to make the intruder sensible of my being in possession of the premises. She turned slowly round, but gracious Heaven; my lord, what a countenance did she display to me! There was no longer any question what she was, or any thought of her being living being. Upon a face which wore the fixed features of a corpse were imprinted the traces of the vilest and most hideous passions which had animated her while she lived. I started up in bed, and sat upright, supporting myself on my palms, as I gazed on this horrible spectre. The hag made, as it seemed, a single and swift stride to the bed where I lay, and squatted herself down upon it, in precisely the same attitude which I had assumed in the extremity of horror, advancing her diabolical countenance within half a yard of mine, with a grin which

seemed to intimate the malice and the derision of an incarnate fiend."

Here General Browne stopped and wiped from his brow the cold perspiration with which the recollection of his horrible vision had covered it.

"My lord," he said, "I am no coward. I have been in all the mortal dangers incidental to my profession, and I may truly boast that no man ever knew Richard Browne dishonour the sword he wears; but in these horrible circumstances, under the eyes, and, as it seemed, almost in the grasp, of an incarnation of an evil spirit, all firmness forsook me, all manhood melted from me like wax in the furnace, and I felt my hair bristle. The current of my life-blood ceased to flow, and I sank back in a swoon, as much a victim to panic terror as ever was a village girl or child of eleven years old. How long I lay in this condition I cannot pretend to guess. But I was roused by the castle clock striking one, so loud that it seemed as if it were in the very room. It was sometime before I dared open my eyes, lest they should again encounter the horrible spectacle. When, however, I summoned courage to look up, she was no longer visible. My first idea was to pull my bell, wake the servants, and remove to a garret or a hay-loft, to be ensured against a second visitation. Nay, I will confess the truth, that my resolution was altered, not by the shame of exposing myself, but by the fear that, as the bell cord hung by the chimney, I might, in making my way to it be again crossed by the fiendish hag, who, I figured to myself, might be still lurking about some corner of the apartment.

I will not pretend to describe what hot and cold fever-fits tormented me for the rest of the night, through broken sleep and weary vigils. A hundred terrible objects appeared to haunt me; but there was the great difference betwixt the vision which I have described and those which followed, that I knew the last to be deceptions of my own fancy and over-excited nerves.

Day at last appeared, and I rose from my bed ill in health and humiliated in mind. I was ashamed of myself as a man and a soldier, and still more so at feeling my own extreme desire to escape from the haunted room. This desire, however, conquered all other considerations; so that huddling on my clothes with the most careless haste, I made my escape from your lordship's mansion, to seek in the open air some relief to my nervous system, shaken as it was by this horrible encounter with a visitant, for such I must believe her, from the other world. Your lordship has now heard the cause of my discomposure, and of my sudden desire to leave your hospitable castle. In other places I trust we may often meet; but God protect me from ever spending a second night under that roof!"

Strange as the General's tale was, he spoke with such a deep air of conviction, that it cut short all the usual comments which are made on such stories. Lord Woodville never once asked him if he was sure he did not dream of the apparition, or suggested any of the possibilities by which it is fashionable to explain supernatural appearances, as wild wanderings of the fancy or deceptions of the optic nerves. On the contrary,

he seemed deeply impressed with the truth and reality of what he had heard; and after a considerable pause, regretted, with much appearance of sincerity, that his early friend should in his house have suffered so severely.

"I am the more sorry for your pain, my dear Browne," he continued, "in that it is the unhappy, though most unexpected, result of an experiment of my own. You must know that, for my father and grandfather's time, at least, the apartment which was assigned to you last night had been shut on account of reports that it was disturbed by supernatural sights and noises. I caused the Tapestryed Chamber, as we call it, to be opened; and without destroying its air of antiquity, I had such new articles of furniture placed in it as became these modern times. Yet, as the opinion that the room was haunted very strongly prevailed among the domestics, and was also known in the neighbourhood and to many of my friends, I feared some prejudice might be entertained by the first occupant of the Tapestryed Chamber. I felt that this might tend to revive the evil report under which it had laboured and so disappoint my purpose of rendering it a useful part of the house. I must confess, my dear Browne, that your arrival yesterday, agreeable to me for a thousand reasons besides, seemed the most favourable opportunity of removing the unpleasant rumours which attached to the room, since your courage was indubitable, and your mind free from any preoccupation on the subject. I could not, therefore, have chosen a more fitting subject for my experiment."

"Upon my life," said General Browne, somewhat hastily, "I am infinitely obliged to your lordship—very particularly indebted indeed. I am likely to remember for some time the consequences of the experiment, as your lordship is pleased to call it."

"Nay, now you are unjust, my dear friend," said Lord Woodville. "You have only to reflect for a single moment, in order to be convinced that I could not foresee the possibility of the pain to which you have been so unhappily exposed. I was yesterday morning a complete sceptic on the subject of supernatural appearances. Nay, I am sure that, had I told you what was said about that room, those very reports would have induced you, by your own choice, to select it for your accommodation. It was my misfortune, perhaps my error, but really cannot be termed my fault, that you have been afflicted so strangely."

"Strangely indeed!" said the General, resuming his good temper; "and I acknowledge that I have no right to be offended with your lordship for treating me like what I used to think myself, a man of some firmness and courage. But I see my post-horses have arrived, and I must not detain you from your amusements."

"Nay, my old friend," said Lord Woodville, "since you cannot stay with us another day, which, indeed, I can no longer urge, give me at least half an hour more. You used to love pictures, and I have a gallery of portraits, some of them by famous artists, representing ancestors to whom this property and castle formerly belonged. I think some of them will strike you as possessing merit."

General Browne accepted the invitation, though somewhat unwillingly. It was evident he was not to breathe freely or at ease till he left Woodville Castle far behind him. He could not refuse his friend's invitation, however; and the less so, that he was a little ashamed of the peevishness which he had displayed towards his well-meaning entertainer.

The General, therefore, followed Lord Woodville through several rooms, into a long gallery hung with pictures, which the latter pointed out to his guest, telling the names, and giving some account of the personages whose portraits presented themselves in progression. General Browne was but little interested in the details which these accounts conveyed to him. They were, indeed, of the kind which are usually found in an old family gallery. But when they gained the middle of the gallery, Lord Woodville beheld General Browne suddenly start, and assume an attitude of the utmost surprise, not unmingled with fear, as his eyes were caught and suddenly riveted by a portrait of an old lady in the fashionable dress of the end of the seventeenth century.

"There she is!" he exclaimed, "there she is, in form and features, though inferior in demoniac expression to the accursed hag who visited me last night."

"If that be the case," said the young nobleman, "there can remain no longer any doubt of the horrible reality of your apparition. That is the picture of a wretched ancestress of mine, of whose crimes a black and fearful catalogue is recorded in the family history. The recital of them would be too horrible; it is enough to say that in your fatal apartment dreadful murder

was committed. I will restore it to the solitude in which the better judgment of those who preceded me had placed it; and never shall anyone, so long as I can prevent it, be exposed to a repetition of the supernatural horrors which could shake such courage as yours."

Thus the friends, who had met with such glee, parted in a very different mood—Lord Woodville to command the Tapestried Chamber to be dismantled and the door built up; and General Browne to seek in some less beautiful country, and with some less dignified friend, forgetfulness of the painful night which he had passed in Woodville Castle.

Sir Walter Scott (1771—1832) was born in Edinburgh. He studied for the Bar, but afterwards decided on a literary career and became famous as a writer of historical fiction and poems. His first great original work, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a story in verse, was well received and was followed by *Marmion* and other poems. He afterwards began to write novels, two of the finest being *Ivanhoe* and *Kenilworth*.

Wars of York and Lancaster : Civil wars of the fifteenth century

Feudal fortress : Fortress built in feudal times. Under the feudal system which existed in Europe in the Middle Ages, the nobles or overlords let out land to tenants over whom they held extensive rights of service.

Diogenes : A Greek philosopher who lived in a tub.

Pitch upon : Happen to choose.

Pointers : A breed of dogs used to point at game

Properties : Used in this sense means *qualities*.

Stolen a march : Got a start unobserved.

THE SQUIRE'S STORY

ELIZABETH GASKELL

In the year 1769 the little town of Barford was thrown into a state of great excitement by the intelligence that a gentleman (and 'quite the gentleman,' said the landlord of the George Inn) had been looking at Mr. Clavering's old house. This house was neither in the town nor in the country. It stood on the outskirts of Barford, on the roadside leading to Derby. The last occupant had been a Mr. Clavering—a Northumberland gentleman of good family—who had come to live in Barford while he was but a younger son; but when some elder branches of the family died, he had returned to take possession of the family estate. The house of which I speak was called the White House, from its being covered with a greyish kind of stucco. It had a good garden at the back, and Mr. Clavering had built capital stables, with what were then considered the latest improvements. The point of good stabling was expected to let the house, as it was in a hunting county; otherwise it had few recommendations. There were many bed-rooms; some entered through others, even to the number of five, leading one beyond the other; several sitting-rooms of the small and poky kind, wainscoted round with wood, and then painted a heavy slate colour; one good dining-room,

and a drawing-room over it, both looking into the garden, with pleasant bow-windows.

Such was the accommodation offered by the White House. It did not seem to be very tempting to strangers, though the good people of Barford rather prided themselves on it as the largest house in the town.

I mention these things that you may have an idea of the desirability of the letting of the White House in the Barfordites' imagination; and you must add for yourselves the bustle, the mystery, and the importance which every little event either causes or assumes in a small town: and then, perhaps, it will be no wonder to you that twenty ragged little urchins accompanied the "gentleman" aforesaid to the door of the White House: and that, although he was above an hour inspecting it, under the auspices of Mr. Jones, the agent's clerk, thirty more had joined themselves on to the wondering crowd before his exit, and awaited such crumbs of intelligence as they could gather before they were threatened or whipped out of hearing distance. Presently, out came the "gentleman" and the lawyer's clerk. The latter was speaking as he followed the former over the threshold. The gentleman was tall, well-dressed, handsome; but there was a sinister cold look in his quick-glancing, light blue eye, which a keen observer might not have liked. There were no keen observers among the boys, and gaping girls. But they stood too near; inconveniently close; and the gentleman, lifting up his right hand, in which he carried a short riding-whip, dealt one or two sharp blows to the nearest, with a look of savage enjoyment on his face as they moved

away whimpering and crying. An instant after, his expression of countenance had changed.

'Here!' said he, drawing out a handful of money, partly silver, partly copper, and throwing it into the midst of them. 'Scramble for it! fight it out, my lads! come this afternoon, at three, to the George, and I'll throw you out some more.' So the boys hurraed for him as he walked off with the agent's clerk. He chuckled to himself, as over a pleasant thought. 'I'll have some fun with those lads,' he said; 'I'll teach 'em to come prowling and prying about me. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make the money so hot in the fire-shovel that it shall burn their fingers. You come and see the faces and the howling. I shall be very glad if you will dine with me at two; and by that time I may have made up my mind respecting the house.'

Mr. Jones, the agent's clerk, agreed to come to the George at two but somehow he had a distaste for his entertainer. Mr. Jones would not like to have said, even to himself, that a man with a purse full of money, who kept many horses, and spoke familiarly of noblemen—above all, who thought of taking the White House—could be anything but a gentleman; but still the uneasy wonder as to who this Mr. Robinson Higgins could be, filled the clerk's mind long after Mr. Higgins and Mr. Higgins's servants, had taken possession of the White House.

The White House was re-stuccoed (this time of a pale yellow colour), and put into thorough repair by the accommodating and delighted landlord; while his tenant seemed inclined to spend any amount of money on internal decorations, which were showy and effective

in their character, enough to make the White House a nine days' wonder to the good people of Barford. The slate-coloured paints became pink, and were finished with gold; the old-fashioned banisters were replaced by newly gilt ones; but, above all, the stables were a sight to be seen. Since the days of the Roman Emperor never was there such provision made for the care, the comfort, and the health of horses. But every one said it was no wonder, when they were led through Barford, covered up to their eyes, but curving their arched and delicate necks, and prancing with short high steps, in repressed eagerness. Only one groom came with them; yet they required the care of three men. Mr. Higgins, however, preferred engaging two lads out of Barford; and Barford highly approved of his preference. Not only was it kind and thoughtful to give employment to the lounging lads themselves, but they were receiving a good training in Mr. Higgins's stables. The district of Derbyshire, in which Barford was situated, was too close to Leicestershire not to support a hunt and a pack of hounds. The master of the hounds was a certain Sir Harry Manley who was a great horseman. Sir Harry's approbation was withheld until he had seen a man on horseback; and if his seat there was square and easy, his hand light, and his courage good, Sir Harry hailed him as a brother.

Mr. Higgins attended the first meet of the season, not as a subscriber, but as an amateur. The Barford huntsmen prided themselves on their bold riding; and their knowledge of the country came by nature; yet this new strange man, whom nobody knew, was in at the death, sitting on his horse, both well breathed and

calm, without a hair turned on the sleek skin of the latter, addressing the old huntsman as he hacked off the tail of the fox; and he, the old man, who was testy even under Sir Harry's slightest rebuke, and flew out on any other member of the hunt that dared to utter a word against his sixty years' experience as stable-boy, groom and poacher he, old Isaac Wormeley, was meekly listening to the wisdom of this stranger, only now and then giving one of his quick, up-turning, cunning glances, not unlike the sharp o'er-canny looks of the poor deceased Reynard, round whom the hounds were howling, unadmonished by the short whip, which was now tucked into Wormeley's well-worn pocket. When Sir Harry rode into the copse—full of dead brushwood and wet tangled grass—and was followed by the members of the hunt, as one by one they cantered past, Mr. Higgins took off his cap and bowed—half deferentially, half insolently—with a lurking smile in the corner of his eye at the discomfited looks of one or two of the laggards. "A famous run, sir," said Sir Harry. "The first time you have hunted in our country; but I hope we shall see you often."

"I hope to become a member of the hunt, sir," said Mr. Higgins.

"Most happy—proud, I am sure, to receive so daring a rider among us. You took the Cropper-gate, I fancy; while some of our friends here"—scowling at one or two cowards by way of finishing his speech. "Allow me to introduce myself—master of the hounds." He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for the card on which his name was formally inscribed. "Some of our friends here are kind enough to come home with me to

dinner; might I ask for the honour?"

"My name is Higgins," replied the stranger, bowing low. "I am only lately come to occupy the White House at Barford, and I have not as yet presented my letters of introduction."

"Hang it!" replied Sir Harry; "a man with a seat like yours, and that good brush in your hand, might ride up to any door in the country (I'm a Leicestershire man!), and be a welcome guest. Mr. Higgins, I shall be proud to become better acquainted with you over my dinner table."

Mr. Higgins knew pretty well how to improve the acquaintance thus begun. He could sing a good song, tell a good story, and was well up in practical jokes; with plenty of that keen worldly sense, which seems like an instinct in some men, and which in this case taught him on whom he might play off such jokes, with impunity from their resentment, and with a security of applause from the more boisterous, vehement, or prosperous. At the end of twelve months Mr. Robinson Higgins was, out-and-out, the most popular member of the Barford hunt, as his first patron, Sir Harry, observed one evening, when they were just leaving the dinner-table of an old hunting squire in the neighbourhood.

"Because, you know," said Squire Hearn, holding Sir Harry by the button—"I mean, you see, this young man is fond of Catherine; and she's a good girl, and will have ten thousand pounds down, the day she's married, by her mother's will; and excuse me, Sir Harry—but I should not like my girl to throw herself away."

Though Sir Harry had a long ride before him, and but the early and short light of a new moon to take it in, his kind heart was so much touched by Squire Hearn's trembling, tearful anxiety, that he stooped and turned back into the dining-room to say, with more asseverations than I care to give :

"My good Squire, I may say, I know that man pretty well by this time; and a better fellow never existed. If I had twenty daughters he should have the pick of them."

Squire Hearn never thought of asking the grounds for his old friend's opinion of Mr. Higgins; it had been given with too much earnestness for any doubts to cross the old man's mind as to the possibility of its not being well founded. Mr. Hearn was not a doubter, or a thinker, or suspicious by nature; it was simply his love for Catherine, his only daughter, that prompted his anxiety in the case; and, after what Sir Harry had said, the old man could totter with an easy mind, though not with very steady legs, into the drawing-room, where his bonny, blushing daughter Catherine and Mr. Higgins stood close together on the hearthrug—he whispering, she listening with downcast eyes. She looked so happy, so like her dead mother had looked when the Squire was a young man, that all his thought was how to please her most. His son and heir was about to be married, and bring his wife to live with the Squire; Barford and the White House were not distant an hour's ride; and, even as these thoughts passed through his mind, he asked Mr. Higgins, if he could stay all night—the young moon was already set—

the roads would be dark—and Catherine looked up with a pretty anxiety which, however, had not much doubt in it, for the answer.

With every encouragement of this kind from the old Squire, it took everybody rather by surprise when, one morning, it was discovered that Miss Catherine Hearn was missing; and when, according to the usual fashion in such cases, a note was found, saying that she had eloped with "the man of her heart," and gone to Gretna Green, no one could imagine why she could not quietly have stopped at home and been married in the parish church. She had always been a romantic, sentimental girl; very pretty and very affectionate, and very much spoiled, and very much wanting in common sense. Her indulgent father was deeply hurt at this want of confidence in his never-varying affection; but when his son came, hot with indignation from the Baronet's (his future father-in-law's house, where every form of law and of ceremony was to accompany his own impending marriage), Squire Hearn pleaded the cause of the young couple with imploring urgency, and protested that it was a piece of spirit in his daughter, which he admired and was proud of. However, it ended with Mr. Nathaniel Hearn's declaring that he and his wife would have nothing to do with his sister and her husband. "Wait till you've seen him, Nat!" said the old Squire, trembling with his distressful anticipations of family discord. "He's an excuse for any girl. Only ask Sir Harry's opinion of him. Confound Sir Harry! So that a man sits his horse well, Sir Harry cares nothing about anything else. Who is this man -this fellow? Where does he

come from? What are his means? Who are his family?"

"He comes from the south—Surrey or Somersetshire, I forget which; and he pays his way well and liberally. There's not a tradesman in Barford but says he cares no more for money than for water; he spends like a prince, Nat. I don't know who his family are, but he seals with a coat of arms, which may tell you if you want to know—and he goes regularly to collect his rent from his estates in the south. Oh, Nat! if you would but be friendly, I should be as well pleased with Kitty's marriage as any father in the county."

Mr. Nathaniel Hearn frowned, and muttered an oath or two to himself. The poor old father was reaping the consequences of his weak indulgence to his two children. Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Hearn kept apart from Catherine and her husband; and Squire Hearn durst never ask them to Levison Hall, though it was his own house. Indeed, he stole away as if he were a culprit whenever he went to visit the White House; and if he passed a night there, he was careful to equivocate when he returned home the next day; an equivocation which was well interpreted by the surly, proud Nathaniel. But the younger Mr. and Mrs. Hearn were the only people who did not visit at the White House. Mr. and Mrs. Higgins were decidedly more popular than their brother and sister-in-law. She made a very pretty, sweet-tempered hostess, and her education had not been such as to make her intolerant of any want of refinement in the associates who gathered round her husband. She

had gentle smiles for everyone and unconsciously played an admirable second in her husband's project of making himself universally popular.

But there is some one to make ill-natured remarks, and draw ill-natured conclusions from very simple causes, in every place; and in Barford this bird of ill-omen was a Miss Pratt. She did not hunt — so Mr. Higgins's admirable riding did not call out her admiration. She did not drink — so the well-selected wines, so lavishly dispensed among his guests, could never mollify Miss Pratt. She could not bear comic songs, so, in that way, her approbation was impregnable. And these three secrets of popularity constituted Mr. Higgins's great charm. Miss Pratt sat and watched. Her face looked immovably grave at the end of any of Mr. Higgins's best stories; but there was a keen, needle-like glance of her unwinking little eyes, which Mr. Higgins felt rather than saw, and which made him shiver, even on a hot day, when it fell upon him. Miss Pratt was a dissenter, and, to propitiate her, Mr. Higgins asked the dissenting minister whose services she attended to dinner; kept himself and his company in good order; gave a handsome donation to the poor of the chapel. All in vain — Miss Pratt stirred not a muscle more of her face towards graciousness; and Mr. Higgins was conscious that, in spite of all his open efforts to captivate Mr. Davis, there was a secret influence on the other side, throwing in doubt and suspicions, and evil interpretations of all he said or did. Miss Pratt, the little, plain old maid, living on eighty pounds a year, was the thorn in the popular Mr. Higgins's side, although she

had never spoken one uncivil word to him; indeed, on the contrary, had treated him with a stiff and elaborate civility.

It was noticed that Mr. Higgins was remarkably careful of his health. He ate, drank, took exercise, rested, by some secret rules of his own; occasionally bursting into an excess, it is true, but only on rare occasions—such as when he returned from visiting his estates in the south, and collecting his rents. That unusual exertion and fatigue - for there were no stage-coaches within forty miles of Barford, and he, like most country gentlemen of that day, would have preferred riding if there had been - seemed to require some strange excess to compensate for it; and rumours went through the town that he shut himself up, and drank enormously for some days after his return. But no one was admitted to these orgies.

One day they remembered it well afterward - the hounds met not far from the town; and the fox was found in a part of the wild heath, which was beginning to be enclosed by a few of the more wealthy townspeople, who were desirous of building themselves houses rather more in the country than those they had hitherto lived in. Among these, the principal was a Mr. Dudgeon, the attorney of Barford, and the agent for all the county families about. The firm of Dudgeon had managed the marriage-settlements, and the wills, of the neighbourhood for generations. Mr. Dudgeon's father had the responsibility of collecting the landowner's rents just as the present Mr. Dudgeon had at the time of which I speak: and as his son and his son's son have done

since. Their business was a hereditary estate to them; and with something of the old feudal feeling was mixed a kind of proud humility at their position towards the squires whose family secrets they had mastered, and the mysteries of whose fortunes and estates were better known to the Messrs. Dudgeons than to themselves.

Mr. John Dudgeon had built himself a house on Wildbury Heath; a mere cottage as he called it: but though only two stories high, it spread out far and wide, and workpeople from Derby had been sent for on purpose to make the inside as complete as possible. The gardens too were exquisite in arrangement, if not very extensive; and not a flower was grown in them but of the rarest species. It must have been somewhat of a mortification to the owner of this dainty place when, on the day of which I speak, the fox, after a long race, during which he had described a circle of many miles, took refuge in the garden; but Mr. Dudgeon put a good face on the matter when a gentleman hunter, rode across the velvet lawn, and tapping at the window of the dining-room with his whip-handle, asked permission to enter his garden and have the fox unearthed. Mr. Dudgeon compelled himself to smile assent, and then he hastily gave orders to have all that the house afforded of provision set out for luncheon, guessing rightly enough that a six hours' run would give even homely fare an acceptable welcome. He bore without wincing the entrance of the dirty boots into his exquisitely clean rooms; he only felt grateful for the care with which Mr. Higgins strode about, laboriously and noise-

lessly moving on the tip of his toes, as he inspected the rooms with a curious eye.

"I'm going to build a house myself, Dudgeon; and, upon my word, I don't think I could take a better model than yours."

"Oh! my poor cottage would be too small to afford any hints for such a house as you would wish to build, Mr. Higgins," replied Mr. Dudgeon, gently rubbing his hands nevertheless at the compliment.

"Not at all! not at all! Let me see. You have dining-room, drawing-room," he hesitated, and Mr. Dudgeon filled up the blank as he expected.

"Four sitting-rooms and the bedrooms. But allow me to show you over the house. I confess I took some pains in arranging it, and, though far smaller than what you would require, it may, nevertheless, afford you some hints."

So they left the eating gentlemen with their mouths and their plates quite full, and the scent of the fox overpowering that of the rashers of ham; and they carefully inspected all the ground-floor rooms. Then Mr. Dudgeon said:

"If you are not tired, Mr. Higgins—it is rather my hobby, so you must pull me up if you are—we will go upstairs, and I will show you my sanctum."

Mr. Dudgeon's sanctum was the centre room, over the porch, which formed a balcony, and which was carefully filled with choice flowers in pots. Inside, there were all kinds of clever contrivances for hiding the real strength of all the boxes and chests required by the particular nature of Mr. Dudgeon's business: for although his office was in Barford, he kept, (as he

informed Mr. Higgins), what was the most valuable here, as being safer than an office which was locked up and left every night. But, as Mr. Higgins reminded him with a sly poke in the side, when next they met, his own house was not over-secure. A fortnight after the gentlemen of the Barford hunt lunched there, Mr. Dudgeon's strong-box,—in his sanctum upstairs, with the mysterious spring-bolt to the window invented by himself, and the secret of which was only known to the inventor and a few of his most intimate friends, to whom he had proudly shown it;—this strong-box, containing the collected Christmas rents of half a dozen landlords (there was then no bank nearer than Derby), was rifled; and the secretly rich Mr. Dudgeon had to stop his agent in his purchases of paintings by Flemish artists because the money was required to make good the missing rents.

The constables of those days were quite incapable of obtaining any clue to the robber or robbers; and though one or two vagrants were taken up and brought before Mr. Dunover and Mr. Higgins, the magistrates who usually attended in the court-room at Barford, there was no evidence brought against them, and after a couple of nights' imprisonment in the lock-ups they were set at liberty. But it became a standing joke with Mr. Higgins to ask Mr. Dudgeon, from time to time, whether he could recommend him a place of safety for his valuables; or, if he had made any more inventions lately for securing houses from robbers.

About two years after this time—about seven years after Mr. Higgins had been married—one Tuesday evening, Mr. Davis was sitting reading the news in the

coffee-room of the George Inn. He belonged to a club of gentlemen who met there occasionally to play cards, to read what few newspapers and magazines were published in those days, to chat about the market at Derby, and prices all over the county. This Tuesday night it was a black frost; and few people were in the room. Mr. Davis was anxious to finish an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*; indeed, he was taking notes from it, intending to answer it, and yet unable with his small income to purchase a copy. So he stayed late; it was past nine, and at ten o'clock the room was closed. But while he wrote, Mr. Higgins came in. He was pale and haggard with cold. Mr. Davis, who had had for some time sole possession of the fire, moved politely on one side and handed to the new-comer the sole London newspaper which the room afforded. Mr. Higgins accepted it, and made some remark on the intense coldness of the weather; but Mr. Davis was too full of his article, and intended reply, to fall into conversation readily. Mr. Higgins hitched his chair nearer to the fire, and put his feet on the fender, giving an audible shudder. He put the newspaper on one end of the table near him, and sat gazing into the red embers of the fire, crouching down over them as if his very marrow were chilled. At length he said:

"There is no account of the murder at Bath in that paper?" Mr. Davis, who had finished taking his notes, and was preparing to go, stopped short, and asked:

"Has there been a murder at Bath? No! I have not seen anything of it—who was murdered?"

"Oh! it was a shocking, terrible murder!" said

Mr. Higgins, not raising his look from the fire, but gazing on with his eyes dilated till the whites were seen all round them. "A terrible, terrible murder! I wonder what will become of the murderer! I can fancy the red glowing centre of that fire—look and see how infinitely distant it seems, and how the distance magnifies it into something awful and unquenchable."

"My dear sir, you are feverish; how you shake and shiver!" said Mr. Davis, thinking privately that his companion had symptoms of fever, and that he was wandering in his mind.

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Higgins. "I am not feverish. It is the night which is so cold." And for a time he talked with Mr. Davis about the article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, for he was rather a reader himself, and could take more interest in Mr. Davis's pursuits than most of the people at Barford. At length it drew near to ten, and Mr. Davis rose up to go home to his lodgings.

"No, Davis, don't go. I want you here. We will have a bottle of port together, and that will put you into good humour. I want to tell you about this murder," he continued, dropping his voice, and speaking hoarse and low. "She was an old woman, and he killed her, sitting reading her Bible by her own fire-side!" He looked at Mr. Davis with a strange searching gaze, as if trying to find some sympathy in the horror which the idea presented to him.

"Who do you mean, my dear sir? What is this murder you are so full of? No one has been murdered here."

"No, you fool! I tell you it was in Bath!" said

Mr. Higgins, with sudden passion : and then calming himself to most velvet-smoothness of manner, he laid his hand on Mr. Davis's knee, there, as they sat by the fire, and gently detaining him, began the narration of the crime he was so full of ; but his voice and manner were constrained to a stony quietude : he never looked in Mr. Davis's face ; once or twice, as Mr. Davis remembered afterwards, his grip tightened like a compressing vice.

"She lived in a small house in a quiet, old-fashioned street, she and her maid. People said she was a good old woman ; but for all that, she hoarded and hoarded, and never gave to the poor. Mr. Davis, it is wicked not to give to the poor—wicked—wicked, is it not ? I always give to the poor, for once I read in the Bible that 'Charity covereth a multitude of sins.' The wicked old woman never gave, but hoarded her money, and saved, and saved. Some one heard of it ; I say she threw a temptation in his way, and God will punish her for it. And this man—or it might be a woman, who knows ?—and this person—heard also that she went to church in the mornings, and her maid in the afternoons ; and so—while the maid was at church, and the street and the house quite still, and the darkness of a winter afternoon coming on—she was nodding over the Bible—and that, mark you ! is a sin, and one that God will avenge sooner or later ; and a step came in the dusk up the stair, and that person I told you of stood in the room. At first he—no ! At first, it is supposed—for, you understand, all this is mere guess-work it is supposed that he asked her civilly enough

to give him her money, or to tell him where it was ; but the old miser defied him, and would not ask for mercy and give up her keys, even when he threatened her, but looked him in the face as if he had been a baby—Oh, God ! Mr. Davis, I once dreamt when I was a little innocent boy that I should commit a crime like this, and I wakened up crying ; and my mother comforted me—that is the reason I tremble so now—that and the cold, for it is very very cold ! ”

“ But did he murder the old lady ? ” asked Mr. Davis. “ I beg your pardon, sir, but I am interested by your story. ”

“ Yes ! he cut her throat ; and there she lies yet in her quiet little parlour, with her face upturned and all ghastly white, in the middle of a pool of blood. Mr. Davis, this wine is no better than water ; I must have some brandy ! ”

Mr. Davis was horror-struck by the story, which seemed to have fascinated him as much as it had done his companion.

“ Have they got any clue^d to the murderer ? ” said he. Mr. Higgins drank down half a tumbler of raw brandy before he answered.

“ No ! no clue whatever. They will never be able to discover him ; and I should not wonder, Mr. Davis — I should not wonder if he repented after all, and did bitter penance for his crime ; and if so—will there be mercy for him at the last day ? ”

“ God knows ! ” said Mr. Davis, with solemnity. “ It is an awful story, ” continued he, rousing himself ; “ I hardly like to leave this warm, light room and go out into the darkness after hearing it. But it must be

done," buttoning on his greatcoat—"I can only say I hope and trust they will find out the murderer and hang him. If you'll take my advice, Mr. Higgins, you'll have your bed warmed, and drink a treacle-posset just the last thing."

The next morning, Mr. Davis went to call on Miss Pratt, who was not very well; and, by way of being agreeable and entertaining, he related to her all he had heard the night before about the murder at Bath; and really he made a very long connected story out of it, and interested Miss Pratt very much in the fate of the old lady partly because of a similarity in their situations; for she also privately hoarded money, and had but one servant, and stopped at home alone on Sunday afternoons to allow her servant to go to church.

"And when did all this happen?" she asked.

"I don't know if Mr. Higgins named the day; and yet I think it must have been on this very last Sunday."

"And to-day is Wednesday. Ill news travels fast."

"Yes, Mr. Higgins thought it might have been in the London newspaper."

"That it could never be. Where did Mr. Higgins learn all about it?"

"I don't know; I did not ask. I think he only came home yesterday: he had been south to collect his rents, somebody said."

Miss Pratt grunted. She used to vent her dislike and suspicions of Mr. Higgins in a grunt whenever his name was mentioned.

"Well, I shan't see you for some days. Godfrey Merton has asked me to go and stay with him and his sister; and I think it will do me good. Besides," added

she, "these winter evenings—and these murderers at large in the country—I don't quite like living with only Peggy to call to in case of need."

Miss Pratt went to stay with her cousin, Mr. Merton. He was an active magistrate, and enjoyed his reputation as such. One day he came in, having just received his letters.

"Bad account of the morals of your little town here, Jessy!" said he, touching one of his letters. "You've either a murderer among you, or some friend of a murderer. Here's a poor old lady at Bath who had her throat cut last Sunday week; and I've a letter from the Home Office, asking me to lend them 'my very efficient aid,' as they are pleased to call it, towards finding out the culprit. It seems he must have been thirsty, and of a comfortable jolly turn; for before going to his horrid work he tapped a barrel of ginger wine the old lady had set by to work; and he wrapped the spigot round with a piece of a letter taken out of his pocket, as may be supposed: and this piece of a letter was found afterwards; there are only these letters on the outside, '*ns, Esq., -arford, -egworth,*' which some one has ingeniously made out to mean Barford, near Kegworth. On the other side there is some allusion to a racehorse, I conjecture, though the name is singular enough: "Church-and-King."

Miss Pratt caught at this name immediately; it had hurt her feelings as a dissenter only a few months ago, and she remembered it well.

"Mr. Nat Hearn has—or had, (as I am speaking in the witness-box, as it were, I must take care of my words), a horse with that ridiculous name."

"Mr. Nat Hearn," repeated Mr. Merton, making a note of the intelligence; then he turned to his letter from the Home Office again.

"There is also a piece of a small key, broken in the futile attempt to open a desk—well, well. Nothing more of consequence. The letter is what we must rely upon."

"Mr. Davis said that Mr. Higgins told him—," Miss Pratt began.

"Higgins!" exclaimed Mr. Merton, "*ns*. Is it Higgins, the blustering fellow that ran away with Nat Hearn's sister?"

"Yes!" said Miss Pratt. "But though he has never been a favourite of mine "

"*ns*," repeated Mr. Merton. "It is too horrible to think of; a member of the hunt kind old Squire Hearn's son-in-law! Who else have you in Barford with names that end in *ns*?"

"There's Jackson, and Higginson, and Blenkinson, and Davis, and Jones. Cousin! one thing strikes me—how did Mr. Higgins know all about it to tell Mr. Davis on Tuesday what had happened on Sunday afternoon?"

There is no need to add much more. Those curious in lives of the highwayman may find the name of Higgins as conspicuous among those annals as that of Claude Duval. Kate Hearn's husband collected his rents on the highway, like many another 'gentleman' of the day; but, having been unlucky in one or two of his adventures, and hearing exaggerated accounts of the boarded wealth of the old lady at Bath, he was led on from robbery to murder, and was hanged for

his crime at Derby, in 1775.

He had not been an unkind husband ; and his poor wife took lodgings in Derby to be near him in his last moments—his awful last moments. Her old father went with her everywhere but into her husband's cell ; and wrung her heart by constantly accusing himself of having promoted her marriage with a man of whom he knew so little. He abdicated his squireship in favour of his son Nathaniel. Nat was prosperous, and the helpless silly father could be of no use to him ; but to his widowed daughter the foolish fond old man was all in all ; her knight, her protector, her companion her most faithful loving companion. Only he ever declined assuming the office of her counsellor shaking his head sadly, and saying

“Ah! Kate, Kate! if I had had more wisdom to have advised thee better, thou need'st not have been an exile here in Brussels, shrinking from the sight of every English person as if they knew thy story.”

I saw the White House not a month ago ; it was to let, perhaps for the twentieth time since Mr. Higgins occupied it ; but still the tradition goes in Barford that once upon a time a highwayman lived there, and amassed untold treasures ; and that the ill-gotten wealth yet remains walled up in some unknown concealed chamber ; but in what part of the house no one knows.

Elizabeth C. Gaskell (1810—1865) was born in London. She first began to write in order to distract her mind from the grief of losing her only son. Her first novel, *Mary Barton*, brought her recognition as a writer, but she is chiefly known as the author of *Cranford* which is written with her usual simplicity of style and is now a recognised classic. Besides her novels, Mrs. Gaskell wrote a number of short stories of which *The Squire's Story* is one of the most well-known.

Squire: the chief landed proprietor in a village.

Leicestershire: a great hunting country.

The meet: meeting of men and hounds for hunting.

in at the death: on the spot when the fox is caught and killed.

without a hair turned: calm and unruffled.

brush: tail of the fox, usually given as a trophy to the first arrival on the scene of the kill.

Gretna Green: a place in Scotland where runaway couples could be married without delay.

coat of arms: heraldic arms granted to a gentleman.

durst: old-fashioned form of *dared*.

dissenter: here means a member of a religious sect which has separated from the Church of England.

Put a good face on the matter: did not show that he minded.

county family: a family with an ancestral estate in the county.

treacle-posset: a drink made with hot milk, spice, and treacle, formerly much used as a remedy for colds.

magistrate: a justice of the peace who tries cases in the local court; usually an influential local man.

Home Office: Department of the Secretary of State for Home Affairs.

Claude Duval: a notorious highwayman.

Hanged: it is correct to speak of a person being *hanged* and of a picture being *hung*.

Brussels: the capital of Belgium.

THE BLACK VEIL.

CHARLES DICKENS.

One winter's evening, towards the close of the year 1800, or within a year or two of that time, a young medical practitioner, recently established in his profession, was seated by a cheerful fire in his little parlour, listening to the wind which was beating the rain in pattering drops against the window, or rumbling dismally in the chimney. The night was wet and cold; he had been walking through mud and water the whole day, and was now comfortably reposing in his dressing-gown and slippers, more than half asleep and less than half awake, revolving a thousand matters in his wandering imagination. First, he thought how hard the wind was blowing, and how the cold, sharp rain would be at that moment beating in his face, if he were not comfortably housed at home. Then, his mind reverted to his annual Christmas visit to his native place and dearest friends; he thought how glad they would all be to see him, and how happy it would make Rose if he could only tell her that he had found a patient at last, and hoped to have more, and to come down again, in a few months' time, and marry her, and take her home to gladden his lonely fireside, and stimulate him to fresh exertions. Then he began to wonder when his first patient would appear, or whether he was destined, by a special dispensation of Providence, never to have any patients at all; and then he

thought about Rose again, and dropped to sleep and dreamed that the tones of her sweet, merry voice sounded in his ears, and that her soft tiny hand rested on his shoulder.

There *was* a hand upon his shoulder, but it was neither soft nor tiny; its owner being a corpulent, round-headed boy, who, in consideration of the sum of one shilling per week and his food, was let out by the parish to carry medicine and messages. As there was no demand for the medicine, however, and no necessity for the messages, he usually occupied his unemployed hours - averaging fourteen a day - in abstracting peppermint drops, taking nourishment, and going to sleep.

"A lady, sir—a lady!" whispered the boy, rousing his master with a shake.

"What lady?" cried our friend, starting up, not quite certain that his dream was an illusion, and half expecting that it might be Rose herself. —"What lady? Where?"

"*There*, sir!" replied the boy, pointing to the glass door leading into the surgery, with an expression of alarm which the very unusual apparition of a customer might have tended to excite.

The surgeon looked towards the door, and started himself, for an instant, on beholding the appearance of his unlooked-for visitor.

It was a singularly tall woman dressed in deep mourning, and standing so close to the door that her face almost touched the glass. The upper part of her figure was carefully muffled in a black shawl, as if for the purpose of concealment; and her face was shrouded

by a thick black veil. She stood perfectly erect, her figure was drawn up to its full height, and though the surgeon *felt* that the eyes beneath the veil were fixed on him, she stood perfectly motionless, and showed, by no gesture whatever, the slightest consciousness of his having turned towards her.

"Do you wish to consult me?" he inquired, with some hesitation, holding open the door. It opened inwards, and therefore the action did not alter the position of the figure, which still remained motionless on the same spot.

She slightly inclined her head, in token of acquiescence.

"Pray walk in," said the surgeon.

The figure moved a step forward; and then, turning its head in the direction of the boy—to his infinite horror—appeared to hesitate.

"Leave the room, Tom," said the young man, addressing the boy, whose large round eyes had been extended to their utmost width during this brief interview. "Draw the curtain, and shut the door."

The boy drew a green curtain across the glass part of the door, retired into the surgery, closed the door after him, and immediately applied one of his large eyes to the keyhole on the other side.

The surgeon drew a chair to the fire, and motioned the visitor to a seat. The mysterious figure slowly moved towards it. As the blaze shone upon the black dress, the surgeon observed that the bottom of it was saturated with mud and rain.

"You are very wet," he said.

"I am," said the stranger, in a low deep voice.

"And you are ill?" added the surgeon, compassionately, for the tone was that of a person in pain.

"I am," was the reply, "very ill; not bodily, but mentally. It is not for myself, or on my own behalf," continued the stranger, "that I come to you. If I laboured under bodily disease, I should not be out, alone, at such an hour, or on such a night as this; and if I were afflicted with it, twenty-four hours hence, God knows how gladly I would lie down and pray to die. It is for another that I beseech your aid, sir. I may be mad to ask it for him—I think I am; but, night after night, through the long dreary hours of watching and weeping, the thought has been ever present to my mind; and though even I see the hopelessness of human assistance availing him, the bare thought of laying him in his grave without it makes my blood run cold!" And a shudder, such as the surgeon well knew art could not produce, trembled through the speaker's frame.

There was a desperate earnestness in this woman's manner, that went to the young man's heart. He was young in his profession, and had not yet witnessed enough of the miseries which are daily presented before the eyes of its members, to have grown comparatively callous to human suffering.

"If," he said, rising hastily, "the person of whom you speak, be in so hopeless a condition as you describe, not a moment is to be lost. I will go with you instantly. Why did you not obtain medical advice before?"

"Because it would have been useless before—because it is useless even now," replied the woman, clasping her hands passionately.

The surgeon gazed, for a moment, on the black veil, as if to ascertain the expression of the features beneath it; its thickness, however, rendered such a result impossible.

"You *are* ill," he said, gently, "although you do not know it. The fever which has enabled you to bear, without feeling it, the fatigue you have evidently undergone, is burning within you now. Put that to your lips," he continued, pouring out a glass of water—"compose yourself for a few moments, and then tell me, as calmly as you can, what the disease of the patient is, and how long he has been ill. When I know what it is necessary I should know, to render my visit serviceable to him I am ready to accompany you."

The stranger lifted the glass of water to her mouth, without raising the veil; put it down again untasted; and burst into tears.

"I know," she said, sobbing aloud, "that what I say to you now, seems like the ravings of fever. I have been told so before, less kindly than by you. I am not a young woman; and they do say, that as life steals on towards its final close, the last short remnant, worthless as it may seem to all beside, is dearer to its possessor than all the years that have gone before, connected though they be with the recollection of old friends long since dead, and young ones—children perhaps—who have fallen off from, and forgotten one as completely as if they had died too. My natural term of life cannot be many years longer, and should be dear on that account; but I would lay it down without a sigh—with cheerfulness—with joy—if what I tell

you now, were only false, or imaginary. To-morrow morning he of whom I speak will be, I *know*, though I would gladly think otherwise, beyond the reach of human aid; and yet, to-night, though he is in deadly peril, you must not see, and could not serve, him."

"I am unwilling to increase your distress," said the surgeon, after a short pause, 'by making any comment on what you have just said, or appearing desirous to investigate a subject you are so anxious to conceal; but there is an inconsistency in your statement which I cannot reconcile with probability. This person is dying to-night, and I cannot see him when my assistance might possibly avail; you fear it will be useless to-morrow, and yet you would have me see him then! If he be, indeed, as dear to you as your words and manner would imply, why not try to save his life before delay and the progress of his disease render it impossible?"

"God help me!" exclaimed the woman, weeping bitterly, "how can I hope strangers will believe what appears incredible, even to myself? You will *not* see him then, sir?" she added, rising suddenly.

"I did not say that I declined to see him," replied the surgeon; "but I warn you, that if you persist in this extraordinary procrastination, and the individual dies, a fearful responsibility rests with you."

"The responsibility will rest heavily somewhere," replied the stranger bitterly. "Whatever responsibility rests with me, I am content to bear, and ready to answer."

"As I incur none," continued the surgeon, "by acceding to your request, I will see him in the morning,

if you leave me the address. At what hour can he be seen ? ”

“*Nine*,” replied the stranger.

“You must excuse my pressing these inquiries,” said the surgeon. “But is he in your charge now ? ”

“He is not,” was the rejoinder.

“Then, if I gave you instructions for his treatment through the night, you could not assist him ? ”

The woman wept bitterly, as she replied, “I could not.”

Finding that there was but little prospect of obtaining more information by prolonging the interview ; and anxious to spare the woman’s feelings, which, subdued at first by a violent effort, were now irrepressible and most painful to witness ; the surgeon repeated his promise of calling in the morning at the appointed hour. His visitor, after giving him a direction to an obscure part of Walworth, left the house in the same mysterious manner in which she had entered it.

It will be readily believed that so extraordinary a visit produced a considerable impression on the mind of the young surgeon ; and that he wondered a great deal and to very little purpose about the possible circumstances of the case. In common with the generality of people, he had often heard and read of singular instances, in which a presentiment of death, at a particular day, or even minute, had been entertained and realised. At one moment he was inclined to think that the present might be such a case ; but, then, it occurred to him that all the anecdotes of the kind he had ever heard, were of persons who had been troubled with a foreboding of their own death. This woman,

however, spoke of another person—a man ; and it was impossible to suppose that a mere dream or delusion of fancy would induce her to speak of his approaching death with such terrible certainty as she had spoken. It could not be that the man was to be murdered in the morning, and that the woman, originally a consenting party, and bound to secrecy by an oath, had relented, and, though unable to prevent the commission of some outrage on the victim, had determined to prevent his death, if possible, by the timely interposition of medical aid. The idea of such things happening within two miles of the metropolis appeared too wild and preposterous to be entertained beyond the instant. Then, his original impression that the woman's intellects were disordered, recurred ; and, as it was the only mode of solving the difficulty with any degree of satisfaction, he obstinately made up his mind to believe that she was mad. Certain misgivings upon this point, however, stole upon his thoughts at the time, and presented themselves again and again through the long dull course of a sleepless night ; during which, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, he was unable to banish the black veil from his disturbed imagination.

The back part of Walworth, at its greatest distance from town, is a straggling miserable place enough, even in these days ; but, five-and-thirty years ago, the greater portion of it was little better than a dreary waste, inhabited by a few scattered people of questionable character, whose poverty prevented their living in any better neighbourhood, or whose pursuits and mode of life rendered its solitude desirable. Very many of

the houses which have since sprung up on all sides, were not built until some years afterwards; and the great majority even of those which were sprinkled about, at irregular intervals, were of the rudest and most miserable description.

The appearance of the place, through which he walked in the morning, was not calculated to raise the spirits of the young surgeon, or to dispel any feeling of anxiety or depression which the singular kind of visit he was about to make, had awakened. Striking off from the high road, his way lay across a marshy common, through irregular lanes, with here and there a ruinous and dismantled cottage fast falling to pieces with decay and neglect. A stunted tree, or pool of stagnant water, roused into a sluggish action by the heavy rain of the preceding night, skirted the path occasionally; and now and then, a miserable patch of garden-ground, with a few old boards knocked together for a summer-house, and old palings imperfectly mended with stakes pilfered from the neighbouring hedges, bore testimony at once to the poverty of the inhabitants, and the little scruple they entertained in appropriating the property of other people to their own use. Occasionally, a filthy-looking woman would make her appearance from the door of a dirty house, to empty the contents of some cooking utensil into the gutter in front, or to scream after a little slipshod girl, who had contrived to stagger a few yards from the door under the weight of a sallow infant almost as big as herself; but, scarcely anything was stirring around: and as much of the prospect as could be faintly traced through the cold damp mist which hung heavily over it,

presented a lonely and dreary appearance perfectly in keeping with the objects we have described.

After plodding wearily through the mud and mire ; making many inquiries for the place to which he had been directed ; and receiving as many contradictory and unsatisfactory replies in return ; the young man at length arrived before the house which had been pointed out to him as the object of his destination. It was a small, low building, one storey above the ground, with even a more desolate and unpromising exterior than any he had yet passed. An old yellow curtain was closely drawn across the window upstairs, and the parlour shutters were closed, but not fastened. The house was detached from any other, and as it stood at an angle of a narrow lane, there was no other habitation in sight.

When we say that the surgeon hesitated, and walked a few paces beyond the house, before he could prevail upon himself to lift the knocker, we say nothing that need raise a smile upon the face of the boldest reader. The police of London were a very different body in that day ; the isolated position of the suburbs, when the desire for building and the progress of improvement had not yet begun to connect them with the main body of the city and its environs, rendered many of them (and this in particular) a place of resort for the worst and most depraved characters. Even the streets in the gayest parts of London were imperfectly lighted, at that time ; and such places as these, were left entirely to the mercy of the moon and stars. The chances of detecting desperate characters, or of tracing them to their haunts, were thus rendered very few,

and their offences naturally increased in boldness, as the consciousness of comparative security became the more impressed upon them by daily experience. Added to these considerations, it must be remembered that the young man had spent some time in the public hospitals of the metropolis; and his own observation might have suggested to him how easily atrocities might be committed. Be this as it may, whatever reflection made him hesitate, he *did* hesitate: but, being a young man of strong mind and great personal courage, it was only for an instant;—he stepped briskly back and knocked gently at the door.

A low whispering was audible, immediately afterwards, as if some person at the end of the passage were conversing stealthily with another on the landing above. It was succeeded by the noise of a pair of heavy boots upon the bare floor. The door-chain was softly unfastened: the door opened; and a tall, ill-favoured man, with black hair, and a face, as the surgeon often declared afterwards, as pale and haggard, as the countenance of any dead man he ever saw, presented himself.

“Walk in, sir,” he said in a low tone.

The surgeon did so, and the man having secured the door again, by the chain, led the way to a small back parlour at the end of the passage.

“Am I in time?”

“Too soon!” replied the man. The surgeon turned hastily round, with a gesture of astonishment not unmingled with alarm, which he found it impossible to repress.

“If you’ll step in here, sir,” said the man, who had

evidently noticed the action—"if you'll step in here, sir, you won't be detained five minutes, I assure you."

The surgeon at once walked into the room. The man closed the door, and left him alone.

It was a little cold room, with no other furniture than two deal chairs, and a table of the same material. A handful of fire, unguarded by any fender, was burning in the grate, which brought out the damp if it served no more comfortable purpose for the unwholesome moisture was stealing down the walls, in long slug-like tracks. The window, which was broken and patched in many places, looked into a small enclosed piece of ground, almost covered with water. Not a sound was to be heard, either within the house, or without. The young surgeon sat down by the fireplace, to await the result of his first professional visit.

He had not remained in this position many minutes, when the noise of some approaching vehicle struck his ear. It stopped; the street-door was opened; a low talking succeeded, accompanied by a shuffling noise of footsteps, along the passage and on the stairs, as if two or three men were engaged in carrying some heavy body to the room above. The creaking of the stairs, a few seconds afterwards, announced that the new-comers having completed their task, whatever it was, were leaving the house. The door was again closed, and the former silence was restored.

Another five minutes had elapsed, and the surgeon had resolved to explore the house, in search of some one to whom he might make his errand known, when the room-door opened, and his last night's visitor, dressed in exactly the same manner, with the veil

lowered as before, motioned him to advance. The singular height of her form, coupled with the circumstance of her not speaking, caused the idea to pass across his brain for an instant, that it might be a man disguised in woman's attire. The violent sobs which issued from beneath the veil, and the convulsive attitude of grief of the whole figure, however, at once exposed the absurdity of the suspicion ; and he hastily followed.

The woman led the way upstairs to the front room, and paused at the door, to let him enter first. It was scantily furnished with an old deal box, a few chairs, and a tent bedstead, without hangings or cross-rails, which was covered with a patchwork counterpane. The dim light admitted through the curtain which he had noticed from the outside, rendered the objects in the room so indistinct, and communicated to all of them so uniform a hue, that he did not, at first, perceive the object on which his eye at once rested when the woman rushed frantically past him, and flung herself on her knees by the bedside.

Stretched upon the bed, closely enveloped in a linen wrapper, and covered with blankets, lay a human form, stiff and motionless. The head and face, which were those of a man, were uncovered, save by a bandage which passed over the head and under the chin. The eyes were closed. The left arm lay heavily across the bed, and the woman held the passive hand.

The surgeon gently pushed the woman aside, and took the hand in his.

"My God!" he exclaimed, letting it fall involuntarily—"the man is dead!"

The woman started to her feet and beat her hands together.

"Oh! don't say so, sir," she exclaimed, with a burst of passion, amounting almost to frenzy. "Oh! don't say so, sir! I can't bear it! Men have been brought to life before, when unskilful people have given them up for lost; and men have died who might have been restored, if proper means had been used. Don't let him lie here, sir, without one effort to save him! This very moment life may be passing away. Do try, sir,—do, for Heaven's sake!"—And while speaking, she hurriedly chafed, first the forehead, and then the breast, of the senseless form before her; and then, wildly beat the cold hands, which, when she ceased to hold them, fell listlessly and heavily back on the coverlet.

"It is of no use, my good woman," said the surgeon, soothingly, as he withdrew his hand from the man's breast. "Stay—undraw that curtain!"

"Why?" said the woman, starting up.

"Undraw that curtain!" repeated the surgeon in an agitated tone.

"I darkened the room on purpose," said the woman, throwing herself before him as he rose to undraw it.

"Oh! sir, have pity on me! If it can be of no use, and he is really dead, do not expose that form to other eyes than mine!"

"This man died no natural or easy death," said the surgeon. "I *must* see the body!" With a motion so sudden, that the woman hardly knew that he had slipped from beside her, he tore open the curtain, admitted the full light of day, and returned to the bedside.

"There has been violence here," he said, pointing towards the body, and gazing intently on the face, from which the black veil was now, for the first time, removed. In the excitement of a minute before, the woman had thrown off the bonnet and veil, and now stood with her eyes fixed upon him. Her features were those of a woman about fifty, who had once been handsome. Sorrow and weeping had left traces upon them which not time itself would ever have produced without their aid; her face was deadly pale; and there was a nervous contortion of the lip, and an unnatural fire in her eye, which showed too plainly that her bodily and mental powers had nearly sunk, beneath an accumulation of misery.

"There has been violence here," said the surgeon, continuing his searching glance.

"There has!" replied the woman.

"This man has been murdered."

"That I call God to witness he has," said the woman, passionately; "pitilessly, inhumanly murdered!"

"By whom?" said the surgeon, seizing the woman by the arm.

"Look at the butchers' marks, and then ask me!" she replied.

The surgeon turned his face towards the bed, and bent over the body which now lay full in the light of the window. The throat was swollen, and a livid mark encircled it. The truth flashed suddenly upon him.

"This is one of the men who were hanged this morning!" he exclaimed, turning away with a shudder.

"It is," replied the woman, with a cold, unmeaning stare.

'Who was he?' inquired the surgeon.

"*My son*," rejoined the woman; and fell senseless at his feet.

It was true. A companion, equally guilty with himself, had been acquitted for want of evidence; and this man had been left for death, and executed. To recount the circumstances of the case, at this distant period, must be unnecessary, and might give 'pain to some persons still alive. The history was an everyday one. The mother was a widow without friends or money, and had denied herself necessities to bestow them on her orphan boy. That boy, unmindful of her prayers, and forgetful of the sufferings she had endured for him—incessant anxiety of mind, and voluntary starvation of body—had plunged into a career of dissipation and crime. And this was the result; his own death by the hangman's hands, and his mother's shame, and incurable insanity.

For many years after this occurrence, and when profitable and arduous occupations would have led many men to forget that such a miserable being existed, the young surgeon was a daily visitor at the side of the harmless, mad woman; not only soothing her by his presence and kindness, but lessening the hardships of her condition by frequent donations for her comfort and support, bestowed with no sparing hand. In the passing gleam of recollection and consciousness which preceded her death, a prayer for his welfare and protection, as fervent as mortal ever breathed, rose from the lips of this poor friendless creature. That prayer flew to Heaven, and was heard. The blessings he was instrumental in conferring, have been repaid to

him a thousandfold ; but, amid all the honours of rank and station which have since been heaped upon him, and which he has so well earned, he can have no reminiscence more gratifying to his heart than that connected with *The Black Veil*.

Charles Dickens, (1812-1870), was one of the greatest novelists of the nineteenth century. The hardships of his own early life gave him the material for some of his most famous novels and also gave him a sympathetic insight into the struggles of the poorer classes

The Sketches by Boz, from which *The Black Veil* is taken, was the first book published by Dickens. Among his most well-known novels are *David Copperfield*, *Pickwick Papers* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

Dispensation of Providence : arrangement by God.

Let out by the parish : an orphan under the guardianship of the parish, sent out to work.

Walworth : a suburb of London.

"BLOW UP WITH THE BRIG."

A SAILOR'S STORY.

WILKIE COLLINS.

I have got an alarming confession to make. I am haunted by a Ghost.

If you were to guess for a hundred years, you would never guess what my ghost is. I shall make you laugh to begin with—and afterwards I shall make your flesh creep. My Ghost is the ghost of a Bedroom Candlestick.

Yes, a bedroom candlestick and candle, or a flat candlestick and candle—put it which way you like—that is what haunts me. I wish it were something pleasanter and more out of the common, a beautiful lady, or a mine of gold and silver, or a cellar of wine or a coach and horses. But, being what it is, I must take it for what it is, and make the best of it; and I shall thank you kindly if you will help me out by doing the same.

I am not a scholar myself, but I make bold to believe that the haunting of any man with anything under the sun begins with the frightening of him. At any rate, the haunting of me with a bedroom candlestick and candle began with the frightening of me with a bedroom candlestick and candle—the frightening of me half out of my life; and, for the time being, the frightening of me altogether out of my wits. That

is not a very pleasant thing to confess before stating the particulars; but perhaps you will be the readier to believe that I am not a downright coward, because you find me bold enough to make a clean breast of it already, to my own great disadvantage.

Here are the particulars, as well as I can put them :

I was apprenticed to the sea when I was about as tall as my own walking-stick; and I made good enough use of my time to be fit for a mate's berth at the age of twenty-five years.

It was in the year eighteen hundred and eighteen, or nineteen, I am not quite certain which, that I reached the before-mentioned age of twenty-five. You will please to excuse my memory not being very good for such things as dates, names, numbers and places. No fear, though, about the particulars I have undertaken to tell you; I have got them all ship-shape in my recollection; I can see them, at this moment, as clear as noonday in my own mind. But there is a mist over what went before, and, for the matter of that, a mist likewise over much that came after—and it's not very likely to lift at my time of life, is it?

Well, in eighteen hundred and eighteen, or nineteen, when there was peace in our part of the world—and not before it was wanted, you will say—there was fighting, of a certain scampering, scrambling kind, going on in that old battle-field which we sea-faring men know by the name of the Spanish Main.

The possessions that belonged to the Spaniards in South America had broken into open mutiny and declared for themselves years before. There was plenty

of bloodshed between the new Government and the old ; but the new had got the best of it. for the most part, under one General Boliver—a famous man in his time, though he seems to have dropped out of people's memories now. Englishmen and Irishmen with a turn for fighting, and nothing particular to do at home, joined the general as volunteers ; and some of our merchants here found it a good venture to send supplies across the ocean to the popular side. There was risk enough, of course, in doing this ; but where one speculation of the kind succeeded, it made up for two, at the least, that failed. And that's the true principle of trade, wherever I have met with it, all the world over.

Among the Englishmen who were concerned in this Spanish-American business, I, your humble servant, happened, in a small way, to be one.

I was then mate of a brig belonging to a certain firm in the City, which drove a sort of general trade, mostly in queer out-of-the-way places, as far from home as possible ; and which freighted the brig, in the year I am speaking of, with a cargo of gunpowder for General Boliver and his volunteers. Nobody knew anything about our instructions, when we sailed, except the captain ; and he didn't seem to like them. I can't say how many barrels of powder we had on board, or how much each barrel held—I only know we had no other cargo. The name of the brig was the *Good Intent*—a queer name enough, you will tell me, for a vessel laden with gunpowder, and sent to help a revolution. And as far as this particular voyage was concerned, so it was. I mean that for

a joke, and I hope you will encourage me by laughing at it.

The *Good Intent* was the craziest tub of a vessel I ever went to sea in, and the worst found in all respects. She was two hundred and thirty, or two hundred and eighty tons burden, I forget which; and she had a crew of eight, all told—nothing like as many as we ought to have had to work the brig. However, we were well and honestly paid our wages; and we had to set that against the chance of foundering at sea, and, on this occasion, likewise the chance of being blown up into the bargain.

In consideration of the nature of our cargo, we were harassed with new regulations, which we didn't at all like, relative to smoking our pipes and lighting our lanterns; and, as usual in such cases, the captain, who made the regulations, preached what he didn't practise. Not a man of us was allowed to have a bit of lighted candle in his hand when he went below—except the skipper; and he used his light, when he turned in, or when he looked over his charts on the cabin table, just as usual.

This light was a common kitchen candle and it stood in an old battered flat candlestick, with all the paint worn and melted off, and all the tin showing through. It would have been more seaman-like and suitable in every respect if he had had a lamp or a lantern; but he stuck to his old candlestick; and that same old candlestick has ever afterward stuck to *me*. That's another joke, if you please, and a better one than the first, in my opinion.

Well we sailed in the brig, and shaped our course,

first, for the Virgin Islands, in the West Indies; and, after sighting them, we made for the Leeward Islands next, and then stood on due south, till the lookout at the masthead hailed the deck and said he saw land. That land was the coast of South America. We had had a wonderful voyage so far. We had lost none of our sails, and not a man of us had been harassed to death at the pumps. It wasn't often the *Good Intent* made such a voyage as that, I can tell you.

I was sent aloft to make sure about the land, and I did make sure of it.

When I reported to the skipper, he went below, and had a look at his letter of instructions and the chart. When he came on deck again, he altered our course a trifle to the eastward—I forget the point on the compass, but that doesn't matter. What I do remember is that it was dark before we closed in with the land. We hove the brig ~~to in~~ from four to five fathoms of water, or it might be six—I can't say for certain. I kept a sharp eye to the drift of the vessel, none of us knowing how the currents ran on that coast. We all wondered why the skipper didn't anchor; but he said that he must first show a light at the fore-topmast-head, and wait for an answering light on shore. We did wait, and nothing of the sort appeared. It was starlight and calm. What little wind there was came in puffs off the land. I suppose we waited, drifting a little to the westward, for the best part of an hour before anything happened—and then, instead of seeing the light on shore, we saw a boat coming towards us, rowed by two men only.

We hailed them, and they answered, "Friends!" and hailed us by our name. They came on board. One of them was an Irishman, and the other was a foreign pilot, who talked a little English.

The Irishman handed a note to our skipper, who showed it to me. It informed us that the part of the coast we were off was not oversafe for discharging our cargo, seeing that spies of the enemy (that is to say, of the old Government) had been taken and shot in the neighbourhood the day before. We might trust the brig to the pilot; and he had his instructions to take us to another part of the coast. The note was signed by the proper people; so we let the Irishman go back alone in the boat, and allowed the pilot to exercise his lawful authority over the brig. He kept us off from the land till noon the next day his instructions, seemingly, ordering him to keep well out of sight of the shore. We only altered our course in the afternoon, so as to close in with the land again a little before midnight.

This same pilot was as ill-looking a vagabond as ever I saw; a skinny, cowardly, quarrelsome fellow, who swore at the men in the vilest broken English, till they were every one of them ready to pitch him overboard. The skipper kept them quiet, and I kept them quiet; for the pilot being given us by our instructions, we were bound to make the best of him. Near nightfall, however, with the best will in the world to avoid it, I was unlucky enough to quarrel with him.

He wanted to go below with his pipe, and I stopped him, of course, because it was contrary to

orders. Upon that he tried to hustle by me, and I put him away with my hand. I never meant to push him down; but somehow I did. He picked himself up as quick as lightning, and pulled out his knife. I snatched it out of his hand, slapped his murderous face for him, and threw his weapon overboard. He gave me one ugly look, and walked aft. I didn't think much of the look then, but I remembered it a little too well afterwards.

We were close in with the land again, just as the wind failed us, between eleven and twelve that night, and dropped our anchor by the pilot's directions.

It was pitch dark, and a dead, airless calm. The skipper was on deck, with two of our best men for watch. The rest were below, except the pilot, who coiled himself up, more like a snake than a man, on the forecastle. It was not my watch till four in the morning. But I didn't like the look of the night, or the pilot, or the state of things generally, and I lay down on deck to get my nap there, and be ready for anything at a moment's notice. The last I remember was the skipper whispering to me that he didn't like the look of things either, and that he would go below and consult his instructions again. That is the last I remember, before the slow, heavy, regular roll of the old brig rocked me off to sleep.

I was ~~awoken~~ by a scuffle on the forecastle and a gag in my mouth. There was a man on my breast and a man on my legs, and I was bound hand and foot in half a minute.

The brig was in the hands of the Spaniards. They were swarming all over her. I heard six heavy splashes in the water, one after another. I saw the captain stabbed to the heart as he came running up the companion, and I heard a seventh splash in the water. Except myself, every soul of us on board had been murdered and thrown into the sea. Why I was left, I couldn't think, till I saw the pilot stoop over me with a lantern and look to make sure who I was. There was a devilish grin on his face, and he nodded his head at me, as much as to say, " *You* were the man who hustled me down and slapped my face, and I mean to play the game of cat and mouse with you in return for it!"

I could neither move nor speak, but I could see the Spaniards take off the main hatch ready for getting up the cargo. A quarter of an hour afterwards I heard the sweeps of a schooner, or other small vessel, in the water. The strange craft was laid alongside of us, and the Spaniards set to work to discharge our cargo into her. They all worked hard except the pilot; and he came from time to time, with his lantern, to have another look at me, and to grin and nod always in the same devilish way. I am old enough now not to be ashamed of confessing the truth, and I don't mind acknowledging that the pilot frightened me.

The fright, and the bonds, and the gag, and the not being able to stir hand or foot, had nearly worn me out by the time the Spaniards gave over work. This was just as the dawn broke. They had moved a good part of our cargo on board their vessel, but nothing like all of it, and they were sharp enough to

be off with what they had got before daylight.

I need hardly say that I had made up my mind by this time to the worst I could think of. The pilot, it was clear enough, was one of the spies of the enemy, who had wormed himself into the confidence of our consignees without being suspected. He, or more likely his employers, had got knowledge enough of us to suspect what our cargo was; we had been anchored for the night in the safest place for them to surprise us; and we had paid the penalty of having a small crew, and consequently an insufficient watch. All this was clear enough but what did the pilot mean to do with *me*?

On the word of a man, it makes my flesh creep now, only to tell you what he did with me.

After all the rest of them were out of the brig, except the pilot and two Spanish seamen, these last took me up, bound and gagged as I was, lowered me into the hold of the vessel, and laid me along on the floor, lashing me to it with ropes' ends, so that I could just turn from one side to the other, but could not roll myself fairly over, so as to change my place. They then left me. Both of them were the worse for liquor; but the devil of a pilot was sober—mind that!—as sober as I am at the present moment.

I lay in the dark for a little while, with my heart thumping as if it was going to jump out of me. I lay for about five minutes or so when the pilot came down into the hold alone.

He had the captain's cursed flat candlestick and a carpenter's awl in one hand, and a long thin twist of cotton-yarn, well oiled, in the other. He put the candle-

stick, with a new candle lighted in it, down on the floor about two feet from my face, and close against the side of the vessel. The light was feeble enough; but it was sufficient to show a dozen barrels of gunpowder or more left all round me in the hold of the brig. I began to suspect what he was after the moment I noticed the barrels. Horror laid hold of me from head to foot, and the sweat poured off my face like water.

I saw him go next to one of the barrels of powder standing against the side of the vessel in a line with the candle, and about three feet, or rather more, away from it. He bored a hole in the side of the barrel with his awl, and the horrid powder came trickling out, as black as hell, and dripped into the hollow of his hand, which he held to catch it. When he had got a good handful, he stopped up the hole by jamming one end of his oiled twist of cotton-yarn fast into it, and he then rubbed the powder into the whole length of the yarn till he had blackened every hair-breadth of it.

The next thing he did—as true as I sit here, as true as the heaven above us all—the next thing he did was to carry the free end of his long, lean, black, frightful slow-match to the lighted candle alongside my face. He tied it (the villain!) in several folds round the tallow candle, about a third of the distance down, measuring from the flame of the wick to the lip of the candlestick. He did that; he looked to see that my lashings were all safe; and then he put his face close to mine, and whispered in my ear. “Blow up with the brig!”

He was on deck again the moment after, and he

and the two others shut the hatch down over me. At the farthest end from where I lay they had not fitted it down quite true, and I saw a blink of daylight glimmering in when I looked in that direction. I heard the sweeps of the schooner fall into the waters -plash! splash! fainter and fainter, as they swept the vessel out in the dead calm, to be ready for the wind in the offing. Fainter and fainter, splash, splash! for a quarter of an hour or more.

While those receding sounds were in my ear, my eyes were fixed on the candle.

It had been freshly lighted. If left to itself, it would burn for between six and seven hours. The slow-match was twisted round it about a third of the way down, and therefore the flame would be about two hours reaching it. There I lay, gagged, bound, lashed to the floor; seeing my own life burning down with the candle by my side there I lay, alone on the sea, doomed to be blown to atoms, and to see that doom drawing on, nearer and nearer with every fresh second of time, through the next two hours; powerless to help myself, and speechless to call for help to others. The wonder to me is that I didn't cheat the flame, the slow-match, and the powder, and die of the horror of my situation before my first half-hour was out in the hold of the brig.

I can't exactly say how long I kept the command of my senses after I had ceased to hear the splash of the schooner's sweeps in the water. I can trace back everything I did and everything I thought, up to a certain point; but, once past that, I get all astray and lose myself in my memory now, much as I lost myself

in my own feelings at the time.

The moment the hatch was covered over me, I began, as every other man would have begun in my place, with a frantic effort to free my hands. In the mad panic I was in, I cut my flesh with the lashings as if they had been knife-blades, but I never moved them. There was less chance still of freeing my legs, or of tearing myself from the fastenings that held me to the floor. I gave in when I was all but suffocated for want of breath. The gag, you will please to remember, was a terrible enemy to me; I could only breathe freely through my nose and that is but a poor vent when a man is straining his strength as far as ever it will go.

I gave in and lay quiet, and got my breath again, my eyes glaring and straining at the candle all the time.

While I was staring at it, the notion struck me of trying to blow out the flame by pumping a long breath at it suddenly through my nostrils. It was too high above me, and too far away from me, to be reached in that fashion. I tried, and tried, and tried; and then I gave in again, and lay quiet, always with my eyes glaring at the candle, and the candle glaring at *me*. The splash of the schooner's sweeps was very faint by this time. I could only just hear them in the morning stillness. Splash! splash!—fainter and fainter—splash! splash!

Without exactly feeling my mind going, I began to feel it getting queer as early as this. The snuff of the candle was growing taller and taller, and the length of tallow between the flame and the slow-match,

which was the length of my life, was getting shorter and shorter. I calculated that I had rather less than an hour and a half to live.

An hour and a half! Was there a chance in that time of a boat pulling off to the brig from shore? Whether the land near which the vessel was anchored was in possession of our side, or in possession of the enemy's side, I made out that they must, sooner or later, send to hail the brig merely because she was a stranger in those parts. The question for *me* was, how soon? The sun had not risen yet, as I could tell by looking through the chink in the hatch. There was no coast village near us, as we all knew, before the brig was seized, by seeing no lights on shore. There was no wind, as I could tell by listening, to bring any strange vessel near. If I had had six hours to live, there might have been a chance for me, reckoning from sunrise to noon. But with an hour and a half, which had dwindled to an hour and a quarter by this time— or, in other words, with the earliness of the morning, the uninhabited coast, and the dead calm all against me there was not the ghost of a chance. As I felt that, I had another struggle—the last—with my bonds, and only cut myself the deeper for my pains.

I gave in once more, and lay quiet, and listened for the splash of the sweeps.

Gone! Not a sound could I hear but the blowing of a fish now and then on the surface of the sea, and the creak of the brig, as she rolled gently from side to side with the little swell there was on the quiet water.

An hour and a quarter. The wick grew terribly

as the quarter slipped away, and the charred top of it began to thicken and spread out mushroom-shape. It would fall off soon. Would it fall off red-hot, and would the swing of the brig send it over the side of the candle and let it down on the slow-match? If it would, I had about ten minutes to live instead of an hour.

This discovery set my mind for a minute on a new tack altogether. I began to ponder with myself what sort of a death blowing up might be. Painful! Well, it would be, surely, too sudden for that. Perhaps just one crash inside me, or outside me, or both; and nothing more! Perhaps not even a crash; that and death and the scattering of this living body of mine into millions of fiery sparks, might all happen in the same instant! I couldn't make it out: I couldn't settle how it would be. The minute of calmness in my mind left it before I had half done thinking; and I got all abroad again.

When I came back to my thoughts, or when they came back to me, (I can't say which), the wick was awfully tall, the flame was burning with a smoke above it, the charred top was broad and red, and heavily spreading out to its fall.

My despair and horror at seeing it took me in a new way, which was good and right, at any rate, for my poor soul. I tried to pray -in my own heart, you will understand, for the gag put all lip-praying out of my power. I tried, but the candle seemed to burn it up in me. I struggled hard to force my eyes from the slow, murdering flame, and to look up through the chink in the hatch at the blessed daylight. I tried

once, tried twice; and gave it up. I next tried only to shut my eyes, and keep them shut—once—twice—and the second time I did it. “God bless old mother, and sister Lizzie; God keep them both, and forgive *me*.” That was all I had time to say, in my own heart, before my eyes opened again, in spite of me, and the flame of the candle flew into them, flew all over me, and burned up the rest of my thoughts in an instant.

I couldn’t hear the fish blowing now; I couldn’t hear the creak of the brig; I couldn’t think; I couldn’t feel the sweat of my own death agony on my face—I could only look at the heavy, charred top of the wick. It swelled, tottered, bent over to one side, dropped—red-hot at the moment of its fall—black and harmless, even before the swing of the brig had sent it over into the bottom of the candlestick.

I caught myself laughing.

Yes! laughing at the safe fall of the bit of wick. But for the gag, I should have screamed with laughing. As it was, I shook with it inside me—shook till the blood was in my head, and I was all but suffocated for want of breath. I had just sense enough left to feel that my own horrid laughter at that awful moment was a sign of my brain going at last. I had just sense enough left to make another struggle before my mind broke loose like a frightened horse, and ran away with me.

One comforting look at the blink of daylight through the hatch was what I tried for once more. The fight to force my eyes from the candle and to get that one look at the daylight was the hardest I had had yet; and I lost the fight. The flame had hold of

my eyes as fast as the lashings had hold of my hands. I couldn't look away from it. I couldn't even shut my eyes, when I tried that next, for the second time. There was the wick growing tall once more. There was the space of unburned candle between the light and the slow-match shortened to an inch or less.

How much life did that inch leave me? Three-quarters of an hour? Half an hour? Fifty minutes? Twenty minutes? Steady! an inch of tallow-candle would burn longer than twenty minutes. An inch of tallow! the notion of a man's body and soul being kept together by an inch of tallow! Wonderful! Why, the greatest king that sits on a throne can't keep a man's body and soul together; and here's an inch of tallow that can do what the king can't! There's something to tell Mother when I get home which will surprise her more than all the rest of my voyages put together. I laughed inwardly again at the thought of that, and shook and swelled and suffocated myself, till the light of the candle leaped in through my eyes, and licked up the laughter, and burned it out of me, and made me all empty and cold and quiet once more.

Mother and Lizzie—I don't know when they came back into my thoughts, but they did come back—it seemed to my disordered mind that they were there bodily before me, in the hold of the brig.

Yes: there was Lizzie, or so it seemed, just as light-hearted as usual, laughing at me. Laughing? Well, why not? Steady! she's crying now—spinning round and round in a fiery mist, wringing her hands, screaming for help—fainter and fainter, like the

splash of the schooner's sweeps. Gone—burned up in the fiery mist! Mist? fire? Everything seemed to be all fire and all mist—no hearing, no seeing, no thinking, no feeling—the brig, the sea, my own self, the whole world, all gone together!

After what I've just told you, I know nothing and remember nothing, till I woke up, (as it seemed to me), in a comfortable bed, with two rough-and-ready men like myself sitting on each side of my pillow, and a gentleman standing watching me at the foot of the bed. It was about seven in the morning. My sleep, (or what seemed like my sleep to me), had lasted longer than eight months—I was among my own countrymen in the island of Trinidad—the men at each side of my pillow were my keepers,—and the gentleman standing at the foot of the bed was the doctor. What I said and did in those eight months, I never have known, and never shall. I woke out of it as if it had been one long sleep—that's all I know.

It was another two months or more before the doctor thought it safe to answer the questions I asked him.

The brig had been anchored, just as I had supposed, off a part of the coast which was lonely enough to make the Spaniards pretty sure of no interruption, so long as they managed their murderous work quietly under cover of night.

My life had not been saved from the shore, but from the sea. An American vessel had sighted the brig as the sun rose; and the captain having his time on his hands in consequence of the calm, and seeing a vessel anchored where no vessel had any reason to

be, had manned one of his boats and sent his mate with it, to look a little closer into the matter, and bring back a report of what he saw.

What he saw, when he and his men found the brig deserted and boarded her, was a gleam of candle-light through the chink in the hatch-way. The flame was within about a thread's breadth of the slow-match when he lowered himself into the hold; and if he had not had the sense and coolness to cut the match in two with his knife before he touched the candle, he and his men might have been blown up along with the brig as well as me. The match caught, and turned into spluttering red fire, in the very act of putting the candle out; and if the communication with the powder-barrel had not been cut off, the Lord only knows what might have happened.

What became of the Spanish schooner and the pilot, I have never heard from that day to this.

As for the brig, the Yankees took her, as they took me, to Trinidad, and claimed their salvage, and got it, I hope, for their own sakes. I was landed just in the same state as when they rescued me from the brig—that is to say, out of my senses. But please to remember, it was a long time ago; and, take my word for it, I was discharged cured, as I have told you. Bless your hearts, I'm all right now, as you may see. I'm a little shaken by telling the story, as is only natural—a little shaken, my good friends, that's all.

Wilde Collins: (1824—1889) wrote many novels among which the most outstanding is *The Woman in White*. He also wrote a number of short stories of which "*Blow up with the Brig?*" from the volume *After Dark* is a notable example.

Ship-shape: in good order.

Spanish Main: a name given to the North coast of South America and to the shores of the former Central American Provinces of Spain adjacent to the Caribbean Sea; the name is often popularly applied to the Caribbean Sea itself.

Leeward Islands: in the West Indies.

Turned in: retired to bed.

Hove the brig to: brought the brig to a standstill

Companion: used in this sense means the staircase leading from the lower part of the ship to the deck.

Hatch: the trap-door over the opening in the deck of a ship through which the cargo is lowered into the hold sometimes used for the opening itself.

Sweep: a large oar

Tack: literally the course of a ship, here used figuratively.

Yankees: Americans

Trinidad: a town in the West Indies.

A TALE OF NEGATIVE GRAVITY

FRANK R. STOCKTON.

My wife and I were staying at a small town in northern Italy; and on a certain pleasant afternoon in spring we had taken a walk of six or seven miles to see the sun set behind some low mountains to the west of the town. Most of our walk had been along a hard, smooth highway, and then we turned into a series of narrower roads, sometimes bordered by walls, and sometimes by light fences of reed or cane. Nearing the mountain, to a low spur of which we intended to ascend, we easily scaled a wall about four feet high, and found ourselves upon pasture land, which led, sometimes by gradual ascents, and sometimes by bits of rough climbing, to the spot we wished to reach. We were afraid we were a little late, and therefore hurried on, running up the grassy hills, and bounding briskly over the rough and rocky places. I carried a knapsack strapped firmly to my shoulders, and under my wife's arm was a large, soft basket of a kind much used by tourists. Her arm was passed through the handles, and around the bottom of the basket, which she pressed closely to her side. This was the way she always carried it. The basket contained two bottles of wine, one sweet for my wife, and another a little acid for myself. Sweet wines give me a headache.

When we reached the grassy bluff, well known thereabouts to lovers of sunset views, I stepped

immediately to the edge to graze upon the scene, but my wife sat down to take a sip of wine, for she was very thirsty; and then, leaving her basket, she came to my side. The scene was indeed one of great beauty. Beneath us stretched a wide valley of many shades of green, with a little river running through it, and red-tiled houses here and there. Beyond rose a range of mountains, pink, pale-green, and purple where their tips caught the reflection of the setting sun, and of a rich grey-green in shadows. Beyond all was the blue Italian sky, illumined by an especially fine sunset.

My wife and I are Americans, and at the time of this story were middle-aged people and very fond of seeing in each other's company whatever there was of interest or beauty around us. We had a son about twenty-two years old, of whom we were also very fond, but he was not with us, being at that time a student in Germany. Although we had good health, we were not very robust people, and, under ordinary circumstances, not much given to long country tramps. I was of medium size, without much muscular development, while my wife was quite stout, and growing stouter.

The reader may, perhaps, be somewhat surprised that a middle-aged couple, not very strong, or very good walkers, the lady loaded with a basket containing two bottles of wine and a metal drinking-cup, and the gentleman carrying a heavy knapsack, filled with all sorts of odds and ends, strapped to his shoulders, should set off on a seven-mile walk, jump over a wall, run up a hill-side, and yet feel in very good trim to enjoy a sunset view. This peculiar state of things I will

proceed to explain.

I had been a professional man, but some years before had retired upon a very comfortable income. I had always been very fond of scientific pursuits, and now made these the occupation and pleasure of much of my leisure time. Our home was in a small town; and in a corner of my grounds I built a laboratory, where I carried on my work and my experiments. I had long been anxious to discover the means of producing and controlling a natural force, which I called negative gravity. Positive gravity attracts everything toward the centre of the earth. Negative gravity, therefore, would be that power which repels everything from the centre of the earth. The advantages of such a discovery could scarcely be described, in a word, it would lighten the burdens of the world.

I will not touch upon the labours and disappointments of several years. It is enough to say that at last I discovered a method of producing, storing, and controlling negative gravity.

The mechanism of my invention was rather complicated, but the method of operating it was very simple. A strong metallic case, about eight inches long, and half as wide, contained the machinery for producing the force; and this was put into action by means of the pressure of a screw worked from the outside. As soon as this pressure was produced, negative gravity began to be evolved and stored, and the greater the pressure the greater the force. As the screw was moved outward, and the pressure diminished the force decreased, and when the screw was withdrawn to its fullest extent, the action of negative

gravity entirely ceased. Thus this force could be produced or dissipated at will to such degrees as might be desired.

When this little apparatus worked to my satisfaction, I called my wife into my laboratory and explained to her my invention and its value. She had known that I had been at work with an important object, but I had never told her what it was. I had said that if I succeeded I would tell her all, but if I failed she need not be troubled with the matter at all. Being a very sensible woman, this satisfied her perfectly. Now I explained everything to her, the construction of the machine, and the wonderful uses to which this invention could be applied. I told her that it could diminish, or entirely dissipate, the weight of objects of any kind. A heavily loaded wagon, with two of these instruments fastened to its sides, and each screwed to a proper force, would be so lifted and supported that it would press upon the ground as lightly as an empty cart, and a small horse could draw it with ease. A bale of cotton, with one of these machines attached, could be handled and carried by a boy. A car, with a number of these machines, could be made to rise in the air like a balloon. Everything, in fact, that was heavy could be made light. I told her of many ways in which the invention might be used, and would have told her of many more if she had not suddenly burst into tears.

"The world has gained something wonderful," she exclaimed, between her sobs. "but I have lost a husband!"

"What do you mean by that? I asked, in surprise.

"I haven't minded it so far," she said, "because it gave you something to do, and it pleased you, and it never interfered with our home pleasures and our home life. But now that is all over. You will never be your own master again. It will succeed, I am sure, and you may make a great deal of money, but we don't need money. What we need is the happiness which we have always had until now. Now there will be patents, and lawsuits, and experiments, and people calling you a humbug, and other people saying they discovered it long ago, and all sorts of persons coming to see you, and you'll be obliged to go to all sorts of places, and you will be an altered man, and we shall never be happy again. Millions of money will not repay us for the happiness we have lost."

These words of my wife struck me with much force. Before I had called her, my mind had begun to be filled and perplexed with ideas of what I ought to do now that the great invention was perfected. Until now the matter had not troubled me at all. I had taken great pleasure in the work, but I had never allowed myself to be too much absorbed by it. But now everything was different. I began to feel that it was due to myself and to my fellow-beings, that I should properly put this invention before the world. And how should I set about it? What steps should I take? I must make no mistakes. When the matter should become known hundreds of scientific people might set themselves to work; how could I tell but that they might discover other methods of producing the same effect. I must guard myself against a great

many things. I must get patents in all parts of the world. Already, as I have said, my mind began to be troubled and perplexed with these things. A turmoil of this sort did not suit my age or disposition. I could not but agree with my wife that the joys of a quiet and contented life were now about to be disturbed.

"My dear," said I, "I believe with you that the thing will do us more harm than good. If it were not for depriving the world of the invention I would throw the whole thing to the winds. And yet," I added, regretfully, "I had expected a great deal of personal gratification from the use of this invention."

"Now, listen," said my wife, eagerly, "don't you think it would be best to do this, use the thing as much as you please for your own amusement and satisfaction but let the world wait. It has waited a long time, and let it wait a little longer. When we are dead, let Herbert have the invention. He will then be old enough to judge for himself whether it will be better to take advantage of it for his own profit, or simply to give it to the public for nothing. It would be cheating him if we were to do the latter, but it would also be doing him a great wrong if we were, at his age, to load him with such a heavy responsibility. Besides, if he took it up, you could not help going into it, too."

I took my wife's advice. I wrote a careful and complete account of the invention, and, sealing it up, I gave it to my lawyers to be handed to my son after my death. If he died first, I would make other arrangements. Then I determined to get all the good and fun out of the thing that was possible without telling anyone anything about it. Even Herbert, who was away

from home, was not to be told of the invention.

The first thing I did was to buy a strong leather knapsack, and inside this I fastened my little machine, with a screw so arranged that it could be worked from the outside. Strapping this firmly to my shoulders, my wife gently turned the screw at the back until the upward tendency of the knapsack began to lift and sustain me. When I felt myself so gently supported and upheld that I seemed to weigh only about thirty or forty pounds, I would set out for a walk. The ~~knapsack~~ did not raise me from the ground, but it gave me a very buoyant step. It was no labour at all to walk; it was a delight, an ecstasy. With the strength of a man and the weight of a child, I gaily strode along. The first day I walked half a dozen miles at a very brisk pace, and came back without feeling in the least degree tired. These walks now became one of the greatest joys of my life. When nobody was looking I would bound over a fence, sometimes just touching it with one hand, and sometimes not touching it at all. I delighted in rough places. I sprang over streams. I jumped and I ran. I felt like Mercury himself.

I now set about making another machine, so that my wife could accompany me in my walks; but when it was finished she positively refused to use it. "I can't wear a knapsack," she said, "and there is no other good way of fastening it to me. Besides, everybody here knows I am no walker, and it would only make them talk."

I occasionally made use of this second machine, but I will only give one instance of its application. Some repairs were needed to the foundation-walls of

my barn, and a two-horse wagon, loaded with building-stone, had been brought into my yard and left there. In the evening, when the men had gone away, I took my two machines and fastened them with strong chains, one on each side of the loaded wagon. Then, gradually turning the screws, the wagon was so lifted that its weight became very greatly diminished. We had an old donkey which used to belong to Herbert, and which was now occasionally used with a small cart to bring packages from the station. I went into the barn and put the harness on the little fellow, and, bringing him out to the wagon, I attached him to it. In this position he looked very funny, with a long pole sticking out in front of him and the great wagon behind him. When all was ready, I touched him up; and, to my great delight, he moved off with the two-horse load of stone as if he were drawing his own cart. I led him out into the public road, along which he proceeded without difficulty. He was an opinionated little beast, and sometimes stopped, not liking the peculiar manner in which he was harnessed; but a touch of the switch made him move on, and I soon turned him and brought the wagon back into the yard. This determined the success of my invention in one of its most important uses, and with a satisfied heart I put the donkey into the stable and went into the house.

Our trip to Europe was made a few months after this, and was mainly on our son Herbert's account. He, poor fellow, was in great trouble, and so, therefore, were we. He had become engaged, with our full consent, to the daughter of a gentleman whom we esteemed very highly. Herbert was young to be engaged to be

married, but as we felt that he would never find a girl to make him so good a wife, we were entirely satisfied, especially as it was agreed on all hands that the marriage was not to take place for some time. It seemed to us that in marrying Janet Gilbert, Herbert would secure for himself, at the very beginning of his career, the most important element of a happy life. But suddenly, without any reason that seemed to us justifiable, Mr. Gilbert, the only surviving parent of Janet, broke off the match; and he and his daughter soon after left the town for a trip to the West.

This blow nearly broke poor Herbert's heart. He gave up his professional studies and came home to us, and for a time we thought he would be seriously ill. Then we took him to Europe, and after a Continental tour of a month or two we left him, at his own request, in Germany, where he thought it would do him good to go to work again. Then we went down to the little town in Italy where my story first finds us. My wife had suffered much in mind and body on her son's account, and for this reason I was anxious that she should take outdoor exercise, and enjoy as much as possible the bracing air of the country. I had brought with me both my little machines. One was still in my knapsack, and the other I had fastened to the inside of an enormous family trunk. As one is obliged to pay for nearly every pound of baggage on the Continent, this saved me a great deal of money. Everything heavy was packed into this great trunk, books, papers, the bronze, iron, and marble relics we had picked up, and all the articles that usually weigh down a tourist's baggage. I screwed up the negative gravity apparatus

until the trunk could be handled with great ease by an ordinary porter. I could have made it weigh nothing at all, but this, of course, I did not wish to do. The lightness of my baggage, however, had occasioned some comment, and I had overheard remarks which were not altogether complimentary about people travelling around with empty trunks ; but this only amused me.

Desirous that my wife should have the advantage of my invention while taking our walks, I had removed the machine from the trunk and fastened it inside the basket, which she could carry under her arm. This assisted her wonderfully. When one arm was tired she put the basket under the other, and thus, with one hand on my arm, she could easily keep up with the free and buoyant steps my knapsack enabled me to take. She did not object to long tramps here, because nobody knew that she was not a walker, and she always carried some wine or other refreshment in the basket, not only because it was pleasant to have with us, but because it seemed ridiculous to go about carrying an empty basket.

There were English-speaking people stopping at the hotel where we were, but they seemed more fond of driving than walking, and none of them offered to accompany us on our rambles, for which we were very glad. There was one man there, however, who was a great walker. He was an Englishman, a member of an Alpine Club, and generally went about dressed in a knickerbocker suit, with grey woollen stockings covering an enormous pair of calves. One evening this gentleman was talking to me and some others about the ascent of the Matterhorn, and I took occasion to

deliver in pretty strong language my opinion upon such exploits. I declared them to be useless, and, if the climber had any one who loved him, wicked.

"Even if the weather should permit a view," I said, "what is that compared to the terrible risk to life? Under certain circumstances," I added, thinking of my invention "such ascents might be freed of danger, and be quite admissible; but ordinarily they should be frowned upon by the intelligent public."

The Alpine Club man looked at me, especially regarding my somewhat slight figure and thinnish legs.

"It's all very well for you to talk in that way," he said, "because it is easy to see that you are not up to that sort of thing."

"In conversations of this kind," I replied, "I never make personal allusions; but since you have chosen to do so, I feel inclined to invite you to walk with me to-morrow to the top of the mountain to the north of this town."

"I'll do it," he said, "at any time you choose to name." And as I left the room soon afterwards I heard him laugh.

The next afternoon, about two o'clock, the Alpine Club man and I set out together for the mountain.

"What have you got in your knapsack?" he said,

"A hammer to use if I come across geological specimens, a field-glass, a flask of wine, and some other things."

"I wouldn't carry any weight, if I were you," he said.

"Oh, I don't mind it," I answered, and off we started.

The mountain to which we were bound was about two miles from the town. Its nearest side was steep, and in places almost precipitous, but it sloped away more gradually toward the north, and up that side a road led by many windings to a village near the summit. It was not a very high mountain, but it would do for an afternoon's climb.

"I suppose you want to go up by the road," said my companion.

"Oh, no," I answered, "we won't go so far around as that. There is a path up this side, along which I have seen men driving their goats. I prefer to take that."

"All right, if you say so," he answered, with a smile; "but you'll find it pretty tough."

After a time he remarked:

"I wouldn't walk so fast, if I were you."

"Oh, I like to step along briskly," I said. And briskly on we went.

My wife had screwed up the machine in the knapsack more than usual, and walking seemed scarcely any effort at all. I carried a long alpenstock, and when we reached the mountain and began the ascent, I found that with the help of this and my knapsack I could go uphill at a wonderful rate. My companion had taken the lead, so as to show me how to climb. Taking a path over some rocks, I quickly passed him and went ahead. After that it was impossible for him to keep up with me. I ran up steep places, I cut off the windings of the path by lightly clambering over

rocks, and even when I followed the beaten track my step was as rapid as if I had been walking on level ground.

"Look here!" shouted the Alpine Club man from below, "you'll kill yourself if you go at that rate! That's no way to climb mountains."

"It's my way!" I cried. And on I skipped.

Twenty minutes after I arrived at the summit, my companion joined me, puffing, and wiping his red face with his handkerchief.

"Confound it!" he cried, "I never came up a mountain so fast in my life."

"You need not have hurried," I said, coolly.

"I was afraid something would happen to you," he growled, "and I wanted to stop you. I never saw a person climb in such an utterly absurd way."

"I don't see why you should call it absurd," I said, smiling with an air of superiority. "I arrived here in a perfectly comfortable condition, neither heated nor wearied."

He made no answer, but walked off to a little distance, fanning himself with his hat and growling words which I did not catch. After a time I proposed to descend.

"You must be careful as you go down," he said. "It is much more dangerous to go down steep places than to climb up."

"I am always prudent," I answered, and started in advance. I found the descent of the mountain much more pleasant than the ascent. It was positively exhilarating. I jumped from rocks and bluffs eight and ten feet in height, and touched the ground as

gently as if I had stepped down but two feet. I ran down steep paths, and, with the aid of my alpenstock, stopped myself in an instant. I was careful to avoid dangerous places, but the runs and jumps I made were such as no man had ever made before upon that mountain-side. Once only I heard my companion's voice.

"You'll break your neck!" he yelled.

"Never fear!" I called back, and soon left him far above.

When I reached the bottom I would have waited for him, but my activity had warmed me up, and as a cool evening breeze was beginning to blow, I thought it better not to stop and take cold. Half an hour after my arrival at the hotel I came downstairs cool, fresh, and dressed for dinner, and just in time to meet the Alpine man as he entered, hot, dusty, and growling.

"Excuse me for not waiting for you," I said; but without stopping to hear my reason, he muttered something and passed into the house.

There was no doubt that what I had done gratified and tickled my vanity.

"I think now," I said, when I related the matter to my wife, "that he will scarcely say that I am not up to that sort of thing."

"I am not sure," she answered, "that it was exactly fair. He did not know how you were assisted."

"It was fair enough," I said. "He is enabled to climb well by the inherited vigour of his constitution and by his training. He did not tell me

what methods of exercise he used to get those great muscles upon his legs. I am enabled to climb by the exercise of my intellect. My method is my business and his method is his business. It is all perfectly fair."

Still she persisted :

"He *thought* that you climbed with your legs, and not with your head."

And now, after this long explanation, necessary to show how a middle-aged couple of slight pedestrian ability, and loaded with a heavy knapsack and basket, should have started out on a rough walk and climb, fourteen miles in all, we will return to ourselves, standing on the little bluff and gazing out upon the sunset view. When the sky began to fade a little, we turned from it and prepared to go back to the town.

"Where is the basket?" I said.

"I left it here," answered my wife. "I unscrewed the machine and it lay perfectly flat."

"Did you afterwards take out the bottles?" I asked, seeing them lying on the grass.

"Yes, I believe I did, I had to take out yours in order to get mine."

"Then," said I, after looking all about the grassy patch on which we stood, "I am afraid you did not entirely unscrew the instrument, and that when the weight of the bottles was removed, the basket gently rose into the air."

"It may be so," she said, lugubriously. "The basket was behind me as I drank my wine."

"I believe that is just what has happened," I

said. "Look up there! I vow that is our basket!"

I pulled out my field-glass and directed it at a little speck high above our heads. It was the basket floating high in the air. I gave the glass to my wife to look, but she did not want to use it.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "I can't walk home without that basket. It's perfectly dreadful!" And she looked as if she were going to cry.

"Do not distress yourself," I said, although I was a good deal disturbed myself. "We shall get home very well. You shall put your hand on my shoulder, while I put my arm around you. Then you can screw up my machine a good deal higher, and it will support us both. In this way I am sure that we shall get on very well."

We carried out this plan, and managed to walk on with moderate comfort. To be sure, with the knapsack pulling me upward, and the weight of my wife pulling me down, the straps hurt me somewhat, which they had not done before. We did not spring lightly over the wall into the road, but, still clinging to each other, we clambered awkwardly over it. The road for the most part declined gently toward the town, and with moderate ease we made our way along it. But we walked much more slowly than we had done before, and it was quite dark when we reached our hotel. If it had not been for the light inside the courtyard, it would have been difficult for us to find it. A travelling-carriage was standing before the entrance, and against the light. It was necessary to pass around it, and my wife went first. I attempted to follow her, but, strange to say, there was

nothing under my feet. I stepped vigorously, but only wagged my legs in the air. To my horror I found that I was rising in the air! I soon saw, by the light below me, that I was some fifteen feet from the ground. The carriage drove away, and in the darkness I was not noticed. Of course, I knew what had happened. The instrument in my knapsack had been screwed up to such an intensity, in order to support both myself and my wife, that when her weight was removed, the force of the negative gravity was sufficient to raise me from the ground. But I was glad to find that when I had risen to the height I have mentioned I did not go up any higher, but hung in the air, about on a level with the second tier of windows of the hotel.

I now began to try to reach the screw in my knapsack in order to reduce the force of the negative gravity; but, do what I would, I could not get my hand to it. The machine in the knapsack had been placed so as to support me in a well-balanced and comfortable way; and in doing this it had been impossible to set the screw so that I could reach it. But in a temporary arrangement of the kind this had not been considered necessary, as my wife always turned the screw for me until sufficient lifting-power had been attained.

When I found that I could not turn the screw I began to be much alarmed. Here I was, dangling in the air, without any means of reaching the ground. I could not expect my wife to return to look for me, as she would naturally suppose I had stopped to speak to someone. I thought of loosening myself from the

knapsack, but this would not do, for I should fall heavily, and either kill myself or break some of my bones. I did not dare to call for assistance, for, if any of the simple-minded inhabitants of the town had discovered me floating in the air, they would have taken me for a demon, and would probably have shot at me. A moderate breeze was blowing, and it wafted me gently down the street. If it had blown me against a tree I would have seized it, and have endeavoured to climb down it; but there were no trees. There was a dim street lamp here and there, but reflectors above them threw their light upon the pavement, and none up to me. On many accounts I was glad that the night was so dark, for, much as I desired to get down, I wanted no one to see me in my strange position, which, to any one but myself and my wife, would be utterly unaccountable. If I could have risen as high as the roofs I might have got on one of them, and, tearing off an armful of tiles, so have loaded myself that I should have been heavy enough to descend. But I did not rise to the eaves of any of the houses. If there had been a telegraph-pole, or anything of the kind that I could have clung to, I would have taken off the knapsack, and would have endeavoured to scramble down as well as I could. But there was nothing to which I could cling. Even the water-spouts, if I could have reached the face of the houses, were imbedded in the walls. At an open window, near which I was slowly blown, I saw two little boys going to bed by the light of a dim candle. I was dreadfully afraid that they would see me and raise an alarm. I actually came so near

to the window that I threw out one foot and pushed against the wall with such force that I went nearly across the street. I thought I caught sight of a frightened look on the face of one of the boys; but of this I am not sure, and I heard no cries. I still floated, dangling, down the street. What was to be done? Should I call out? In that case, if I were not shot or stoned, my strange predicament, and the secret of my invention, would be exposed to the world. If I did not do this, I must either let myself drop and be killed or mangled, or hang there and die. When, during the course of the night, the air became more rarefied, I might rise higher and higher perhaps to an altitude of one or two hundred feet. It would then be impossible for people to reach me and get me down, even if they were convinced that I was not a demon. I should then expire, and when the birds of the air had eaten all of me that they could devour, I should for ever hang above the town a dangling skeleton, with a knapsack on its back.

Such thoughts were not re-assuring, and I determined that if I could find no means of getting down without assistance, I would call out and run all risks; but so long as I could endure the tension of the straps. I would hold out and hope for a tree or a pole. Perhaps it might rain, and my wet clothes would then become so heavy that I should descend as low as the top of a lamp-post.

As this thought was passing through my mind, I saw a spark of light upon the street approaching me. I rightly imagined that it came from a tobacco-

pipe, and presently I heard a voice. It was that of the Alpine Club man. Of all people in the world I did not want him to discover me, and I hung as motionless as possible. The man was speaking to another person who was walking with him.

"He is crazy beyond a doubt," said the Alpine man. "Nobody but a maniac could have gone up and down that mountain as he did! He hasn't any muscles, and one need only look at him to know that he couldn't do any climbing in a natural way. It is only the excitement of insanity that gives him strength."

The two now stopped almost under me, and the speaker continued :

"Such things are very common with maniacs. At times they acquire an unnatural strength which is perfectly wonderful. I have seen a little fellow struggle and fight so that four strong men could not hold him."

Then the other person spoke :

"I am afraid what you say is too true," he remarked. "Indeed, I have known it for some time."

At these words my breath almost stopped. It was the voice of Mr. Gilbert, my townsman, and the father of Janet. It must have been he who had arrived in the travelling-carriage. He was acquainted with the Alpine Club man, and they were talking of me. Proper or improper, I listened with all my ears.

"It is a very sad case," Mr. Gilbert continued. "My daughter was engaged to marry his son, but I

broke off the match. I could not have her marry the son of a lunatic, and there could be no doubt of his condition. He has been seen—a man of his age, and the head of a family—load himself up with a heavy knapsack, which there was no possible necessity for him to carry; and go skipping along the road for miles, vaulting over fences and jumping over rocks and ditches like a young calf or a colt. I myself saw a most heart-rending instance of how a kindly man's nature can be changed by the derangement of his intellect. I was at some distance from his house, but I plainly saw him harness a little donkey which he owns to a large two-horse waggon loaded with stone, and beat and lash the poor little beast until it drew the heavy load some distance along the public road. I would have remonstrated with him on this horrible cruelty, but he had the waggon back in his yard before I could reach him."

"Oh, there can be no doubt of his insanity," said the Alpine Club man, "and he oughtn't to be allowed to travel about in this way. Some day he will pitch his wife over a precipice just for the fun of seeing her shoot through the air."

"I am sorry he is here," said Mr. Gilbert, "for it would be very painful to meet him. My daughter and I will retire very soon, and go away as early to-morrow morning as possible so as to avoid seeing him."

And then they walked back to the hotel.

For a few moments I hung, utterly forgetful of my condition, and absorbed in the consideration of these revelations. One idea now filled my mind.

Everything must be explained to Mr. Gilbert, even if it should be necessary to have him called to me, and for me to speak to him from the upper air.

Just then I saw something white approaching me along the road. My eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and I perceived that it was an up-turned face. I recognised the hurried gait, the form ; it was my wife. As she came near me I called her name, and in the same breath entreated her not to scream. It must have been an effort for her to restrain herself, but she did it.

"You must help me to get down," I said, "without anybody seeing us."

"What shall I do ?" she whispered.

"Try to catch hold of this string."

Taking a piece of twine from my pocket, I lowered one end to her. But it was too short : she could not reach it. I then tied my handkerchief to it, but still it was not long enough.

"I can get more string, or handkerchiefs," she whispered hurriedly.

"No," I said ; "you could not get them up to me. But, leaning against the hotel wall, on this side, in the corner, just inside the garden gate, are some fishing-poles. I have seen them there every day. You can easily find them in the dark. Go, please, and bring me one of those."

The hotel was not far away, and in a few minutes my wife returned with a fishing-pole. She stood on tip-toe, and reached it high in the air ; but all she could do was to strike my feet and legs with it. My most frantic exertions did not enable me to get my hands

low enough to touch it.

"Wait a minute," she said; and the rod was withdrawn.

I knew what she was doing. There was a hook and line attached to the pole, and with womanly dexterity she was fastening the hook to the extreme end of the rod. Soon she reached up, and gently struck at my legs. After a few attempts the hook caught in my trousers, a little below my right knee. Then there was a slight pull, a long scratch down my leg, and the hook was stopped by the top of my boot. Then came a steady downward pull, and I felt myself descending. Gently and firmly the rod was drawn down; carefully the lower end was kept free from the ground: and in a few moments my ankle was seized with a vigorous grasp. Then someone seemed to climb up me. my feet touched the ground, an arm was thrown around my neck, the hand of another arm was busy at the back of my knapsack, and I soon stood firmly in the road, entirely free from negative gravity.

"Oh, that I should have forgotten," sobbed my wife, "and that I should have dropped your arms, and let you go up into the air! At first I thought that you had stopped below, and it was only a little while ago that the truth flashed upon me. Then I rushed out and began looking up for you. I knew that you had wax matches in your pocket, and hoped that you would keep on striking them, so that you would be seen."

"But I did not wish to be seen," I said, as we hurried to the hotel; "and I can never be sufficiently

thankful that it was you who found me and brought me down. Do you know that it is Mr. Gilbert and his daughter who have just arrived? I must see him instantly. I will explain it all to you when I come upstairs."

I took off my knapsack and gave it to my wife, who carried it to our room, while I went to look for Mr. Gilbert. Fortunately I found him just as he was about to go up to his chamber. He took my offered hand, but looked at me sadly and gravely.

"Mr. Gilbert," I said, "I must speak to you in private. Let us step into this room. There is no one here."

"My friend," said Mr. Gilbert, "it will be much better to avoid discussing this subject. It is very painful to both of us, and no good can come from talking of it."

"You cannot now understand what it is I want to say to you," I replied. "Come in here, and in a few minutes you will be very glad that you listened to me."

My manner was so earnest and impressive that Mr. Gilbert was constrained to follow me, and we went into a small room, called the smoking-room, but in which people seldom smoked, and closed the door. I immediately began my statement. I told my old friend that I had discovered, by means that I need not explain at present, that he had considered me crazy, and that now the most important object of my life was to set myself right in his eyes. I thereupon gave him the whole history of my invention, and explained the reason of the actions that had appeared to him those

of a lunatic. I said nothing about the little incident of that evening. That was a mere accident, and I did not care now to speak of it.

Mr. Gilbert listened to me very attentively.

"Your wife is here?" he asked, when I had finished.

"Yes," I said; "and she will corroborate my story in every item, and no one could ever suspect her of being crazy. I will go and bring her to you."

In a few minutes my wife was in the room, had shaken hands with Mr. Gilbert, and had been told of my suspected madness. She turned pale, but smiled.

"He did act like a crazy man," she said, "but I never supposed that anybody would think him one." And tears came into her eyes.

"And now, my dear," said I, "perhaps you will tell Mr. Gilbert how I did all this."

And then she told him the story that I had told.

Mr. Gilbert looked from the one to the other of us with a troubled air.

"Of course I do not doubt either of you, or rather I do not doubt that you believe what you say. All would be right if I could bring myself to credit that such a force as that you speak of can possibly exist."

"That is a matter," said I, "which I can easily prove to you by actual demonstration. If you can wait a short time, until my wife and I have had something to eat—for I am nearly famished, and I am sure she must be—I will set your mind at rest upon that point."

"I will wait here," said Mr. Gilbert, "and smoke a cigar. Don't hurry yourselves. I shall be glad to

have some time to think about what you have told me."

When we had finished dinner, which had been set aside for us, I went upstairs and got my knapsack, and we both joined Mr. Gilbert in the smoking-room. I showed him the little machine, and explained, very briefly, the principle of its construction. I did not give any practical demonstration of its action, because there were people walking about the corridor and they might at any moment have come into the room; but, looking out of the window, I saw that the night was much clearer. The wind had dissipated the clouds, and the stars were shining brightly.

"If you will come up the street with me," said I to Mr. Gilbert, "I will show you how this thing works."

"That is just what I want to see," he answered.

"I will go with you," said my wife, and we started up the street.

When we were outside the little town, I found the starlight was quite sufficient for my purpose. The white roadway, the low walls, and the objects about us could easily be distinguished.

"Now," said I to Mr. Gilbert, "I want to put this knapsack on you, and let you see how it feels, and how it will help you to walk." To this he assented with some eagerness, and I strapped it firmly on him. "I will now turn this screw," said I, "and you will become lighter and lighter."

"Be very careful not to turn it too much," said my wife earnestly.

"Oh, you may depend on me for that," said I,

turning the screw very gradually.

Mr. Gilbert was a stout man, and I was obliged to give the screw a good many turns.

"There seems to be considerable hoist in it," he said directly. And then I put my arms around him, and found that I could raise him from the ground.

"Are you lifting me?" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes; I did it with ease," I answered.

"Upon—my—word!" ejaculated Mr. Gilbert.

I then gave the screw a half turn more, and told him to walk and run. He started off, at first slowly, then he made long strides, then he began to run, and then to skip and jump. It had been many years since Mr. Gilbert had skipped and jumped. No one was in sight, and he was free to gambol as much as he pleased. "Could you give it another turn?" said he, bounding up to me. "I want to try that wall." I put on a little more negative gravity, and he vaulted over a five-foot wall with great ease. In an instant he had leaped back into the road, and in two bounds was at my side. "I came down as light as a cat," he said. "There was never anything like it." And away he went up the road, taking steps at least eight feet long, leaving my wife and me laughing heartily at the agility of our stout friend. In a few minutes he was with us again. "Take it off," he said. "If I wear it any longer I shall want one myself, and then I shall be taken for a crazy man, and perhaps clapped into an asylum."

"Now," said I, as I turned back the screw before unstrapping the knapsack, "do you understand how I took long walks, and leaped and jumped; how I ran

uphill and downhill, and how the little donkey drew the loaded wagon?"

"I understand it all," cried he. "I take back all I ever said or thought about you, my friend."

"And Herbert may marry Janet?" cried my wife.

"*May* marry her!" cried Mr. Gilbert. "Indeed he *shall* marry her, if I have anything to say about it! My poor girl has been drooping ever since I told her it could not be."

My wife rushed at him, but whether she embraced him or only shook his hands I cannot say; for I had the knapsack in one hand, and was rubbing my eyes with the other.

"But, my dear fellow," said Mr. Gilbert directly, "if you still consider it to your interest to keep your invention a secret, I wish you had never made it. No one having a machine like that can help using it, and it is often quite as bad to be considered a maniac as to be one."

"My friend," I cried, with some excitement, "I have made up my mind on this subject. The little machine in this knapsack, which is the only one I now possess, has been a great pleasure to me. But I now know it has also been of the greatest injury indirectly to me and mine, not to mention some direct inconvenience and danger, which I will speak of another time. The secret lies with us three, and we will keep it. But the invention itself is too full of temptation and danger for any of us."

As I said this, I held the knapsack with one hand while I quickly turned the screw with the other. In a few moments it was high above my head, while I

with difficulty held it down by the straps. "Look!" I cried. Then I released my hold, and the knapsack shot into the air and disappeared into the upper gloom.

I was about to make a remark, but had no chance, for my wife threw herself upon my bosom, sobbing with joy.

"Oh, I am so glad—so glad!" she said. "And you will never make another?"

"Never another!" I answered.

"And now let us hurry in and see Janet," said my wife.

"You don't know how heavy and clumsy I feel," said Mr. Gilbert, striving to keep up with us as we walked back. "If I had worn that thing much longer, I should never have been willing to take it off!"

Janet had retired, but my wife went up to her room.

"I think she has felt it as much as our boy," she said, when she rejoined me. "But I tell you, my dear, I left a very happy girl in that little bed-chamber over the garden."

There were three very happy elderly people talking together until quite late that evening. "I shall write to Herbert to-night," I said, when we separated, "and tell him to meet us all in Geneva. It will do the young man no harm if we interrupt his studies just now."

"You must let me add a postscript to the letter," said Mr. Gilbert, "and I am sure it will require no knapsack with a screw in the back to bring him quickly to us."

And it did not.

There is a wonderful pleasure in tripping over the earth like a winged Mercury, and in feeling one's self relieved of much of that attraction of gravitation which drags us down to earth, and gradually makes the movement of our bodies but weariness and labour. But this pleasure is not to be compared, I think, to that given by the buoyancy and lightness of two young and loving hearts, reunited after a separation which they had supposed would last for ever.

What became of the basket and the knapsack, or whether they ever met in the upper air, I do not know. If they but float away and stay away from ken of mortal man, I shall be satisfied.

And whether or not the world will ever know more of the power of negative gravity depends entirely upon the disposition of my son, Herbert, when—after a good many years, I hope—he shall open the packet my lawyers have in keeping.

Frank R. Stockton (1834—1902), a well-known American writer, is famous for his unusual and ingenious plots. He wrote a number of novels and short stories. *A Tale of Negative Gravity* was included in the volume, *The Christmas Wreck and Other Stories*.

Good trim . good condition.

A patent ; a Government grant of the exclusive privilege of making or selling a new invention.

Mercury : one of the old Roman gods, the messenger of Jove.

Alpine Club : a club to which great climbers belong.

Matterhorn : a peak in the Swiss Alps.

Alpenstock : a long, iron-shod staff used in climbing the Alps and other mountains

Geneva : a town in Switzerland.

THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING!

MARY COLERIDGE.

It was not very quiet in the room where the king lay dying. People were coming and going, rustling, in and out with hushed footsteps, whispering eagerly to each other; and where a great many people are all busy making as little noise as possible, the result is apt to be a kind of bustle, that weakened nerves can scarcely endure.

But what did that matter? The doctors said he could hear nothing now. He gave no sign that he could. Surely the sobs of his beautiful young wife, as she knelt by the bedside, must else have moved him.

For days the light had been carefully shaded. Now, in the hurry, confusion and distress, no one remembered to draw the curtains close, so that the dim eyes might not be dazzled. But what did that matter? The doctors said he could see nothing now.

For days no one but his attendants had been allowed to come near him. Now the room was free for all who chose to enter. What did it matter? The doctors said he knew no one.

So he lay for a long time, one hand flung out upon the counterpane, as if in search of something. The queen took it softly in hers, but there was no answering pressure. At length the eyes and mouth

closed, and the heart ceased to beat.

"How beautiful he looks," they whispered to one another.

When the king came to himself it was all very still—wonderfully and delightfully still, as he thought, wonderfully and delightfully dark. It was a strange, unspeakable relief to him—he lay as if in heaven. The room was full of the scent of flowers, and the cool night air came pleasantly through an open window. A row of wax tapers burned with soft radiance at the foot of the bed on which he was lying, covered with a velvet pall, only his head and face exposed. Four or five men were keeping guard around him, but they had fallen fast asleep.

So deep was the feeling of content which he experienced that he was loth to stir. Not till the great clock of the palace struck eleven, did he so much as move. Then he sat up with a light laugh.

He remembered how, when his mind was failing him, and he had rallied all his powers in one last passionate appeal against the injustice which was taking him away from the world just when the world most needed him, he had heard a voice saying, "I will give thee yet one hour after death. If, in that time, thou canst find three that desire thy life, live!"

This was his hour, his hour, that he had snatched away from death. How much of it had he lost already? He had been a good king; he had worked night and day for his subjects; he had nothing to fear, and he knew that it was very pleasant to live, how pleasant, he had never known before, for, to do him justice, he was not selfish; it was his unfinished work that he

grieved about when the decree went forth against him. Yet, as he passed out of the room where the watchers sat heavily sleeping, things were changed to him somehow. The burning sense of injustice was gone. Now that he came to think of it, he had done very little. True that it was his utmost, but there were many better men in the world, and the world was large, very large it seemed to him now. Everything had grown larger. He loved his country and his home as well as ever, but in the night it had seemed as if they must perish with him, and now he knew that they were still unchanged.

Outside the door he paused a moment, hesitating whither to go first. Not to the queen. The very thought of her grief unnerved him. He would not see her till he could once more clasp her in his arms, and bid her weep only tears of joy because he was come again. After all, he had but an hour to wait. Before the castle clock struck twelve, he would be back again in life, remembering these things only as a dream. He sighed a little to think of it.

"All that to do over again some day," he said, as he recalled his last moments.

Almost he turned again to the couch he had so lately left.

"But I have never yet done anything through fear," said the king.

And he smiled as he thought of the terms of the compact. His city lay before him in the moonlight,

"I could find three thousand as easily as three," he said. "Are they not all my friends?"

As he passed out of the gate, he saw a child sitting

on the steps, crying bitterly.

"What is the matter, little one?" said the sentinel on guard, stopping a moment.

"Father and mother have gone to the castle, because the king's dead," sobbed the child, "and they've never come back again; and I am so tired and so hungry! And I've had no supper, and my doll's broken. Oh! I do wish the king were alive again!"

And she burst into a fresh storm of weeping. It amused the king not a little.

"So this is the first of my subjects that wants me back!" he said.

He had no child of his own. He would have liked to try and comfort the little maiden, but there were other calls upon him just then. He was on his way to the house of his great friend, the man whom he loved more than all others. A kind of malicious delight possessed him, as he pictured to himself the deep dejection he should find him in.

"Poor Amyas!" he said, "I know what I should be feeling in his place. I am glad he was not taken. I could not have borne his loss."

As he entered the courtyard of his friend's house, lights were being carried to and fro, horses were being saddled, an air of bustle and excitement pervaded the place. Look where he might, he could not see the face he knew so well. He entered at the open door. His friend was not in the hall. Room after room he vainly traversed—they were all empty. A sudden horror took him. Surely Amyas was not dead of grief?

He came at length to a small private apartment, in which they had spent many a happy, busy hour

together ; but his friend was not here either, though, to judge by appearances, he could only just have left it. Books and papers were tumbled all about in strange confusion, and bits of broken glass strewed the floor.

A little picture was lying on the ground. The king picked it up, and recognized a miniature of himself, the frame of which had been broken in the fall. He let it drop again, as if it had burnt him. The fire was blazing brightly, and the fragments of a half-destroyed letter lay, unconsumed as yet, in the fender. It was in his own writing. He snatched it up, and saw it was the last he had written, containing the details of an elaborate scheme which he had much at heart. He had only just thrown it back into the flames when two people entered the room, talking together, one a lady, the other a man, booted and spurred as though he came from a long distance.

“Where is Amyas ?” he asked.

“Gone to proffer his services to the new king, of course,” said the lady. “We are, as you may think, in great anxiety. He has none of the ridiculous notions of his predecessor, who, indeed, hated him cordially. The very favour Amyas has hitherto enjoyed will stand in his way at the new court. I only hope he may be in time to make his peace. He can, with truth, say that he utterly disapproved of the foolish reforms which his late master was bent on making. Of course, he was fond of him in a way ; but we must think of ourselves, you know. People in our position have no time for sentiment. He started almost immediately

after the king's death. I am sending his retinue after him."

"Quite right," said the gentleman, whom the king now knew as one of his ambassadors. "I shall follow him at once. Between you and me, it is no bad thing for the country. That poor boy had no notion of statesmanship. He forced me to conclude a peace which would have been disastrous to all our best interests. Happily, we shall have war directly now. Promotions in the army would have been at a standstill if he had had his way."

The king did not stay to hear more.

"I will go to my people," he said. "They at least have no interest to make peace with my successor. He will but take from them what I gave."

He heard the clock strike the first quarter as he went. He was, indeed, a very remarkable king, for he knew his way to the poorest part of his dominions. He had been there before, often and often, unknown to anyone; and the misery which he had there beheld had stirred and steeled him to attempt what had never before been attempted.

No one about the palace knew where he had caught the malignant fever which had killed him. He had a shrewd suspicion himself, and he went straight to that quarter.

"Fevers won't hurt me now," he said laughing. The houses were as wretched, the people looked as sickly and squalid as ever. They were standing about in knots in the streets, late though it was, talking together about him. His name was in every mouth. The details of his illness, and the probable day of his

funeral, seemed to interest them more than anything else.

Five or six men were sitting drinking round a table in a disreputable-looking public-house, and he stopped to overhear their conversation.

"And a good riddance, too!" said one of them, whom he knew well. "What's the use of a king who never spends a farthing more than he can help? It gives no impetus to trade. The new fellow's a very different sort. We shall have fine doings soon."

"Aye!" struck in another, "a meddlesome, priggish sort of chap he was, always worrying us about clean houses, and such like. What right's *he* got to interfere, I'd like to know?"

"Down with all kings! say I," put in a third; "but if we're to have 'em, let 'em behave as such."

"Wanted to abolish capital punishment, he did!" cried a fourth. "Thought he'd get more work out of the poor fellows in prison, I suppose? Depend on it, there's some reason like that at the bottom of it. We aren't so very particular about the lives of our subjects for nothing;" an expression of opinion in which all the rest heartily concurred. The clock struck again as the king turned away; he felt as if a storm of abuse from someone he had always hated would be a precious balm just then. He entered the state prison, and made for the condemned cell. Capital punishment was not abolished yet and in this particular instance he had certainly felt glad of it.

The cell was tenanted only by a little haggard-looking man, who was writing busily on his knee. The

king had only seen him once before, and he looked at him curiously.

Presently the gaoler entered, and with him the first councillor, a man whom his late master had greatly loved and esteemed. The convict looked up quickly.

"It was not to be till to-morrow," he said. Then, as if afraid he had betrayed some cowardice, "but I am ready at any moment. May I ask you to give this paper to my wife?"

"The king is dead," said the first councillor gravely. "You are reprieved. His present majesty has other views. You will, in all probability, be set at large to-morrow."

"Dead?" said the man with a stunned look.

"Dead!" said the first councillor, with the impressiveness of a whole board.

The man stood up, passing his hand across his brow.

"Sir," he said earnestly, "I respected him. For all he was a king, he treated me like a gentleman. He, too, had a young wife. Poor fellow, I wish he were alive again!"

There were tears in the man's eyes as he spoke.

The third quarter struck as the king left the prison. He felt unutterably humiliated. The pity of his foe was harder to bear than the scorn of his friends. He would rather have died a thousand deaths than owe his life to such a man. And yet, because he was himself noble, he could not but rejoice to find nobility in another. He said to himself sternly that it was not worth what he had gone through. He reviewed

his position in no very self-complacent mood. The affection he had so confidently relied upon was but a dream. The people he was fain to work for were not ripe for their own improvement. A foolish little child, a generous enemy, these were his only friends. After all, was it worth while to live? Had he not better go back quietly and submit, making no further effort? He had learnt his lesson; he could "lie down in peace, and sleep, and take his rest." The eternal powers had justified themselves. What matter though every man had proved a liar? The bitterness had passed away, and he seemed to see clearly.

Thick clouds had gathered over the moon, and the cold struck through him. All at once a sense of loneliness that cannot be described rushed over him, and his heart sank. Was there really no one who cared—no one? He would have given anything at that moment for a look, a single word of real sympathy. He longed with sick longing for the assurance of love.

There were yet a few moments left. How had he borne to wait so long? This, at least, he was sure of, and this was all the world to him. He began to find comfort and consolation in the thought; he forgave—indeed he almost forgot—the rest. Yet he had fallen very low, for, as he stood at the door of his wife's room, he hesitated whether to go in. What if this, too, were an illusion? Had he not best go back before he knew?

"But I have never yet done anything through fear," said the king.

His wife was sitting by the fire alone, her face hidden, her long hair falling round her like a veil. At the

first sight of her, a pang of self-reproach shot through him. How could he ever have doubted?

She was wearing a ring that he had given her—a ring she wore always, and the light sparkled and flashed from the jewel. Except for this, there was nothing bright in the room.

He ardently desired to comfort her. He wondered why all her ladies had left her. Surely one might have stayed with her on this first night of her bereavement. She seemed to be lost in thought. If she would only speak, or call his name! But she was quite silent.

A slight noise made the king start. A secret door in the wall opened, the existence of which he had thought was known only to himself and his queen, and a man stood before her.

She put her finger to her lips, as though to counsel silence.

"You have come," she said—"Oh, I am so glad! I had to hold his hand when he was dying. I was frightened sitting here by myself. I thought his ghost would come back, but he will never come back any more. We may be happy always now," and drawing the ring from her finger, she kissed it, weeping, and gave it to him.

When midnight struck, the watchers wakened with a start, to find the king lying stark and stiff, as before, but a great change had come over his countenance.

"We must not let the queen see him again," they said.

Mary Coleridge (1861—1907). The work of Mary Coleridge who wrote various novels and short stories, shows a direct simplicity of style and a keen but sympathetic insight into character.

Steeled : lit. *hardened*, gave firmness of purpose.

Public house : an inn.

Aworritting : old form of *worrying*.

Be set at large : be set free.

Board : used in this sense means body of councillors.

THE DISINTEGRATION MACHINE.

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

Professor Challenger was in the worst possible humour. As I stood at the door of his study, my hand upon the handle and my foot upon the mat, I heard a monologue which ran like this, the words booming and reverberating through the house :

"Yes, I say it is the second wrong call. The second in one morning. Do you imagine that a man of science is to be distracted from essential work by the constant interference of some idiot at the end of a telephone? I will not have it. Send this instant for the manager. Oh! you are the manager. Well, why don't you manage? Yes, you certainly manage to distract me from work the importance of which your mind is incapable of understanding. I want the superintendent. He is away? So I should imagine. A written apology? Very good. I will consider it. Good morning."

It was at this point that I ventured to make my entrance. It was certainly an unfortunate moment. I confronted him as he turned from the telephone like a lion in his wrath. His huge black beard was bristling, his great chest was heaving with indignation, and his arrogant grey eyes swept me up and down as the backwash of his anger fell upon me.

"Infernal, idle, overpaid rascals!" he boomed. "I could hear them laughing while I was making my just complaint. There is a conspiracy to annoy me. And now, young Malone, you arrive to complete a disastrous morning. Are you here, may I ask, on your own account, or has your newspaper commissioned you to obtain an interview? As a friend you are privileged, as a journalist you are outside the pale."

I was hunting in my pocket for McArdle's letter when suddenly some new grievance came to his memory. His great hairy hands fumbled about among the papers upon his desk and finally extracted a press-cutting.

"You have been good enough to allude to me in one of your recent articles," he said, shaking the paper at me. "You began a paragraph with the words: Professor G.E. Challenger, who is among our greatest living scientists."

"Well, sir?" I asked.

"Why these invidious qualifications and limitations? Perhaps you can mention the names of these other predominant scientific men to whom you impute equality, or possibly superiority to myself?"

"It was badly worded. I should certainly have said: 'Our greatest living scientist,' " I admitted. It was after all my own honest belief. My words turned winter into summer.

"My dear young friend, do not imagine that I am exacting, but surrounded as I am by pugnacious and unreasonable colleagues, one is forced to take

one's own part. Self-assertion is foreign to my nature, but I have to hold my ground against opposition. Come now! Sit here! What is the reason of your visit?"

I had to tread warily, for I knew how easy it was to set the lion roaring once again. I opened McArdle's letter.

"May I read you this, sir? It is from McArdle, my editor."

"I remember the man, not an unfavourable specimen of his class."

"He has, at least, a very high admiration for you. He has turned to you again and again when he needed the highest qualities in some investigation. That is the case now."

"What does he desire?" Challenger, who plumed himself on his reputation, expanded into geniality under the influence of flattery. He sat down with his elbows upon the desk, his gorilla-like hands clasped together, his beard bristling forward, and his big grey eyes, half covered by his drooping lids, fixed benignly upon me. He was huge in all that he did and his benevolence was even more overpowering than his truculence.

"I'll read you his note to me. He says: 'Please call upon our esteemed friend, Professor Challenger, and ask for his co-operation in the following circumstances. There is a foreign gentleman named Theodore Nemor, living at White Friars' Mansions, Hampstead, who claims to have invented a machine of a most extraordinary character. It is capable of disintegrating any object placed within its sphere of in-

fluence. He claims that it can make matter dissolve and return to atomic condition, and that by reversing the process, it can be reassembled. The claim seems to be an extravagant one, and yet there is solid evidence that there is some basis for it and that the man has stumbled upon some remarkable discovery."

"I need not enlarge upon the revolutionary character of such an invention, nor of its extreme importance as a potential weapon of war. A force which could disintegrate a battleship, or turn a battalion, if it were only for a time, into a collection of atoms, would dominate the world. For social and for political reasons not an instant is to be lost in getting to the bottom of the affair. The man courts publicity as he is anxious to sell his invention, so that there is no difficulty in approaching him. The enclosed card will open his doors. What I desire is that you and Professor Challenger shall call upon him, inspect his invention, and write for the *Gazette* a considered report upon the value of the discovery. I expect to hear from you to-night.—R. McArdle."

"There are my instructions, Professor," I added, as I refolded the letter. "I sincerely hope that you will come with me, for how can I, with my limited capacities, act alone in such a matter?"

"True, Malone! True!" purred the great man. "Though you are by no means destitute of natural intelligence, I agree with you that you would be somewhat over-weighted in such a matter as you lay before me. These unutterable people upon the telephone have already ruined my morning's work, so

that a little more can hardly matter. I am at your service."

And thus it came about that on that October morning I found myself in the deep level tube with the Professor, speeding to the north of London to what proved to be one of the most singular experiences of my remarkable life.

I had, before leaving the Professor's house, ascertained by the much-abused telephone that our man was at home, and had warned him of our coming. He lived in a comfortable flat in Hampstead, and he kept us waiting for quite half an hour in his ante-room, whilst he carried on an animated conversation with a group of visitors, whose voices, as they finally bade farewell in the hall, showed that they were Russians. I caught a glimpse of them through the half-opened door, and had a passing impression of prosperous and intelligent men, with astrakhan collars to their coats, glistening top-hats, and every appearance of bourgeois well-being. (Tho) hall-door closed behind them, and the next instant Theodore Nemor entered the room. I can see him now as he stood with the sunlight full upon him, rubbing his long, thin hands together and surveying us with his broad smile and his cunning yellow eyes.

He was a short, thick man, with some suggestion of deformity in his body, though it was difficult to say where the suggestion lay. One might say that he was a hunchback without the hump. His large, soft face was like an underdone dumpling, of the same colour and moist consistency, while the pimples and blotches which adorned it stood out the more ag-

gressively against the pallid back-ground. His eyes were those of a cat, and catlike was the thin, long, bristling moustache above his loose, wet, slobbering mouth. It was all repulsive and low until one came to the sandy eyebrows. From these upwards there was a splendid head such as I have seldom seen. Even Challenger's hat might have fitted that magnificent head. One might read Theodore Nemor as a vile, crawling conspirator from the lower part of his face, but to judge from the upper part, he might take rank with the great thinkers and philosophers of the world.

"Well, gentlemen," said he in a velvety voice with only the least trace of a foreign accent, "you have come, as I understand from our short chat over the telephone, in order to learn more of the Nemor Disintegrator. Is it so?"

"Exactly."

"May I ask if you represent the British Government?"

"Not at all, I am a correspondent of the *Gazette*, and this is Professor Challenger."

"An honoured name, a name of European reputation." His yellow fangs gleamed in obsequious amiability. "I was about to say that the British Government has lost its chance. What else it has lost it may find out later. Possibly its Empire as well. I was prepared to sell to the first Government which gave me my price, and if it has now fallen into hands of which you may disapprove, you have only yourselves to blame."

"Then you have sold your secret?"

"At my own price."

"You think the purchaser will have a monopoly?"

"Undoubtedly he will."

"But others know the secret as well as you."

"No, sir." He touched his great forehead. "This is the safe in which the secret is securely locked—a better safe than any of steel, and secured by something better than a mere key. Some may know one side of the matter: others may know another. No one in the world knows the whole matter, save only I."

"And these gentlemen to whom you have sold it?"

"No, sir, I am not so foolish as to hand over the knowledge until the price is paid. And after that it is I whom they buy, and they move this safe,"—he again tapped his brow—"with all its contents to whatever point they desire. My part of the bargain will then be done, faithfully, ruthlessly done. After that, history will be made." He rubbed his hands together and the fixed smile upon his face twisted itself into something like a snarl.

"You will excuse me, sir," boomed Challenger, who had sat in silence up to now, but whose expressive face registered most complete disapproval of Theodore Nemor, "we should wish before we discuss the matter, to convince ourselves that there is something to discuss. We have not forgotten a recent case where a man who proposed to explode mines from a distance, proved upon investigation to be an arrant imposter. History may well repeat itself. You will understand, sir, that I have a repu-

tation to sustain as a man of science—a reputation which you have been good enough to describe as European, though I have every reason to believe that it is not less conspicuous in America. Caution is a scientific attribute and you must show us your proofs before we can seriously consider your claims."

Nemor cast a particularly malignant glance from the yellow eyes at my companion, but the smile of affected geniality broadened upon his face.

"You live up to your reputation, Professor. I had always heard that you were the last man in the world who could be deceived. I am prepared to give you an actual demonstration which cannot fail to convince you, but before we proceed to that I must say a few words upon the general principle."

"You will realize that the experimental plant which I have erected here in my laboratory is only a model, though within the limits it acts most admirably. There would be no possible difficulty, for example, in disintegrating you and reassembling you, but it is not for such a purpose as that that a great Government is prepared to pay a price which runs into millions. My model is a mere scientific toy. It is only when the same force is invoked upon a large scale that enormous practical effects could be achieved."

— "May we see this model?"

"You will not only see it, Professor Challenger, but you will have the most conclusive demonstration

possible upon your own person, if you have the courage to submit to it."

"If!" the Professor began to roar. "Your 'if', sir, is in the highest degree offensive."

"Well, well. I had no intention to dispute your courage. I will only say that I will give you an opportunity to demonstrate it. But I would first say a few words upon the underlying laws which govern the matter."

"When certain crystals, salt, for example, or sugar, are placed in water they dissolve and disappear. You would not know that they had ever been there. Then by evaporation or otherwise you lessen the amount of water, and lo! there are your crystals again, visible once more and the same as before. Can you conceive a process by which you, an organic being, are in the same way dissolved, and then, by a subtle reversal of the conditions, reassembled once more?"

"The analogy is a false one," cried Challenger. "Even if I make so monstrous an admission as that our molecules could be dispersed by some disrupting power, why should they reassemble in exactly the same order as before?"

"The objection is an obvious one, and I can only answer that they do so reassemble down to the last atom of the structure. There is an invisible framework and every part flies back into its true place. You may smile, Professor, but your incredulity and your smile may soon be replaced by quite another emotion."

Challenger shrugged his shoulders "I am quite

ready to submit it to the test, but frankly I do not believe in your machine. My time is valuable, and if we are to have any sort of a demonstration, I would beg you to proceed with it without further ceremony."

"Then you will be pleased to follow me," said the inventor. He led us down the stairs leading from the flat and across a small garden which lay behind. At the end of it was a considerable out-house which he unlocked and we entered. Inside was a large whitewashed room with innumerable copper wires hanging in festoons from the ceiling, and a huge magnet balanced upon a pedestal. In front of this was what looked like a prism of glass, three feet in length and about a foot in diameter. To the right of it was a chair which rested upon a platform of zinc, and which had a burnished copper cap suspended above it. Both the cap and the chair had heavy wires attached to them, and at the side were numbered slots and a handle covered with india-rubber which lay at present in the slot marked zero.

"Nemor's Disintegrator," said this strange man, waving his hand towards the machine.

"This is the model which is destined to be famous, as altering the balance of power among the nations. Who holds this, rules the world. Now, Professor Challenger, you have, if I may say so, treated me with some lack of courtesy and consideration in this matter. Will you dare to sit upon that chair and to allow me to demonstrate upon your own body the capabilities of the new force?"

Challenger had the courage of a lion, and anything in the nature of defiance roused him in an instant to a frenzy. He rushed at the machine, but I seized his arm and held him back.

"You shall not go," I said. "Your life is too valuable. It is monstrous. What possible guarantee of safety have you? The nearest approach to that apparatus which I have ever seen was the electrocution chair at Sing Sing."

"My guarantee of safety," said Challenger, "is that you are a witness and that this person would certainly be held for manslaughter at the least should anything befall me."

"That would be a poor consolation to the world of science, when you would leave unfinished work which none but you can do. Let me, at least, go first, and then, when the experience proves to be harmless, you can follow."

Personal danger would never have moved Challenger, but the idea that his scientific work might remain unfinished hit him hard. He hesitated, and before he could make up his mind, I had dashed forward and jumped into the chair. I saw the inventor put his hand to the handle. I was aware of a click. Then for a moment there was a sensation of confusion and a mist before my eyes. When they cleared, the inventor with his odious smile was standing before me, and Challenger, with his apple-red cheeks drained of blood and colour, was staring over his shoulder.

"Well, get on with it!" said I.

"It is all over. You responded admirably," Nemor

replied. "Step out, and Professor Challenger will now no doubt, be ready to take his turn."

I have never seen my old friend so utterly upset. His iron nerves had for a moment completely failed him. He grasped my arm with a shaking hand. "My God, Malone, it is true," said he. "You vanished. There is not a doubt of it. There was a mist for an instant and then vacancy."

"How long was I away?"

"Two or three minutes. I was, I confess, horrified. I could not imagine that you would return. Then he clicked this lever, if it is a lever, into a new slot and there you were upon the chair, looking a little bewildered, but otherwise the same as ever. I thanked God at the sight of you!" He mopped his moist brow with his big red handkerchief.

"Now, sir," said the inventor, "or perhaps your nerve has failed you?"

Challenger visibly braced himself. Then, pushing my protesting hand to one side, he seated himself upon the chair. The handle clicked into number three. He was gone.

I should have been horrified, but for the perfect coolness of the operator. "It is an interesting process, is it not?" he remarked. "When one considers the tremendous individuality of the Professor, it is strange to think that he is at present a mere cloud suspended in some portion of this building. He is now, of course, entirely at my mercy. If I choose to leave him in suspension there is nothing on earth to prevent me."

"I would very soon find means to prevent you."

The smile once again became a snarl. "You cannot imagine that such a thought ever entered my mind. Good heavens! Think of the permanent dissolution of the great Professor Challenger, vanished into cosmic space leaving no trace! Terrible! Terrible! At the same time he has not been as courteous as he might. Don't you think some small lesson—?"

"No, I do not."

"Well, we will call it a curious demonstration. Something that would make an interesting paragraph in your paper. For example, I have discovered that the hair of the body being on an entirely different vibration from the living organic tissues can be included or excluded at will. It would interest me to see the bear without his bristles. Behold him!"

There was the click of the lever. An instant later Challenger was seated upon the chair once more. But what a Challenger! What a shorn lion! Furious as I was at the trick that had been played upon him, I could hardly keep from roaring with laughter.

His huge head was as bald as a baby's and his chin was as smooth as a girl's. Bereft of his glorious mane, the lower part of his face was heavily jowled, while his whole appearance was that of an old fighting gladiator, battered and bulging, with the jaws of a bulldog over a massive chin.

It may have been some look upon our faces—I have no doubt that the evil grin of my companion had widened at the sight—but, however that may be, Challenger's hand flew up to his head and he became conscious of his condition. The next instant he had

sprung out of the chair, seized the inventor by the throat, and had hurled him to the ground. Knowing Challenger's immense strength, I was convinced that the man would be killed.

"For God's sake be careful. If you kill him we can never get matters right again!"

That argument prevailed. Even in his maddest moments Challenger was always open to reason. He sprang up from the floor dragging the trembling inventor up with him. "I give you five minutes," he panted in his fury. "If in five minutes I am not as I was, I will choke the life out of your little wretched body."

Challenger in a fury was not a safe person to argue with. The bravest man might shrink from him, and there were no signs that Mr. Nemor was a particularly brave man. On the contrary, those blotches and warts upon his face had suddenly become much more conspicuous as the face behind them changed to the colour of putty. His limbs were shaking and he could hardly articulate.

"Really, Professor!" he babbled, with his hand to his throat, "this violence is quite unnecessary. Surely a harmless joke may pass among friends. It was my wish to demonstrate the powers of the machine. I had imagined that you wanted a full demonstration. No offence, I assure you, Professor, none in the world!"

For answer Challenger climbed back into the chair.

"You will keep your eye upon him, Malone. Do not permit any liberties."

"I'll see to it, sir."

"Now then, set that matter right or take the consequences."

The terrified inventor approached his machine. The reuniting power was turned on to the full, and in an instant, there was the old lion with his tangled mane once more. He stroked his beard affectionately with his hands and passed them over his head to be sure that the restoration was complete. Then he descended solemnly from his perch.

"You have taken a liberty, sir, which might have had very serious consequences to yourself. However, I am content to accept your explanation that you only did it for purposes of demonstration. Now, may I ask you a few questions upon this remarkable power which you claim to have discovered?"

"I am ready to answer anything save what the source of the power is. That is my secret."

"And do you seriously inform us that no one in the world knows this except yourself?"

"No one has the least idea."

"No assistants?"

"No, sir. I work alone."

"Dear me! That is most interesting. You have satisfied me as to the reality of the power, but I do not yet perceive its practical bearings."

"I have explained, sir, that this is a model. But it would be quite easy to erect a plant upon a large scale. Certain currents set up vibrations which either disintegrate or reunite. A large machine would have the same effect, and cover a space in proportion to the strength of the current."

"Give an example."

"We will suppose that one pole of the machine was in one small vessel out at sea and one in another; a battleship in between them would simply vanish. So also with a column of troops."

"And you have sold this secret as a monopoly to a single European Power?"

"Yes sir, I have. When the money is paid over they will have such power as no nation ever had yet. You don't even now see the full possibilities of this invention if placed in capable hands—hands which did not fear to wield the weapon which they held. They are immeasurable." A gloating smile passed over the man's evil face. "Conceive a quarter of London in which such machines have been erected. Imagine the effect of such a current upon the scale which could easily be adopted. Why," he burst into laughter, "I could imagine the whole Thames valley being swept clean, and not one man, woman, or child left of these teeming millions!"

The words filled me with horror—and even more so did the air of exultation with which they were pronounced. They seemed, however, to produce quite a different effect upon my companion. To my surprise he broke into a genial smile and held out his hand to the inventor.

"Well, Mr. Nemor, we have to congratulate you," said he. "There is no doubt that you have come upon a remarkable property of Nature which you have succeeded in harnessing for the use of man. That this use should be destructive is no doubt very deplorable, but Science knows no distinctions of the sort, and

follows knowledge wherever it may lead. Apart from the principle involved you have, I suppose, no objection to my examining the construction of the machine?"

"None in the least. The machine is merely the body. It is the soul of it, the animating principle, which you can never hope to capture."

"Exactly. But the mere mechanism seems to be a model of ingenuity." For some time he walked round it and fingered its several parts. Then he hoisted his unwieldy bulk into the chair.

"Would you like another experiment?" asked the inventor.

"Later, perhaps—later! But meanwhile there is, as no doubt you know, some leakage of electricity. I can distinctly feel a weak current passing through me."

"Impossible. The machine is so arranged—."

"But I assure you that I feel it." He lowered himself from his perch.

The inventor hastened to take his place.

"I can feel nothing."

"Is there not a tingling down your spine?"

"No, sir, I do not observe it."

There was a sharp click and the man had disappeared. I looked with amazement at Challenger. "Good heavens! did you touch the machine, Professor?"

He smiled at me benignly with an air of mild surprise.

"Dear me! I may have inadvertently touched the handle," said he. "One is very liable to have awkward accidents with a rough model of this kind. This lever

should certainly be guarded."

"It is in number three. That is the slot which causes disintegration."

"So I observed when you were operated upon."

"But I was so excited when he brought you back that I did not see which was the proper slot for the return. Did you notice it?"

"I may have noticed it, young Malone, but I did not burden my mind with small details. There are many slots and we do not know their purpose. We may make the matter worse if we experiment with the unknown. Perhaps, it is better to leave matters as they are."

"And you would ——."

"Exactly. It is better so. The interesting personality of Mr. Theodore Nemor has distributed itself throughout the cosmos, his machine is worthless, and a certain foreign Government has been deprived of knowledge by which much harm would have been wrought. Not a bad morning's work, young Malone. Your newspaper will no doubt have an interesting column upon the inexplicable disappearance of the inventor shortly after the visit of its own special correspondent. I have enjoyed the experience. These are the lighter moments which come to brighten the dull routine of study. But life has its duties as well as its pleasures, and I must now return to my work."

Looking back, it seemed to me that a slight mist was still hovering round the chair. "But surely—" I urged.

"The first duty of the law-abiding citizen is to prevent murder," said Professor Challenger. "I have

done so. Enough, Malone, enough! The theme will not bear discussion. It has already disengaged my thoughts too long from matters of more importance."

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: (1859—1930) who gained fame by his series of Sherlock Holmes stories, has written on many subjects, including spiritualism. He was a great and prolific writer and was working at his last book almost up to the time of his recent death.

The Disintegration Machine appeared in the volume of stories, *The Maracot Deep*

Outside the pale: literally beyond the boundary · note the idiom.

Turned winter into summer: turned his wrath into satisfaction.

Tube: underground railway.

Astrakhan: curled lamb-skin from Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea.

Bourgeois: middle-class.

Molecule: one of the minute particles of which matter is composed.

Electrocution chair: the chair in which criminals are placed to be executed in America where capital punishment is by means of electrocution.

Sing Sing: a prison in America.

Cosmic: of the cosmos or universe.

ROADS OF DESTINY.

THE LEFT BRANCH.

O. HENRY.

The song was over. The words were David's; the air, one of the countryside. The company about the inn table applauded heartily, for the young poet had paid for the wine.

David went out into the village street, where the night air drove the wine vapour from his head. Then he remembered that he had resolved to leave his home that night to seek fame and honour in the great world outside.

"When my poems are on every man's tongue," he told himself, in a fine exhilaration: "I will return, but not before."

Except the roysterers in the tavern, the village folk were abed. David crept softly into his room in the shed of his father's cottage and made a bundle of his small store of clothing. With this upon a staff he set his face outward upon the road that ran from Vernoy.

He passed his father's herd of sheep huddled in their nightly pen—the sheep he herded daily, leaving them to scatter while he wrote verses on scraps of paper. He hesitated—but no, his decision was made. Vernoy was no place for him. Not one soul there could share his thoughts. Out along that road lay his fate and his future.

Three leagues across the dim, moonlit country ran the road, straight as a ploughman's furrow. It was believed in the village that the road ran to Paris, at least: and this name the poet whispered often to himself as he walked. Never so far from Vernoy had David travelled before.

Three leagues, then, the road ran, and then joined with another and a larger road at right angles. David stood, uncertain, for a while, and then took the road to the left.

Upon this more important highway were, imprinted in the dust, wheel tracks left by the recent passage of some vehicle.

Some half an hour later these traces were verified by the sight of a ponderous carriage mired in a little brook at the bottom of a steep hill. The driver and postillions were shouting and tugging at the horses' bridles. On the road at one side stood a huge black-clothed man and a slender lady wrapped in a long, light cloak.

David saw the lack of skill in the efforts of the servants. He quietly assumed control of the work. He directed the outriders to cease their clamour at the horses and to exercise their strength upon the wheels. The driver alone urged the animals with his familiar voice: David himself heaved a powerful shoulder at the rear of the carriage, and with one harmonious tug the great vehicle rolled up on solid ground. The outriders climbed to their places.

David stood for a moment upon one foot. The huge gentleman waved a hand. "You will enter the carriage," he said, in a voice large, like himself, but

smoothed by art and habit. Obedience belonged in the path of such a voice. Brief as was the young poet's hesitation, it was cut shorter still by a renewal of the command. David's foot went to the step. In the darkness he perceived dimly the form of the lady upon the rear seat. He was about to seat himself opposite, when the voice again swayed him to its will. "You will sit at the lady's side."

The gentleman swung his great weight to the forward seat. The carriage proceeded up the hill. The lady was shrunk, silent into her corner. David could not estimate whether she was old or young, but a delicate, mild perfume from her clothes stirred his poet's fancy to the belief that there was loveliness beneath the mystery. Here was an adventure such as he had often imagined. But as yet he held no key to it, for no word was spoken while he sat with his impenetrable companions.

In an hour's time David perceived through the window that the vehicle traversed the street of some town. Then it stopped in front of a closed and darkened house, and a postillion alighted to hammer impatiently upon the door. A latticed window above flew wide and a night-capped head popped out.

"Who are ye that disturb honest folk at this time of night? My house is closed. 'Tis too late for profitable travellers to be abroad. Cease knocking at my door, and be off."

"Open," spluttered the postillion, loudly; "open for Monseigneur the Marquis de Beaupertuys."

"Ah!" cried the voice above. "Ten thousand pardons, my lord! I did not know—the hour is so late—

at once shall the door be opened, and the house placed at my lord's disposal."

Inside was heard the clink of chain and bar, and the door was flung open. Shivering with chill and apprehension, the landlord of the Silver Flagon stood half clad, candle in hand, upon the threshold.

David followed the marquis out of the carriage. "Assist the lady," he was ordered. The poet obeyed. He felt her small hand tremble as he guided her descent. "Into the house," was the next command.

The room was the long dining-hall of the tavern. A great oak table ran down its length. The huge gentleman seated himself in a chair at the nearer end. The lady sank into another against the wall, with an air of great weariness. David stood, considering how best he might now take his leave and continue upon his way.

"My lord," said the landlord, bowing to the floor, "h-had I ex-expected this honour, entertainment would have been ready. T-t-there is wine and cold fowl and m-m-may be "

"Candles," said the marquis, spreading the fingers of one plump white hand in a gesture he had. "Y-yes, my lord." He fetched half a dozen candles, lighted them, and set them upon the table. "If my lord would, perhaps, deign to taste a certain Burgundy—there is a cask—" "Candles," said the marquis, spreading his fingers.

"Assuredly—quickly—I fly, my lord."

A dozen more lighted candles shone in the hall. The great bulk of the marquis overflowed his chair. He was dressed in fine black from head to foot save

for the snowy ruffles at his wrists and throat. Even the hilt and scabbard of his sword were black. His expression was one of sneering pride. The ends of an upturned moustache reached nearly to his mocking eyes.

The lady sat motionless, and now David perceived that she was young and possessed of pathetic and appealing beauty. He was startled from the contemplation of her forlorn loveliness by the booming voice of the marquis.

"What is your name and pursuit?"

"David Mignot. I am a poet."

The moustache of the marquis curled nearer to his eyes.

"How do you live?"

"I am also a shepherd: I guarded my father's flock," David answered, with his head high, but a flush upon his cheek.

"Then listen, master shepherd and poet, to the fortune you have blundered upon to-night. This lady is my niece, Mademoiselle Lucie de Varennes. She is of noble descent and is possessed of ten thousand francs a year in her own right. As to her charms, you have but to observe for yourself. If the inventory pleases your shepherd's heart, she becomes your wife at a word. Do not interrupt me. To-night I conveyed her to the Chateau of the Comte de Villemaur, to whom her hand had been promised. Guests were present: the priest was waiting: her marriage to one eligible in rank and fortune was ready to be accomplished. At the altar Mademoiselle, so meek and dutiful, turned upon me like a leopardess, charged me with

cruelty and crimes, and broke, before the gaping priest, the troth I had plighted for her. I swore there and then, by ten thousand devils, that she should marry the first man we met after leaving the Chateau, be he prince, charcoal burner, or thief. You, shepherd, are the first. Mademoiselle must be wed this night. If not you, then another. You have ten minutes in which to make your decision. Do not vex me with words or questions. Ten minutes, shepherd: and they are speeding."

The marquis drummed loudly with his white fingers upon the table. He sank into a veiled attitude of waiting. It was as if some great house had shut its doors and windows against approach. David would have spoken, but the huge man's bearing stopped his tongue. Instead, he stood by the lady's chair and bowed.

"Mademoiselle," he said, and he marvelled to find his words flowing easily before so much elegance and beauty. "You have heard me say I was a shepherd. I have also had the fancy, at times, that I am a poet. If it be the test of a poet to adore and cherish the beautiful, that fancy is now strengthened. Can I serve you in any way, Mademoiselle?"

The young woman looked up at him with eyes dry and mournful. His frank, glowing face, made serious by the gravity of the adventure, his strong, straight figure and the liquid sympathy in his blue eyes, perhaps, also, her imminent need of long-denied help and kindness, thawed her to sudden tears.

"Monsieur," she said, in low tones, "You look to be true and kind. He is my uncle, the brother of my

father, and my only relative. He loved my mother, and he hates me because I am like her. He has made my life one long terror. I am afraid of his very looks, and never before dared to disobey him. But to-night he would have married me to a man three times my age. You will forgive me for bringing this vexation upon you, Monsieur. You will, of course, decline this mad act he tries to force upon you. But let me thank you for your generous words, at least. I have had none spoken to me for so long."

There was now something more than generosity in the poet's eyes. This fine, new loveliness held him with its freshness and grace. The subtle perfume from her filled him with strange emotions. His tender look fell warmly upon her. She leaned to it, thirstily.

"Ten minutes," said David, "are given to me in which to do what I would devote years to achieve. I will not say I pity you, it would not be true; I love you. I cannot ask for love from you yet, but let me rescue you from this cruel man, and, in time, love may come. I think I have a future: I shall not always be a shepherd. For the present I will cherish you with all my heart and make your life less sad. Will you trust your fate to me, Mademoiselle?"

"Ah, you would sacrifice yourself from pity!"

"From love. The time is almost up, Mademoiselle."

"You will regret it, and despise me."

"I will live only to make you happy, and myself worthy of you."

Her fine small hand crept into his from beneath

her cloak.

"I will trust you," she breathed, "with my life. And—and love—may not be so far off as you think. Tell him. Once away from the power of his eyes I may forget."

David went and stood before the marquis. The figure stirred, and the mocking eyes glanced at the great hall clock.

"Two minutes to spare. A shepherd requires eight minutes to decide whether he will accept a bride of beauty and income! Speak up, shepherd, do you consent to become Mademoiselle's husband?"

"Mademoiselle," said David, standing proudly, "has done me the honour to yield to my request that she will become my wife."

"Well said!" said the marquis. "You have yet the making of a courtier in you, master shepherd. Mademoiselle could have drawn a worse prize, after all. And now to be done with the affair as quick as the Church and the devil will allow."

He struck the table soundly with his sword hilt. The landlord came, knees-shaking, bringing more candles in the hope of anticipating the great lord's whims. "Fetch a priest," said the marquis, "a priest, do you understand? In ten minutes have a priest here, or—"

The landlord dropped his candles and fled.

The priest came, heavy-eyed and ruffled. He made David Mignot and Lucie de Varennes man and wife, pocketed a gold piece that the marquis tossed him, and shuffled out again into the night.

"Wine," ordered the marquis, spreading his omni-

ous fingers at the host.

"Fill glasses," he said, when it was brought. He stood up at the head of the table in the candle-light, a black mountain of venom and conceit, with something like the memory of an old love turned to poison in his eye, as it fell upon his niece.

"Monsieur Mignot," he said, raising his wineglass, "drink after I say this to you. You have taken to be your wife one who will make your life a foul and wretched thing. The blood in her is an inheritance running black lies and red ruin. She will bring you shame and anxiety. There is your promise, poet, for a happy life. Drink your wine. At last, Mademoiselle, I am rid of you."

The marquis drank. A little grievous cry, as if from a sudden wound, came from the girl's lips. David, with his glass in his hand, stepped forward three paces and faced the marquis. There was little of a shepherd in his bearing.

"Just now," he said calmly, "you did me the honour to call me 'Monsieur.' May I hope, therefore, that my marriage to Mademoiselle has placed me somewhat nearer to you in—let us say, reflected rank—has given me the right to stand more as an equal to Monseigneur in a certain little piece of business I have in my mind?"

"You may hope, shepherd," sneered the marquis.

"Then," said David, dashing the glass of wine into the contemptuous eyes that mocked him, "perhaps you will condescend to fight me."

The fury of the great lord outbroke in one sudden curse like a blast from a horn. He tore his sword

from its black sheath; he called to the hovering landlord: "A sword there, for this (lo ut!)" He turned to the lady with a laugh that chilled her heart, and said: "You put much labour upon me, madame. It seems I must find you a husband and make you a widow in the same night."

"I know not sword-play," said David. He flushed to make the confession before his lady.

"I know not sword-play," mimicked the marquis. "Shall we fight like peasants with oaken cudgels? Francis my pistols!"

A postillion brought two shining great pistols ornamented with carven silver, from the carriage holsters. The marquis tossed one upon the table near David's hand. "To the other end of the table," he cried; "even a shepherd may pull a trigger. Few of them attain the honour to die by the weapon of a De Beaupertuys."

The shepherd and the marquis faced each other from the ends of the long table. The landlord, in an agony of terror, clutched the air and stammered; "M—M—Monseigneur, for the love of God: not in my house: do not spill blood—it will ruin my custom—" The look of the marquis threatening him, paralysed his tongue.

"Coward," cried the lord of Beaupertuys, "cease chattering your teeth long enough to give the word for us to fire, if you can."

Mine host's knees smote the floor. He was without a vocabulary. Even sounds were beyond him. Still, by gestures he seemed to beseech peace in the name of his house and custom.

"I will give the word," said the lady, in a clear

voice. She went up to David and kissed him sweetly. Her eyes were sparkling brightly and colour had come to her cheek. She stood against the wall, and the two men levelled their pistols for her count.

"One—two—three!"

The two reports came so nearly together that the candles flickered but once. The marquis stood, smiling, the fingers of his left hand resting outspread upon the end of the table. David remained erect, and turned his head very slowly, searching for his wife with his eyes. Then, as a garment falls from where it is hung, he sank, crumpled, upon the floor.

With a little cry of terror and despair, the widowed maid ran and stooped above him. She found his wound, and then looked up with her old look of pale melancholy. "Through his heart," she whispered. "Oh, his heart!"

"Come," boomed the great voice of the marquis, "Out with you to the carriage: daybreak shall not find you on my hands. Wed you shall be again, and to a living husband, this night. The next we come upon, my lady, highwayman or peasant. If the road yields no other, then the churl that opens my gates. Out with you to the carriage!"

The marquis implacable and huge, the lady wrapped again in the mystery of her cloak, the postillion bearing the weapons—all moved out to the waiting carriage. The sound of its ponderous wheels rolling away echoed through the slumbering village. In the hall of the Silver Flagon the distracted landlord wrung his hands above the slain poet's body, while the flames of the four and twenty candles danced and flickered on the ~~table~~.

O. Henry (1862—1910). William Sidney Porter, who wrote under the pen-name O. Henry, is regarded as having been one of the best short story writers produced by America where the art of the short story was developed long before it was considered seriously in England.. He wrote a large number of stories, many of which are characterized by their excellence of plot and by their surprise endings.

Monseigneur : French for *my lord*.

The Silver Flagon : the name of the inn.

Mademoiselle : French for *Miss*.

Chateau : a French castle.

Comte : the French form of the title *count*

Chattering teeth : teeth shaking together with fear.

THE STOLEN BACILLUS.

BY

H. G. WELLS.

"This again," said the Bacteriologist, slipping a glass slide under the microscope, "is a preparation of the celebrated *Bacillus* of cholera—the cholera germ."

The pale-faced man peered down the microscope. He was evidently not accustomed to that kind of thing, and held a limp white hand over his disengaged eye. "I see very little," he said.

"Touch this screw," said the Bacteriologist: "perhaps the microscope is out of focus for you. Eyes vary so much. Just the fraction of a turn this way or that."

"Ah! now I see," said the visitor. "Not so very much to see after all. Little streaks and shreds of pink. And yet those little particles, those mere atoms, might multiply and devastate a city! Wonderful!"

He stood up, and releasing the glass slip from the microscope, held it in his hand towards the window. "Scarcely visible," he said, scrutinising the preparation. He hesitated. "Are these—alive? Are they dangerous now?"

"Those have been stained and killed," said the Bacteriologist. "I wish, for my own part, we could kill and stain every one of them in the universe."

"I suppose," the pale man said with a slight smile,

"that you scarcely care to have such things about you in the living—in the active state?"

"On the contrary, we are obliged to," said the Bacteriologist. "Here, for instance. . .". He walked across the room and took up one of several sealed tubes. "Here is the living thing. This is a cultivation of the actual living disease bacteria." He hesitated. "Bottled cholera, so to speak."

A slight gleam of satisfaction appeared momentarily in the face of the pale man. "It's a deadly thing to have in your possession," he said, devouring the little tube with his eyes. The Bacteriologist watched the morbid pleasure in his visitor's expression. This man who had visited him that afternoon with a note of introduction from an old friend, interested him from the very contrast of their dispositions. The lank black hair and deep grey eyes, the haggard expression and nervous manner, the fitful yet keen interest of his visitor were a novel change from the phlegmatic deliberations of the ordinary scientific worker with whom the Bacteriologist chiefly associated. It was perhaps natural, with a hearer evidently so impressionable to the lethal nature of his topic, to take the matter in its most impressive aspect.

He held the tube in his hand thoughtfully. "Yes, here is the pestilence imprisoned. Only break such a little tube as this into a supply of drinking water, say to these minute particles of life that one must needs examine with the highest powers of the microscope even to see, and that one can neither smell nor taste—say to them, 'Go forth, increase and multiply, and replenish the cisterns,' and

death-mysterious, untraceable death, death swift and terrible, death full of pain and indignity--would be released upon this city, and go hither and thither seeking his victims. Here he would take the husband from the wife, here the child from its mother, here the statesman from his duty, and here the toiler from his trouble. He would follow the water-mains, creeping along streets, picking out and punishing a house here and a house there where they did not boil their drinking-water, creeping into the wells of the mineral-water makers, getting washed into salad, and lying dormant in ices. He would wait ready to be drunk in the horse-troughs and by unwary children in the public fountains. He would soak into the soil, to reappear in springs and wells at a thousand unexpected places. Once start him at the water supply, and before we could ring him in, and catch him again, he would have decimated the metropolis."

He stopped abruptly. He had been told rhetoric was his weakness.

"But he is quite safe here, you know--quite safe."

The pale-faced man nodded. His eyes shone. He cleared his throat. "Those Anarchist--rascals," said he, "are fools, blind fools--to use bombs when this kind of thing is attainable, I think . . ."

A gentle rap, a mere light touch of the fingernails, was heard at the door. The Bacteriologist opened it. "Just a minute, dear," whispered his wife.

When he re-entered the laboratory his visitor was looking at his watch. "I had no idea I had wasted an hour of your time," he said. "Twelve minutes to four, I ought to have left here by half-past three.

But your things were really too interesting. No, positively I cannot stop a moment longer. I have an engagement at four."

He passed out of the room reiterating his thanks, and the Bacteriologist accompanied him to the door, and then returned thoughtfully along the passage, to his laboratory. He was musing on the ethnology of his visitor. Certainly the man was not a Teutonic type nor a common Latin one. "A morbid product, anyhow, I am afraid," said the Bacteriologist to himself. "How he gloated on those cultivations of disease-germs!" A disturbing thought struck him. He turned to the bench, and then very quickly to his writing-table. Then he felt hastily in his pockets, and then rushed to the door. "I may have put it down on the hall table," he said.

"Minnie!" he shouted hoarsely in the hall.

"Yes, dear," came a remote voice.

"Had I anything in my hand when I spoke to you, dear, just now?"

Pause.

"Nothing, dear, because I remember... .."

"Blue ruin!" cried the Bacteriologist, and incontinently ran to the front door and down the steps of his house to the street.

Minnie, hearing the door slam violently, ran in alarm to the window. Down the street a slender man was getting into a cab. The Bacteriologist, hatless, and in his carpet slippers, was running and gesticulating wildly towards this group. One slipper came off, but he did not wait for it. "He has gone *mad*!" said Minnie. "It's that horrid science of his"; and, open-

ing the window, would have called after him. The slender man, suddenly glancing round, seemed struck with the same idea of mental disorder. He, pointing hastily to the Bacteriologist, said something to the cabman, the door of the cab slammed, the whip swished, the horse's feet clattered, and in a moment the cab with the Bacteriologist hotly in pursuit, had receded up the vista of the roadway and disappeared round the corner.

Minnie remained straining out of the window for a minute. Then she drew her head back into the room again. She was dumbfounded. "Of course he is eccentric," she meditated. "But running about London—in the height of the season too in his socks!" A happy thought struck her. She hastily put on her hat, seized his shoes, went into the hall, took down his hat and light overcoat from the pegs, emerged upon the doorstep, and hailed a cab that opportunely crawled by. "Drive me up the road and round Havelock Crescent, and see if we can find a gentleman running about in a velveteen coat and no hat."

"Velveteen coat, ma'am, and no hat. Very good ma'am." And the cabman whipped up at once in the most matter-of-fact way, as if he drove to this address every day of his life.

Some few minutes later the little group of cabmen and loafers that collects round the cabmen's shelter at Haverstock Hill were startled by the passing of a cab with a ginger-coloured screw of a horse, driven furiously.

They were silent as it went by, and then as it receded... . "That's Harry Hicks. What's *he* got?"

said the stout gentleman known as Old Tootles.

"He's using his whip, he is," said the ostler boy.

"Hullo !" said poor old Tommy Byles ; "here's another lunatic."

"It's old George," said old Tootles, "and he's drivin' a lunatic *as* you say."

The group round the cabmen's shelter became animated. Chorus : "Go it, George !" "It's a race." "You'll catch 'em !" "Whip up !"

"She's a goer, she is !" said the ostler boy. "Well," cried old Tootles, "I'm goin' to begin in a minute. Here's another comin'. If all the cabs in Hampstead haven't gone mad this morning !"

"It's a female this time," said the ostler boy.

"She's following *him*," said old Tootles.

"Usually the other way about."

"What's she got in her hand ?"

"Looks like a high hat."

"What a lark it is ! Three to one on old George," said the ostler boy. "Next !"

Minnie went by in a perfect roar of applause. She did not like it, but she felt that she was doing her duty, and whirled on down Haverstock Hill and Camden Town High Street with her eyes ever intent on the animated back view of old George, who was driving her vagrant husband so incomprehensibly away from her.

The man in the foremost cab sat crouched in the corner, his arms tightly folded, and the little tube that contained such vast possibilities of destruction gripped in his hand. His mood was a singular mixture of fear and exultation. Chiefly he was afraid of being

caught before he could accomplish his purpose, and behind this was a vaguer but larger fear of the awfulness of his crime. But his exultation far exceeded his fear. No Anarchist before him had ever approached this conception of his. All those distinguished persons whose fame he had envied dwindled into insignificance beside him. He had only to make sure of the water supply, and break the tube into a reservoir. How brilliantly he had planned it, forged the letter of introduction and got into the laboratory, and how brilliantly he had seized his opportunity ! The world should hear of him at last. All those people who had sneered at him, neglected him, preferred other people to him, found his company undesirable, should consider him at last. Death, death, death ! They had always treated him as a man of no importance. All the world had been in a conspiracy to keep him under. He would teach them yet what it is to isolate a man. What was this familiar street ? Great Saint Andrew's Street, of course ! How fared the chase ? The Bacteriologist was scarcely fifty yards behind. That was bad. He would be caught and stopped yet. He felt in his pocket for money, and found half-a-sovereign. This he thrust up through the trap in the top of the cab into the man's face. "More," he shouted, "if only we get away."

The money was snatched out of his hand. "Right you are," said the cabman, and the trap slammed, and the lash lay along the glistening side of the horse. The cab swayed, and the Anarchist, half-standing under the trap, put the hand containing the little

glass tube upon the door to preserve his balance. He felt the brittle thing crack, and the broken half of it rang upon the floor of the cab. He fell back into the seat with a curse and stared dismally at the two or three drops of moisture on the floor.

He shuddered.

"Well! I suppose I shall be the first. *Phew!* Anyhow, I shall be a martyr. That's something. But it is a filthy death, nevertheless. I wonder if it hurts as much as they say."

Presently a thought occurred to him—he groped between his feet. A little drop was still in the broken end of the tube, and he drank that to make sure. It was better to make sure. At any rate, he would not fail.

Then it dawned upon him that there was no further need to escape the Bacteriologist. In Wellington Street he told the cabman to stop, and got out. He slipped on the step, and his head felt queer. It was rapid stuff this cholera poison. He waved his cabman out of existence, so to speak, and stood on the pavement with his arms folded upon his breast awaiting the arrival of the Bacteriologist. There was something tragic in his pose. The sense of imminent death gave him a certain dignity. He greeted his pursuer with a defiant laugh.

"Long live Anarchy! You are too late, my friend. I have drunk it. The cholera is abroad!"

The Bacteriologist, from his cab beamed curiously at him through his spectacles. "You have drunk it! An Anarchist! I see now." He was about to say something more, and then checked himself. A smile hung

in the corner of his mouth. He opened the door of his cab as if to descend, at which the Anarchist waved him a dramatic farewell and strode off towards Waterloo Bridge, carefully jostling his infected body against as many people as possible. The Bacteriologist was so preoccupied with the vision of him that he scarcely manifested the slightest surprise at the appearance of Minnie upon the pavement with his hat and shoes and overcoat. "Very good of you to bring my things," he said, and remained lost in contemplation of the receding figure of the Anarchist.

"You had better get in," he said, still staring. Minnie felt absolutely convinced now that he was mad, and directed the cabman home on her own responsibility. "Put on my shoes? Certainly dear," said he, as the cab began to turn, and hid the strutting black figure, now small in the distance, from his eyes. Then suddenly something grotesque struck him, and he laughed. Then he remarked, "It is really very serious, though."

"You see, that man came to my house to see me, and he is an Anarchist. No—don't faint, or I cannot possibly tell you the rest. And I wanted to astonish him not knowing he was an Anarchist, and took up a cultivation of that new species of Bacterium that infest, and I think cause, the blue patches upon various monkeys; and like a fool I said it was Asiatic cholera. And believing it was cholera he ran away with it to poison the water of London, and he certainly might have made things look blue for this civilized city. And now he has swallowed it. Of course, I cannot say what will happen, but you know it turned that kitten

blue, and the three puppies in patches, and the sparrow bright blue. But the bother is, I shall have all the trouble and expense of preparing some more."

"Put on my coat on this hot day ! Why ? Because we might meet Mrs. Jabber. My dear, Mrs. Jabber is not a draught. But why should I wear a coat on a hot day because of Mrs. . . . Oh ! *very* well."

H. G. Wells (1866—) is a writer of great force and originality and is one of the most influential English novelists of the present day. He is a logical, clear-thinking writer and there is a clear-cut, vigorous quality about his short stories.

Bacillus—microscopic vegetable organism containing germs.

Bacteriologist—one who makes a scientific study of bacteria.

Teutonic—German

Latin—of the Latin peoples, (French, Italian Spanish, etc.)

Cultivations—bacteria artificially reared for purposes of study.

The season—the London season in the early summer when all fashionable people are in town.

THE BURGLARY.

ARNOLD BENNETT.

Lady Dain said: "Jee, if that portrait stays there much longer you'll just have to take me off to Pirehill one of these fine mornings."

Pirehill is the seat of the great local hospital; but it is also the seat of the great local lunatic asylum: and when the inhabitants of the Five Towns say merely "Pirehill," they mean the asylum.

"I do declare I can't eat my food now-a-days," said Lady Dain, "and it's all that portrait!" She stared plaintively up at the immense oil-painting which faced her as she sat at the breakfast-table in her spacious and opulent dining room.

Sir Jehoshaphat made no remark.

Despite Lady Dain's animadversions upon it, despite the undoubted fact that it was generally disliked in the Five Towns, the portrait had cost a thousand pounds (some said guineas), and though not yet two years old it was probably worth at least fifteen hundred in the picture market. For it was a Cressage, and not only was it a Cressage, it was one of the finest Cressages in existence.

It marked the summit of Sir Jehoshaphat's career. Sir Jehoshaphat's career was, perhaps, the most successful and brilliant in the entire social history of the Five Towns. This famous man was the principal partner in Dain Brothers. His brother

was dead, but two of Sir Jee's sons were in the firm. Dean Brothers were the largest manufacturers of cheap earthenware in the district, catering chiefly for the American and Colonial buyer.

Dain had meant to make a name and he had made it. The Five Towns might laugh at his vulgar snobbishness. The Five Towns might sneer at his calculated philanthropy. But he was, nevertheless, the best-known man in the Five Towns, and it was precisely his snobbishness and his philanthropy which had carried him to the top. Moreover he had been the first public man in the Five Towns to gain a knighthood. Had he not been three times mayor of his native borough? Was not the whole northern half of the county dotted and spangled by his benefactions, his institutions and his endowments?

It was apropos of the house-warming of his new house, Sneyd Castle, also of the completion of his third mayoralty, that the movement had been started, (primarily by a few toadies), for tendering to Sir Jee a popular gift worthy to express the profound esteem in which he was officially held in the Five Towns. It having been generally felt that the gift should take the form of a portrait, a local personage had suggested that Cressage should paint it, and when the Five Towns had inquired about Cressage and discovered that that genius from the United States was celebrated throughout the civilized world, that he had painted half the aristocracy, and that his income was regal, the suggestion was accepted and Cressage was approached.

Cressage haughtily consented to paint Sir Jee's

portrait on his usual conditions ; namely, that the sitter should go to the little village in Bedfordshire where Cressage had his principal studio, and that the painting should be exhibited at the Royal Academy before being shown anywhere else, (Cressage was an R. A., but no one thought of putting R. A. after his name. He was so big that, instead of the Royal Academy conferring distinction on him, he conferred distinction on the Royal Academy).

Sir Jee went to Bedfordshire and was rapidly painted, and he came back gloomy. The presentation committee went to Bedfordshire later to inspect the portrait, and they too, came back gloomy.

Then the Academy Exhibition opened, and the portrait showing Sir Jee in his robe and chain, and in a chair, was instantly hailed as possibly the most glorious masterpiece of modern times. All the critics were of one accord. The committee and Sir Jee were reassured, but only partially, and Sir Jee rather less so than the committee, for there was something in the enthusiastic criticism which gravely disturbed them. One critic wrote that Cressage had displayed even more than his "customary" astounding insight into character."

Another critic wrote that Cressage's observation was, as usual, "calmly and coldly hostile." Another referred to the "typical provincial mayor, immortalized for the diversion of future ages."

Inhabitants of the Five Towns went to London to see the work for which they had subscribed, and

they saw a mean, little, old man, with thin lips and a straggling grey beard; ridiculous in his gew-gaws of office. When you looked at the picture close by, it was a meaningless mass of coloured smudges, but when you stood fifteen feet away from it, the portrait was absolutely life-like, amazing, miraculous. It was so wondrously life-like that some of the inhabitants of the Five Towns burst out laughing. Many people felt sorry—not for Sir Jee—but for Lady Dain. Lady Dain was beloved and genuinely respected. She was a simple, homely, sincere woman, her one weakness being that she had never been able to see through Sir Jee.

Of course, at the presentation ceremony the portrait had been ecstatically referred to as a possession for ever, and the recipient and his wife had pretended to be overflowing with pure joy in the ownership of it.

It had been hanging in the dining-room of Sneyd Castle for about sixteen months, when Lady Dain told her husband that it would ultimately drive her into the lunatic asylum.

"Don't be silly, wife," said Sir Jee. "I wouldn't part with that portrait for ten times what it cost."

This was, to speak bluntly, a downright lie. Sir Jee secretly hated the portrait more than anyone hated it. He would have been almost ready to burn down Sneyd Castle in order to get rid of the thing. But it happened that on the previous evening his receptive brain had been visited by a less expensive scheme than burning down the castle.

Lady Dain sighed.

"Are you going to town early?" she inquired.

"Yes," he replied, "I'm on the Bench to-day."

He was chairman of the Bench of Magistrates. As he drove into town he revolved his scheme and thought it wild and dangerous but still feasible.

II

On the Bench that morning Sir Jee shocked Mr. Sherratt, the Magistrate's clerk, and he utterly disappointed Mr. Bourne, Superintendent of the borough police. There had recently occurred a somewhat thrilling series of burglaries in the district, and the burglars, (a gang of them was presumed), had escaped the solicitous attentions of the police. But on the previous afternoon an underling of Mr. Bourne's had caught a man who was generally believed to be wholly or partially responsible for the burglaries. The Five Towns breathed with relief and congratulated Mr. Bourne; and Mr. Bourne was well pleased with himself. The Staffordshire Signal headed the item of news, "Capture of a Supposed Burglar." The supposed burglar gave his name as William Smith, and otherwise behaved in an extremely suspicious manner.

Now, Sir Jee, sitting as Chief Magistrate in the police-court, actually dismissed the charge against the man! Overruling his sole colleague on the Bench that morning, Alderman Easton, he dismissed the charge against William Smith, holding that the evidence for the prosecution was insufficient to justify even a remand. No wonder that Mr. Bourne

was discouraged, not to say angry. No wonder that that pillar of the law, Mr. Sherratt, was pained and shocked. At the conclusion of the case Sir Jehoshaphat said that he would be glad to speak with William Smith afterwards in the Magistrates' room, indicating that he sympathized with William Smith and wished to exercise upon William Smith his renowned philanthropy.

And so, at about noon, when the court majestically rose, Sir Jee retired to the Magistrates' room, where the humble Alderman Easton was discreet enough not to follow him, and awaited William Smith. And William Smith came, guided thither by a policeman, to whom, in parting from him, he made a rude, surreptitious gesture.

Sir Jee seated in the arm-chair which dominated the other chairs round the elm-wood table in the Magistrates' room, emitted a preliminary cough.

"Smith," he said sternly, leaning his elbows on the table, "you were very fortunate this morning, you know."

And he gazed at Smith.

Smith stood near the door, cap in hand. He did not resemble a burglar, who surely ought to be big, muscular, and masterful. He resembled an undersized clerk who has been out of work for a long time, but who has nevertheless found the means to eat and drink rather plenteously. He was clothed in a very shabby navy-blue suit, frayed at the wrists and ankles, and greasy in front. His linen collar was brown with dirt, his fingers were dirty.

his hair was unkempt and long, and a young and lusty black beard was sprouting on his chin. His boots were not at all pleasant.

"Yes, Governor," Smith replied lightly with a Manchester accent. "And what is your game?"

Sir Jee was taken aback. He, the Chairman of the borough Bench and the leading philanthropist in the county, to be spoken to so! But what could he do? He himself had legally established Smith's innocence. Smith was as free as air, and had a perfect right to adopt any tone he chose to any man he chose. And Sir Jee desired a service from William Smith.

"I was hoping I might be of use to you," said Sir Jehoshaphat diplomatically.

"Well," said Smith, "that's all right. But none of your philanthropic dodges, you know. I don't want to lead a new life, and I don't want to turn over a new leaf, and I don't want a helping hand. And, what's more, I don't want a situation. I've got all the situations I need. But I never refuse money, nor beer either. Never did, and I'm forty years old next month!"

"I suppose burgling doesn't pay very well, does it?" Sir Jee boldly ventured.

William Smith laughed coarsely.

"It pays right enough," said he. "But I don't put my money on my back, Governor. I put it into a bit of property when I get the chance."

"It may pay," said Sir Jee. "But it is wrong. It is very anti-social."

Is it, indeed?" Smith returned dryly. "Anti-social, is it? Well, I've heard it called plenty of things in my time, but never that. Now, I should have called it quite sociable, sort of making free with strangers, and so on. However," he added, "I came across a gentleman once who told me crime was nothing but a disease and ought to be treated as such. I asked him for a dozen of port, but he never sent it."

"Ever been caught before?" Sir Jee inquired.

"Not much!" Smith exclaimed. "And this will be a lesson to me, I can tell you. Now, what are you getting at, Governor? Because my time's money, my time is."

Sir Jee coughed once more.

"Sit down," said Sir Jee.

William Smith sat down opposite to him at the table, and put his shiny elbows on the table precisely in the manner of Sir Jee's elbows.

"Well?" he cheerfully encouraged Sir Jee.

"How would you like to commit a burglary that was not a crime?" said Sir Jee, his shifty eyes wandering around the room. "A perfectly lawful burglary?"

"What are you getting at?" William Smith was genuinely astonished.

"At my residence, Sneyd Castle," Sir Jee proceeded, "there's a large portrait of myself in the dining-room that I want to have stolen. You understand?"

"Stolen?"

"Yes. I want to get rid of it. And I want people to think that it has been stolen."

"Well, why don't you stop up one night and steal it yourself, and then burn it?" William Smith suggested.

"I could be deceitful," said Sir Jee, gravely. "I could not tell my friends that the portrait had been stolen if it had not been stolen. The burglary must be entirely genuine."

"What's the figure?" said Smith curtly.

"Figure?"

"What are you going to give me for the job?"

"Give you for doing the job?" Sir Jee repeated, his secret and ineradicable meanness aroused. "Give you? Why, I'm giving you the opportunity of stealing honestly a picture that's worth over a thousand pounds—I dare say it would be worth two thousand pounds in America—and you want to be paid into the bargain! Do you know, my man, that people come all the way from Manchester, and even from London, to see that portrait?" He told Smith about the painting.

"Then why are you so anxious to be rid of it?" queried the burglar.

"That's my affair," said Sir Jee. "I don't like it. Lady Dain doesn't like it. But it's a presentation portrait, and so I can't—you see, Mr. Smith?"

"And how am I going to dispose of it when I've got it?" Smith demanded. "You can't melt a portrait down as if it were silver. By what you say, Governor, it's known all over the blessed world. Seems to me I might just as well try to sell the Nelson Column."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Sir Jee. "Nonsense. You'll

sell it in America quite easily. It'll be a fortune to you. Keep it for a year first, and then send it to New York." William Smith shook his head and drummed his fingers on the table; and then quite suddenly he brightened and said:

"All right, Governor. I'll take it on, just to oblige you."

"When can you do it?" asked Sir Jee, hardly concealing his joy. "To-night?"

"No," said Smith, mysteriously. "I'm engaged to-night. Nor to-morrow. I'm engaged to-morrow too."

"You seem to be very much engaged, my man," Sir Jee observed.

"What do you expect?" Smith retorted. "Business is business. I could do it the night after to-morrow."

"But that's Christmas Eve," Sir Jee protested.

"What if it is Christmas Eve?" said Smith coldly. "Would you prefer Christmas Day? I'm engaged on Boxing Day, and the day after."

"Not in the Five Towns, I trust?" Sir Jee remarked.

"No," said Smith shortly. "The Five Towns are finished." The affair was arranged for Christmas Eve.

"Now," Sir Jee suggested, "shall I draw you a plan of the castle, so that you can. . ."

William Smith's face expressed terrific scorn. "Do you suppose," he said, "that I haven't had plans of your castle ever since it was built? What do you take me for? I'm a businessman, that's what I am."

Sir Jee was snubbed, and he agreed submissively to all William Smith's arrangements for the innocent burglary. He perceived that in William Smith he had stumbled on a professional of the highest class, and this good fortune pleased him.

"There's only one thing that riles me," said Smith, in parting, "and that is that you'll say afterwards that you've done everything you could for me and then I burgled your castle. And you'll talk about the ingratitude of the lower classes. I know you, Governor!"

III

On the afternoon of the twenty-fourth of December, Sir Jehoshaphat drove home to Sneyd Castle from the principal of the three Dain manufacturies, and found Lady Dain superintending the work of packing up trunks. He and she were to quit the castle that afternoon in order to spend Christmas on the other side of the Five Towns, under the roof of their eldest son, John who had a new house, a new wife, and a new baby. John was a domineering person, and, being rather proud of his house and all that was his, he had obstinately decided to have his own Christmas at his own hearth. Grandpapa and grandmama, drawn by the irresistible attraction of that novelty, a grandson, (though Mrs. John had declined to have the little thing named Jehoshaphat), had yielded to John's solicitations and the family gathering, for the first time in history, was not to occur round Sir Jee's mahogany.

Sir Jee, very characteristically, said nothing to Lady Dain immediately. He allowed her to pro-

ceed with the packing of the trunks, and then tea was served. The time was approaching for the carriage to come round to take them to the station, when at last he suddenly remarked,

"I shan't be able to go with you to John's this afternoon."

"Oh, Jee!" she exclaimed. "Really, you are tiresome. Why couldn't you tell me before?"

"I will come over to-morrow morning—perhaps in time for church," he proceeded, ignoring her demand for an explanation.

He always did ignore her demand for an explanation. Indeed, she only asked for explanations in a mechanical and perfunctory manner—she had long since ceased to expect them. Sir Jee had been born like that—devious and mysterious. And Lady Dain accepted him as he was. She was somewhat surprised, therefore, when he went on.

"I have some minutes of committee meetings that I really must go carefully through and send off to-night, and you know as well as I do that there'll be no chance of doing that at John's. I've telegraphed to John."

He was obviously nervous and self-conscious.

"There is no food in the house," sighed Lady Dain. "And the servants are all going away except Callear, and he can't cook your dinner to-night. I think I'd better stay myself and look after you."

"You'll do no such thing," said Sir Jee decisively. "As for my dinner, anything will do for that. The servants have been promised their holiday, to start

from this evening, and they must have it. I can manage."

Here spoke the philanthropist with his unshakable sense of justice.

So Lady Dain departed, anxious and worried, having previously provided some cold food for Sir Jee in the dining-room, and instructed Callear about boiling the water for Sir Jee's tea on Christmas morning. Callear was the under-coachman and a useful odd man. He it was who would drive Sir Jee to the station on Christmas morning, and then guard the castle and the stables thereof during the absence of the family and the other servants.

After Sir Jee had consumed his cold repast in the dining-room the other servants went, and Sir Jee was alone in the castle, facing the portrait.

He had managed the affair fairly well, he thought. It would have been dangerous if the servants had been left in the castle. They might have suffered from insomnia, and heard William Smith, and interfered with the operations of William Smith. On the other hand Sir Jee had no intention whatever of leaving the castle uninhabited to the mercies of William Smith. He felt that he himself must be on the spot to see that everything went right and that nothing went wrong. Thus, the previously arranged scheme for the servants' holiday fitted perfectly into his plans, and all that he had had to do was to refuse to leave the castle till the morrow. It was ideal.

Nevertheless, he was a little afraid of what he had done, and what he was going to permit

William Smith to do. It was certainly dangerous—certainly rather a wild scheme. However, the die was cast, and within twelve hours he would be relieved of the intolerable incubus of the portrait.

When he thought of the humiliations which that portrait had caused him; when he remembered the remarks of his sons concerning it, especially John's remarks; when he recalled phrases about it in the London newspapers, he squirmed, and told himself that no scheme for getting rid of it could be too wild and perilous. And, after all, the burglary dodge was the only dodge, absolutely the only conceivable practical method of disposing of the portrait except burning down the castle. And surely it was preferable to a conflagration, to arson! Moreover, in case of fire at the castle, some blundering fool would be sure to cry: "The portrait! The portrait must be saved!" And the portrait would be saved.

He gazed at the repulsive, hateful thing. In the centre of the lower part of the massive gold frame was the legend: "Presented to Sir Jehoshaphat Dain, Knight, as a mark of public esteem and gratitude," etc. He wondered if William Smith would steal the frame. It was to be hoped that he would not steal the frame. In fact, William Smith would find it very difficult to steal that frame unless he had an accomplice or so.

"This is the last time I shall see you!" said Sir Jee to the portrait.

Then he unfastened the catch of one of the windows in the dining-room (as per contract with

William Smith), turned out the electric light, and went to bed in the deserted castle.

He went to bed, but not to sleep. It was no part of Sir Jee's programme to sleep. He intended to listen, and he did listen.

At about two o'clock, precisely the hour which William Smith had indicated, he fancied he heard muffled and discreet noises. Then he was sure that he heard them. William Smith had kept his word. Then the noises ceased for a period, and then they recommenced. Sir Jee restrained his curiosity as long as he could, and when he could restrain it no more, he rose and silently opened his bedroom window and put his head out into the nipping night air of Christmas. And by good fortune he saw the vast oblong of the picture, carefully enveloped in sheets, being passed by a couple of dark figures through the dining-room window to the garden outside. William Smith had a colleague, then, and he was taking the frame as well as the canvas. Sir Jee watched the men disappear down the avenue, and they did not reappear. Sir Jee returned to bed.

Yes, he felt himself equal to facing it out with his family and friends. He felt himself equal to pretending that he had no knowledge of the burglary.

Having slept for a few hours, he got up early and, half-dressed, descended to the dining-room, just to see what sort of a mess William Smith had made.

The portrait, out of its frame, lay flat on the hearthrug, with the following words written on it in chalk: "This is no use to me." It was the massive gold frame that had gone.

Further, as was later discovered, all the silver had gone too. Not a spoon was left in the castle.

Arnold Bennett (1867—) has written many novels, plays and short stories. *The Old Wives' Tale* which is usually considered to be his best novel, established his reputation as one of the foremost writers of the present day. He has given us realistic word pictures of life in the "Five Towns," the pottery-manufacturing district in Staffordshire where he spent his early life. *The Burglary* is taken from the volume of stories, *The Grim Story of the Five Towns*.

Apropos : in connection with.

R. A. : these letters after an artist's name indicate that he has had pictures shown at the Royal Academy.

Robe and chain : the badges of office worn by a mayor.

To see through : to detect the nature of.

To be on the Bench : to be a judge.

Magistrate : a Justice of the Peace who decides cases in the local court ; usually an influential local person

Alderman : a member of the town corporation

Governor : sometimes used as a mode of address instead of *Sir* by uneducated people

Manchester accent : the type of provincial 'accént heard at Manchester

What is your game ? what is your object ? (slang).

Put money on my back · spend money on clothes.

Nelson Column · a well-known monument erected to the memory of Lord Nelson in London.

Boxing Day : the day after Christmas Day.

The die was cast *die* singular of *dice* , here used figuratively.

RETRIBUTION.

JEFFERY FARNOL.

The moon was at the full and the clock of Saint Clement the Dane was chiming midnight when Mr. Merriam, reaching the arched doorway of Clifford's Inn, raised his hand to knock upon the wicket; a white hand, slim and elegant like himself, but a hand whose symmetry was marred by the loss of its little finger.

Mr. Merriam then raised his hand to knock, but, in the very act, checked himself and turned to peer over his shoulder.

It was Christmas Eve and freezing hard, in a cloudless firmament a myriad stars glittered, their vivid light scarce dimmed by the pale glory of an orb moon that cast an ugly blotch before Mr. Merriam wherever he moved, the grotesque, foreshortened shadow of his immaculate and stately self; beholding which, he frowned and lifted scowling eyes to glare up at the star-lit heaven and round about the silent thoroughfare. Then, slowly retracing his steps, he turned eastwards and sauntered towards the grim shadow of Temple Bar. From a sedan-chair a-swing between its trotting bearers issued a quavering voice upraised in song tipsily discordant; here and there a belated pedestrian, muffled to the eyes, hastened by; from dark corners misery peered, and murmured hoarse supplications; but Mr. Merriam strolled leisurely on

all unheeding, and apparently impervious to the cold, left hand poised gracefully upon the hilt of his small sword, right hand clasping a silver-mounted cane, but his eyes, set in the oval of a handsome face, pale by contrast with the black curls of his great periwig, small, bright and very keen eyes scanning Temple Bar with a fixed and expectant scrutiny.

Almost within the shadow of the Bar he paused to lean gracefully upon his cane and peer up at a row of rusted iron spikes that crowned the central arch, some of which spikes were topped by awful, shapeless, festering things that had once been human. It was upon one of these dismal objects that Mr. Merriam focussed his keen gaze, a head so much fresher and less weather-beaten than its ghastly fellows that Mr. Merriam could plainly descry the pallid features in detail; the eyes that seemed to leer down at him beneath drooping lids, the pinched nostrils, the dark opening of the mouth horribly agape.

Mr. Merriam smiled and, taking out his snuff-box, helped himself to a pinch which he inhaled delicately and with an appearance of much enjoyment.

Many other eyes had doubtless looked upon this gruesome thing since it had been set up that morning, but surely none with such an expression of malignant satisfaction as these of Mr. Merriam.

"Egad, and so there you are, my lord!" said he in a soft, murmurous voice. "Not precisely the Apollo you were, my lord, no. She would shudder away from you now, my lord, as she was wont to shudder from me. Aha! Barbara.....my proud Lady Disdain, would

ye kiss him now? Egad, I venture to doubt it, madam—aye, upon my soul, I do. So there you are, my lord, no very pleasing object, though you will look worse yet when the wind and rain and sun have been at you awhile. . . . There I have you and there I leave you. . . . to rot and rot, my lord. . . . and over the Border is Barbara—waiting to be comforted! She shall be less cruel than she was, mayhap. . . . we shall see anon. And so a merry Christmas, my lord, a fair good night and may she forget you as speedily as you shall rot

“Were you speaking to me, sir?”

Mr. Merriam stood utterly still for a moment, then, fobbing his snuff-box, spun round upon the speaker, whipping out his sword as he did so. He saw standing beside him a very tall man in a long, loose cloak, his features hidden in the shade of his wide-eaved hat.

“Were you speaking to me, sir?”

“I was not!” answered Mr. Merriam and, stepping quickly back, he levelled his sword threateningly. “Lift your head and let me look at you!” he commanded.

The man obeyed, showing a lean face with high cheek bones and a shock of fiery red hair.

“You’re a Scot!” said Mr. Merriam, scowling.

“I am.”

“Well -yonder’s another!” quoth Mr. Merriam, gesturing with his cane to the freshly-decapitated head above them. “Take my advice and don’t prowl hereabouts lest you come to a like end. Now—out of my path!”

The man stepped quickly aside, and Mr. Merriam sheathed his sword, then, becoming conscious of the other's fixed stare, thrust his mutilated hand hastily into his pocket.

"What the deuce d'ye stare at?" he demanded angrily.

"Nothing, sir, only you have lost a finger, and him. . . up yonder—his head! 'Tis you are the lucky one—so far, I'm thinking. But, as you say, sir, this is not a very healthy place for us Scots, so here's one who will away. Good-night to you!"

Mr. Merriam stood to scowl until the flutter of the long cloak was lost in the shadows of Temple Bar, then went his way; once he turned to glance back and it seemed to him that amid those shadows were two forms now, crouching motionless to peer after him as he went.

Thus Mr. Merriam's step was a little more hurried and his knock a little louder and more imperious than usual upon the wicket which, opening in due season, discovered Job, the night-watchman, lantern in hand.

"Lord! Is it you, Mr. Merriam, sir?" exclaimed Job. .

"Has anyone inquired for me since I went out, Job?"

"Not a living soul, sir!"

"Egad, 'twould hardly be a dead one, I fancy."

"You don't believe in ghosts then, sir—phantoms and such?"

"Tush and fiddle-de-de, man!"

"Maybe, sir, but I've heard that Clifford's is haunted."

"By what, Job?"

"Can't say, Mr. Merriam, sir—but there's been enough folk die in Clifford's one way or another. And then there's the Bar, d'ye see. Will ye step into my lodge for a spell, sir?"

"Thank you, no—that is, yes, I will, if you've a fire—'tis perishing cold!"

"Aye, so 'tis, sir, regular Christmas weather. But I've a fire that will make you warm in no time."

"You keep yourself very comfortable, Job!" said Mr. Merriam, seating himself at the hearth and stretching his legs to the fire.

"Aye, pretty snug, sir, pretty snug! And there's a new head top o' the Bar—did you happen to see it as you came along, sir?"

"Aye, I took some notice of it, Job."

"'Twere set up this very mornin', sir. There's a friend of mine, Ben Bowker by name, drove a roarin' trade with his spy-glass all day—a ha'penny a look—must have made a fortune. Took a peep myself—a nice head sir... A young—ah—a very young gentleman by his looks, sir... . judging by his head young and handsome"

"D'ye think so, Job? Who was he?"

"One o' those rebel Scotch lords who was executed yesterday—though they say that this young lord was not so guilty as some."

"Ha, do they, Job? What else do they say?"

"Well, they say he was executed on false evidence and that they are seekin' and searchin' for the informer."

Mr. Merriam blinked drowsily at the fire and pinched his pointed chin.

"I wonder if they'll find him, Job?" he murmured.

"I hope so, sir. I don't like informers."

"I wonder," yawned Mr. Merriam. "I wonder who this informer could have been?"

"Well, sir, Mr. Grice the lawyer at Number Fifteen told me that this informer was the poor dead young lord's very own cousin."

"Remarkable!" sighed Mr. Merriam, fingering a scar that marked his handsome face. "Mr. Grice at Number Fifteen would seem to be a singularly well-informed gentleman. However, the young lord is certainly dead . . . Yes, very thoroughly dead, it appears."

"Aye, sir—nobody was ever deader! And so young—no more than twenty-three they say. And such a death "

"Decapitation is a swift death, Job, and consequently a merciful."

"Maybe, sir, but think what goes before the stroke—the soldiers, the crowds, the shouting, the headsman—the axe itself. And him so very young—and at Christmas, too—I call it uncommon hard! If ever a dead man turned himself into a ghost and took to haunting—fittin' and flyin'—moanin' and groanin'—it should be this young lord, and what's more . . ." Job paused suddenly as if to listen.

"Ah—did you hear it, Job?"

"Aye, sir,—sounded like the wicket shuttin' to!"

Mr. Merriam's drowsiness vanished in an instant, and he was upon his feet, his keen gaze upon the door.

"There is someone outside!" said he softly.

"Aye, but who should open or shut the wicket without me, sir?"

Deigning no answer, Mr. Merriam crossed to the door, jerked it suddenly open and, peering into the gloom of the arch, uttered a fierce exclamation and clapped hand to sword.

"Neil! Ah, thank God!" exclaimed a soft voice, and forth out of the darkness came a muffled shape, white hands outstretched.

"Lord—a young woman!" quoth Job, contemptuously.

"Barbara!" gasped Mr. Merriam; then seizing those white hands, stood a long moment staring into the face upraised to his, a beautiful face though deadly pale beneath the shadowy hood: then with a sudden, masterful gesture he drew the unresisting hand within his arm and led the lady across the Inn towards the privacy of his chambers.

Job, peering after them, had the vague impression of a black shape that flitted behind them in the denser gloom, but thinking this mere fancy, shook his head and shut himself in with his fire.

"Barbara . . ." said Mr. Merriam, gripping the passive fingers he held, "here in London! Can this indeed be you?"

"Wherefore not, Neil?"

"You are vastly changed since last we met, my lady!"

"I am a year older and—wiser."

"And infinitely gentler. . . Egad, I can scarce believe you are that proud termagant that had me turned out—aye, driven from her haughty presence by her lackeys. . ."

"I am not, Neil," she answered in the same low,

even tone.

"And why are you here?" he demanded, a little bitterly. "Why do you come to me?"

"Because I am solitary, Neil, and very lonely and—you loved me—once. . . "

"Aye, by Heaven, once and for always, my lady!" he answered passionately, "I have waited a long time for this hour . . . and to-night . . . O Barbara," he whispered, stooping to behold her face, "how beautiful you are! Nay, why do you tremble—are you cold?"

"Yes," she whispered, "Yes, Neil—dreadfully cold as cold as—death!"

"Come then, I have a fire within doors, yonder."

Mr. Merriam's chambers were on the ground-floor and he was stooping to fit the key into the lock when he started suddenly erect and turned to find her close behind him.

"Did you hear anything, Barbara?" he questioned

"Nothing, Neil. Perhaps you heard the wind."

"But there is no wind/child."

"A shutter, then the rattle of a casement. You are fanciful."

"Perhaps I am," he laughed, "though 'tis something strange in me!"

Then he opened the door and, having closed it behind them, heard her breathe distressfully as he struck flint and steel; when at last he had lighted the candles he saw her leaning against the door, her whole form shaken by violent tremors.

"What, Barbara, are you so very cold?"

"Yes, Neil!" she gasped.

At this he made haste to seat her in the great

elbow-chair before the hearth, to kick the smouldering fire to a blaze, to fill her a glass of brandy.

"You are worn out, my sweet soul," said he, feasting his hungry eyes on her loveliness while she sipped the fiery spirit.

"Yes, Neil."

"And—more beautiful than ever!" and speaking, he took and fondled her hand.

"They killed him yesterday, Neil!" said she, staring into the fire.

"So I hear," answered Mr. Merriam, kissing her cold limp fingers.

"I watched it done, Neil. And he saw me. Yes, amid all those thousands of faces his eyes found mine and. . . . he smiled on me, Neil... . and his cheeks so pale . . . so very pale."

"Fie, child—'tis over and done! Poor Roderick is dead indeed, but his troubles are done with. So forget this doleful business—banish these past sad memories and think rather of the future. To-morrow I was intending to start for Scotland and you . . . you, my Barbara."

"Poor Roderick!" she sighed, "Oh, 'twas pitiful to see how his hands shook and trembled despite his brave bearing."

"Ay," exclaimed Mr. Merriam between gnashing teeth, "beyond a doubt it was upon his account you adventured all this way to London."

"'Twas to save—you, Neil."

"Me?" he echoed. "To save me, Barbara? From what?"

"A needless sin," she sighed. "I mean the mur-

der of your cousin Roderick....."

Mr. Merriam sprang to his feet and stood scowling down at her, his handsome face suffused, his long white fingers opening and shutting;

"Madam!" he exclaimed, "ha, my lady, dare ye name me—murderer?"

She never so much as stirred or troubled to look at him.

"Yes," she answered in the same, sighing voice. "I name you murderer because I know you intercepted that incriminating letter from France. I know 'twas you formed and laid the information against him. I know 'twas you sent Roderick to his death—and all ah God. . . all for love of me!"

"So you dare think 'twas I....."

"I know!" she murmured, and turning slowly in her chair she looked at him at last; and before this calm dispassionate scrutiny Mr. Merriam's bold assurance was shaken, his keen glance wavered and he plucked nervously at his ruffle. "Ah Neil," she sighed,..... "had you but known . . . my heart was yours."!

Mr. Merriam gasped and fell back a step, voiceless and staring.

"And so," she continued in the same passionless tone, "I came hasting to tell you the truth, but was delayed on the road and reached London only in time to. . . . watch him die and you..... that I loved, become. his murderer."

Mr. Merriam stared down at the beautiful, impassive face with eyes wide in horrified dismay.

"My God!" he gasped. "If this be true. . . . O, Barbara..... if this indeed be true... . Nay, but

—'twas ever and always Roderick with you and never a glance for me . . . Aye, 'twas ever Roderick, curse him! You loved him—I saw it in your eyes a thousand times . . . ”

“O, blind!” she cried, rising to her feet, “O blind! I loved you then, Neil, and . . . God forgive me . . . I love you yet . . . ”

“Barbara!” he cried exultant, and reached out his arms to her. “Barbara!”

“Ah no, no!” she panted, shrinking from him. “Your hands are red with Roderick’s blood . . . Do not touch me!”

“But you love me, Barbara, you love me?”

“Aye, but . . . there is your sin betwixt us!”

“Love should forgive all, Barbara!”

“But first must be confession, Neil.”

“Confession?” he muttered.

“O Neil,” she sighed, “how may I ever lie within your arms . . . how shall sin be forgiven without confession?”

“So be it!” he answered, and reaching out masterful arms, he clasped her, shivering, in his embrace. “Come to me, Barbara, your head upon my bosom—your eyes on mine—so! Now loved woman—hear me! I have loved you beyond imagining, and dreading to lose you to that lordly fool, my cousin, I took means to remove him . . . ”

“By the letter, Neil?”

“By the letter.”

“You laid the information that brought his head [^]~~neath~~ the axe?”

“I did! And you—you are my reward. So here

then is my confession and now—kiss me, my Barbara ! ”

But from those quivering lips so near his own, rose a sudden awful scream that grew ever higher and more shrill as, breaking from his lax hold, she flung herself down upon her knees before the elbow-chair and crouched there, her face bowed and hidden in her arms. And so came silence ; but presently upon this silence came a rustling at the window, a soft padding against the glass. Mr. Merriam turned and stood motionless, only his long, white fingers clutched and clutched at the laces of his cravat ; for, pressed close against the panes was the pallid oval of an awful face that seemed to leer in at him beneath drooping lids and with mouth horribly agape.

With a tinkle of breaking glass, the lattice swung open and, as if borne on the chilly air, this ghastly thing projected itself into the room towards him. . .

Mr. Merriam uttered a dreadful, choking cry and, crashing over backwards, lay very still, staring up at the rafters with eyes fixed and wide.

But though Mr. Merriam's eyes were so very wide open he saw nothing of the figure that wriggled into the room—a very tall, bony man with fiery-red hair, and his ears heard nothing of the hoarse whisper :

“ All right, my lady—I have it safe down from yon gate for ye. So away with ye outside and leave the rest to me—I'll not be very long. . . ”

* * * * *

Next morning, his nightly watch over, Job, muffled to the ears, stepped out into the chilly morning air—an air vibrant with the joyous welcome of Christmas bells, and trudged homewards. But being close to

Temple Bar he must needs halt a moment to glance upward at that pitiful thing which had been the cynosure of so many eyes and had filled Ben Bowker's pockets at one halfpenny per look; glancing upwards, therefore, Job stood suddenly agape, forgetful alike of cold, of breakfast and the comfort of bed that awaited him, for there, in place of the head of that poor young lord, was another, with eyes fixed in a wide and horrified stare... . a handsome face, pale by contrast with the black curls of its great periwig that stirred gently in the cold wind—the head and face of Mr. Merriam.

Jeffery Farnol (living) has written various novels and short stories, many of them describing the life of a bygone period. The time of the events in the story *Retribution* was immediately after one of the Jacobite rebellions when the Scots had helped in a fruitless attempt to overthrow the Government and to restore the Stuarts to the throne.

Saint Clement the Dane : the name of a church in London.

Clifford's Inn : formerly one of the Inns of Court; now no longer in existence.

Sedan-chair : a small carriage for one, carried by two men. Used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Temple Bar : an old gateway in London, (now removed), above which the heads of executed malefactors were displayed.

Apollo : the sun-god worshipped by the ancient Greeks and supposed to be of great beauty.

Egad : an ancient oath meaning *By God*.

The Border : the boundary between England and Scotland.

Fobbing his snuff-box : placing it in a small pocket.

Not a healthy place for us Scots : many Scots were being arrested for their share in the recent rebellion.

Struck flint and steel : before matches were known, a light was produced by striking flint and steel together.

A SOURCE OF IRRITATION.

STACY AUMONIER.

To look at old Sam Gates you would never suspect him of having nerves. His sixty-nine years of close application to the needs of the soil had given him a certain earthy solidity. To observe him hoeing, or thinning out a broad field of turnips, hardly attracted one's attention. He seemed so much part and parcel of the whole scheme.

He blended into the soil like a glorified swede. Nevertheless, the half-dozen people who claimed acquaintance knew him to be a man who suffered from little moods of irritability.

And on this glorious morning a little incident annoyed him unreasonably. It concerned his niece Aggie. She was a plump girl with clear blue eyes and a face as round and inexpressive as the dumplings for which the county was famous. She came slowly across the long sweep of the downland and putting down the bundle wrapped up in a red handkerchief which contained his breakfast and dinner, she said,

"Well Uncle, is there any news?"

Now this may not appear to the casual reader to be a remark likely to cause irritation, but it affected old Sam Gates as a very silly and unnecessary question. It was moreover the constant repetition of it which was beginning to anger him. He met his niece twice a day. In the morning she brought his bundle of food at seven, and when he passed his sister's cottage on the

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way home to tea at five she was invariably hanging about the gate. And on each occasion she always said, in exactly the same voice :

"Well, Uncle, is there any news?"

"News!" What news should there be? For sixty-nine years he had never lived farther than five miles from Halvesham. For nearly sixty of those years he had bent his back above the soil. There were indeed historic occasions: once, for instance, when he had married Annie Hatchet. And there was the birth of his daughter. There was also a famous occasion when he had visited London. Once he had been to a flower-show at Market Roughborough. He either went or didn't go to church on Sundays. He had had many interesting chats with Mr. James at "The Cowman," and three years ago had sold a pig to Mrs. Wade. But he couldn't always have interesting news of this sort up his sleeve. Didn't the silly girl know that for the last three weeks he had been thinning turnips for Mr. Dodge on this very same field? What news could there be?

He blinked at his niece, and didn't answer. She undid the parcel and said:

"Mrs. Goping's fowl got out again last night."

He replied, "Ah!" in a non-committal manner, and began to munch his bread and bacon. His niece picked up the handkerchief and humming to herself, walked back across the field. It was a glorious morning, and a white sea-mist added to the promise of a hot day. He sat there munching, thinking of nothing in particular, but gradually subsiding into a mood of placid content. He noticed the back of Aggie

disappear in the distance. It was a mile back to the cottage, and a mile and a half to Halvesham. Silly things, girls! They were all alike. One had to make allowances. He dismissed her from his thoughts and took a long swig of tea out of a bottle. Insects buzzed lazily. He tapped his pocket to assure himself that his pouch of shag was there, and then he continued munching. When he had finished, he lighted his pipe and stretched himself comfortably. He looked along the line of turnips he had thinned, and then across the adjoining field of swedes. Silver streaks appeared on the sea below the mist. In some dim way he felt happy in his solitude amidst this sweeping immensity of earth and sea and sky.

And then something else came to irritate him. It was one of "these dratted aeroplanes." Aeroplanes were his pet aversion. He could find nothing to be said in their favour. Nasty, noisy, vile-smelling things that seared the heavens, and made the earth dangerous.

Every day there seemed to be more and more of them. Of course "this old war" was responsible for a lot of them, he knew. The war was a nuisance. They were short-handed on the farm. Beer and tobacco were dear, and Mrs. Stevens' nephew had been wounded in the foot.

He turned attention once more to the turnips. But an aeroplane has an annoying genius for gripping one's attention. When it appears on the scene however much we dislike it, it has a way of taking stage-centre; we cannot help constantly looking at it. And so it was with old Sam Gates. He spat on his hands and blinked up at the sky. And suddenly the

aeroplane behaved in a very extraordinary manner. It was well over the sea when it seemed to lurch in a drunken manner, and skimmed the water. Then it shot up at a dangerous angle and zigzagged. It started to go farther out, and then turned and made for the land. The engines were making a curious grating noise. It rose once more, and then suddenly dived downwards and came plump down, right in the middle of Mr. Dodge's field of swedes.

Finally, as if not content with this desecration, it ran along the ground, ripping and tearing up twenty-five yards of good swedes, and then came to a stop. Old Sam Gates was in a terrible state. The aeroplane was more than a hundred yards away, but he waved his arms, and called out :

"Hi! you there, you mustn't land in those swedes! They're Mister Dodge's."

The instant the aeroplane stopped a man leapt out, and gazed quickly round. He glanced at Sam Gates, and seemed uncertain whether to address him or whether to concentrate his attention on the flying-machine. The latter arrangement appeared to be his ultimate decision. He dived under the engine, and became frantically busy. Sam had never seen any one work with such furious energy. But all the same, it was not to be tolerated. It was disgraceful. Sam started out across the field, almost hurrying in his indignation. When he approached within earshot of the aviator, he cried out again :

"Hi! you mustn't rest your old aeroplane here. You've kicked up all Mr. Dodge's swedes. A nice thing you've done!"

He was within five yards when suddenly the aviator turned and covered him with a revolver! And speaking in a sharp, staccato voice, he said:

"Old Grandfather, you must sit down. I am very occupied. If you interfere or attempt to go away, I'll shoot you. So!"

Sam gazed at the horrid glittering little barrel, and gasped. Well, he'd never heard anything like it! To be threatened with murder when you're doing your duty on your employer's private property! But, still, perhaps the man was mad. A man must be more or less mad to go up in one of those crazy things, and life was very sweet on that summer morning, in spite of sixty-nine years. He sat down among the swedes.

The aviator was so busy with his cranks and machinery that he hardly deigned to pay him any attention, except to keep the revolver handy. He worked feverishly and Sam sat watching him. At the end of ten minutes he seemed to have solved his troubles with the machine, but he still seemed very scared. He kept on glancing round and out to sea. When his repairs were completed, he straightened his back and wiped the perspiration from his brow. He was apparently on the point of springing back into the machine and going off, when a sudden mood of facetiousness, caused by relief from the strain he had endured, came to him. He turned to old Sam, and smiled; at the same time remarking,

"Well, old grandfather, and now we shall be all right, shan't we?"

He came close up to Sam, and then suddenly started back.

"Gott!" he cried. "Paul Jouperts!"

Sam gazed at him, bewildered, and the madman began to talk to him in some foreign tongue. Sam shook his head.

"You've no right," he remarked, "to come through those swedes of Mr. Dodge's."

And then the aviator behaved in a most peculiar manner. He came up and examined his face very closely, and gave a gentle tug at his beard and hair, as if to see whether it were real or false.

"What is your name, old man?" he said.

"Sam Gates."

The aviator muttered some words to himself and then turned to his machine. He appeared to be dazed and in a great state of doubt. He fumbled with some cranks, but kept glancing at old Sam. At last he got into the car and started the engine. Then he stopped, and sat there deep in thought. At last he suddenly sprang out again, and, approaching Sam, he said very deliberately:

"Old Grandfather, I shall require you to accompany me."

Sam gasped.

"Eh?" he said. "What are ye talkin' about? 'company? I've got these lines of turnips to finish and my work's already behind."

The disgusting little revolver once more flashed before his eyes.

"There must be no discussion," came the voice. "It is necessary that you mount the seat of the car

without delay. Otherwise I shoot you like the dog you are; So!"

Old Sam was hale and hearty. He had no desire to die so ignominiously. The pleasant smell of the downland was in his nostrils. His foot was on his native heath. He mounted the seat of the car, contenting himself with a mutter:

"Well, that's a nice thing, I must say! Flyin' about the country with all the turnips only half thinned . . . "

He found himself strapped in. The aviator was in a fever of anxiety to get away. The engines made a ghastly splutter and noise. The thing started running along the ground. Suddenly it shot upwards, giving the swedes a last contemptuous kick. At twenty minutes to eight that morning old Sam found himself being borne right up above his fields and out to sea! His breath came quickly. He was a little frightened.

"God forgive me!" he murmured.

The thing was so fantastic and sudden, his mind could not grasp it. He only felt in some vague way that he was going to die, and he struggled to attune his mind to the change. He offered up a mild prayer to God, who, he felt, must be very near, somewhere up in these clouds! Automatically he thought of the vicar at Halvesham, and a certain sense of comfort came to him at the reflection that on the previous day he had taken a "cooking of beans" to God's representative in that village. He felt calmer after that, but the horrid machine seemed to go higher and higher. He could not turn in his seat, and he could see nothing but sea and sky. Of course the

man was mad, mad as a March hare. Of what earthly use could *he* be to any one? Besides, he had talked pure gibberish, and called him Paul Something, when he had already told him that his name was Sam. The thing would fall down into the sea soon and they would both be drowned. Well, well! He had reached the three-score years and ten.

He was protected by a screen, but it seemed very cold. What on earth would Mr. Dodge say? There was no one left to work the land but a fool of a boy named Billy Whitehead at Deric's Cross. On, on, on they went at a furious pace. His thoughts danced disconnectedly from incidents of his youth, conversations with the vicar, hearty meals in the open, a frock his sister wore on the day of the postman's wedding, the drone of a psalm, the illness of some ewes belonging to Mr. Dodge. Everything seemed to be moving very rapidly, upsetting his sense of time. He felt outraged and yet at moments there was something entrancing in the wild experience. He seemed to be living at an incredible pace. Perhaps he was really dead, and on his way to the Kingdom of God. Perhaps this was the way they took people there.

After some indefinite period he suddenly caught sight of a long strip of land. Was this a foreign country or were they returning? He had by this time lost all feeling of fear. He became interested, and almost disappointed. The aeroplane was not such a fool as it looked. It was very wonderful to be right up in the sky like this. His dreams were suddenly disturbed by a fearful noise. He thought

the machine was blown to pieces. It dived and ducked through the air, and things were bursting all round it and making an awful din; and then it went up higher and higher. After a while these noises ceased, and he felt the machine gliding downwards. They were really right above solid land, trees, fields, streams, and white villages. Down, down, down they glided. This was a foreign country. There were straight avenues of poplars and canals. This was not Halvesham. He felt the thing glide gently and bump into a field. Some men ran forward and approached them, and the mad aviator called out to them. They were mostly fat men in grey uniforms, and they all spoke this foreign gibberish. Some one came and unstrapped him. He was very stiff, and could hardly move. An exceptionally gross-looking man punched him in the ribs, and roared with laughter. They all stood round and laughed at him, while the mad aviator talked to them and kept pointing at him. Then he said,

“Old grandfather, you must come with me.”

He was led to a zinc-roofed building, and shut in a little room. There were guards outside with fixed bayonets. After a while the mad aviator appeared again, accompanied by two soldiers. He beckoned him to follow. They marched through a quadrangle and entered another building. They went straight into an office, where a very important-looking man, covered with medals, sat in an easy-chair. There was a lot of saluting and clicking of heels.

The aviator pointed at Sam and said something, and the man with the medals started at sight of him,

and then came up and spoke to him in English.

"What is your name? Where do you come from? Your age? The name and birthplace of your parents?"

He seemed intensely interested, and also pulled his hair and beard to see if they came off. So well, and naturally did he and the aviator speak English that after a voluble cross-examination they drew apart, and continued the conversation in that language. And the extraordinary conversation was of this nature:

"It is a most remarkable resemblance," said the man with medals. But what do you want me to do with him, Hausemann?"

"The idea came to me suddenly, excellency," replied the aviator, "and you may consider it worthless. It is just this. The resemblance is so amazing. Paul Jouperts has given us more valuable information than any one at present in our service. And the English know that. There is an award of twenty-five thousand francs on his head. Twice they have captured him, and each time he escaped. All the company commanders and their staff have his photograph. He is a serious thorn in their flesh.

"Well?" replied the man with the medals.

"My suggestion is this. To-morrow, as you know, the English are attacking Hill 701, which we have for tactical reasons decided to evacuate. If after the attack they find what they believe to be the dead body of Paul Jouperts in, say, the second lines, they will take no further trouble in the matter. And when they think he is dead, Paul Jouperts will be able to prosecute his labours undisturbed."

The man with the medals twirled his moustache and looked thoughtfully at his colleague.

"Where is Paul at the moment?" he asked.

"He is acting as a gardener at the Convent of St. Eloise at Mailleton-en-haut, which, as you know, is one hundred metres from the headquarters of the British central army staff."

The man with the medals took two or three rapid turns up and down the room. Then he said:

"Your plan is excellent, Hausemann. The only point of difficulty is that the attack started this morning."

"This morning!" exclaimed the other.

"Yes. The English attacked unexpectedly at dawn. We have already evacuated the first line. We shall evacuate the second line at eleven-fifty. It is now ten-fifteen. There may be just time."

He looked suddenly at old Sam in the way that a butcher might look at a prize heifer at an agricultural show, and remarked casually:

"Yes, it is a remarkable resemblance. It seems a pity not to do something with it."

Then, speaking in German, he added:

"It is worth trying, and if it succeeds, the higher authorities shall hear of your lucky accident, and inspiration, Herr Hausemann. Instruct Lieutenant Schutz to send the old fool by two orderlies to the east extremity of trench 38. Keep him there till the order of evacuation is given. Then shoot him, but don't disfigure him, and lay him out face upwards."

The aviator saluted and withdrew, accompanied by his victim. Old Sam had not understood the latter

part of the conversation, and he did not catch quite all that was said in English, but he felt that somehow things were not becoming too promising, and it was time to assert himself. So he remarked when they got outside :

"Now, look here, mister, when am I goin' back to my turnips?"

And the aviator replied with a pleasant smile :

"Do not be disturbed, old grandfather: you shall. get back to the soil quite soon."

In a few moments he found himself in a large grey car, accompanied by four soldiers. The aviator left him. The country was barren and horrible, full of great pits and rents, and he could hear the roar of artillery and the shriek of shells. Overhead, aeroplanes were buzzing angrily. He seemed to be suddenly transported from the Kingdom of God to the Pit of Darkness. He wondered whether the vicar had enjoyed the beans. He could not imagine beans growing here, beans, ay! or anything else. If this was a foreign country, give him dear old England.

Gr-r-r-r Bang! Something exploded just at the rear of the car. The soldiers ducked, and one of them pushed him in the stomach and swore.

"An ugly-looking lout," he thought. "If I was twenty years younger I'd give him a punch in the eye that would make him sit up."

The car came to a halt by a broken wall. The party hurried out and dived behind a mound. He was pulled down a kind of shaft and found himself in a room buried underground, where three more German

officers were drinking and smoking. The soldiers saluted and handed a type-written despatch. The officers looked at him drunkenly, and one came up and pulled his beard and spat in his face, and called him "an English swine." He then shouted out some instructions to the soldiers, and they led him out into the narrow trench. One walked behind him and occasionally prodded him with the butt-end of a gun. The trenches were half full of water, and reeked of gases, powder, and decaying matter. Shells were constantly bursting overhead, and in places the trenches had crumbled and were nearly blocked up. They stumbled on, sometimes falling, sometimes dodging moving masses, and occasionally crawling over the dead bodies of men. At last they reached a deserted looking trench, and one of the soldiers pushed him into the corner of it and growled something, and then disappeared round the angle. Old Sam was exhausted. He lay panting against the mud wall, expecting every minute to be blown to pieces by one of those infernal things that seemed to be getting more and more insistent. The din went on for nearly twenty minutes, and he was alone in the trench. He fancied he heard a whistle amidst the din. Suddenly one of the soldiers who had accompanied him came stealthily round the corner. And there was a look in his eye old Sam did not like. When he was within five yards the soldier raised his rifle and pointed it at Sam's body. Some instinct impelled the old man at that instant to throw himself forward on his face. As he did so, he was conscious of a terrible explosion, and he had just time to observe the soldier falling in a

heap near him, when he lost consciousness.

His consciousness appeared to return to him with a snap. He was lying on a plank in a building, and he heard someone say :

"I believe the old boy's English."

He looked round. There were a lot of men lying there and others in khaki and white overalls were busy amongst them. He sat up and rubbed his head, and said :

"Hi, mister, where am I now ?"

Someone laughed, and a young man came up and said :

"Well, old thing, you were very nearly in the next world. Who are you ?"

Someone else came up, and the two of them were discussing him. One of them said :

He's quite all right. He was only knocked out. Better take him to the colonel. He may be a spy."

The other came up, and touched his shoulder, and remarked :

"Can you walk, uncle ?"

He replied :

"Ay, I can walk all right."

"That's an old sport !"

The young man took his arm and helped him out of the room into a courtyard. They entered another room where an elderly, kind faced officer was seated at a desk. The officer looked up and exclaimed :

"Good God ! Bradshaw, do you know who you've got there ?"

The younger one said, "No. Who, sir ?"

"Why ! it's Paul Jouperts !" exclaimed the colonel.

"Paul Jouperts ! Great Scott !"

The older officer addressed himself to Sam. He said :

"Well, we've got you once more, Paul. We shall have to be a little more careful this time."

The young officer said :

"Shall I detail a squad, sir ?"

"We can't shoot without a court-martial," replied the kind-faced senior.

Then Sam interpolated :

"Look here, sir. I'm sick of all this. My name isn't Paul. My name is Sam. I was thinnin' a line of turnips . . ."

Both officers burst out laughing, and the younger one said :

"Good ! damn good ! Isn't it amazing, sir, the way they not only learn the language, but even take the trouble to learn a dialect ?"

The older man busied himself with some papers.

"Well, Sam," he remarked, "you shall be given a chance to prove your identity. Our methods are less drastic than those of your Boche masters. What part of England are you supposed to come from ? Let's see how much you can bluff us with your topographical knowledge."

"I was thinnin' a line of turnips this morning at half-past seven on Mr. Dodge's farm at Halvesham, when one of these aeroplanes came right down among the swedes. I told him to get clear of that, when the fellow got out of the car and drew a revolver and he said, 'You must company me'. . . ."

"Yes, yes," interrupted the senior officer : "that's

all very good. Now tell me, where is Halvesham? What is the name of the local vicar? I'm sure you'd know that."

"I sit under the Reverend David Pryce, mister, and a God-fearin' man he be. I took him a cookin' of beans only yesterday. I work for Mr. Dodge—he owns Greenway Manor and has a stud-farm at Newmarket, they say."

"Charlie Dodge?" asked the younger officer.

"Ay, Charlie Dodge. You write and ask him if he knows old Sam Gates."

The two officers looked at each other, and the older one looked at Sam more closely.

"It's very extraordinary," he remarked.

"Everybody knows Charlie Dodge," added the younger officer.

It was at that moment that a wave of genius swept over old Sam. He put his hand to his head, and suddenly jerked out :

"What's more, I can tell you where this Paul is. He's acting gardener in a convent at. . ."

He puckered up his brow and fumbled with his hat and then got out :

"Mighteno."

The older officer gasped.

"Mailleton-en-haut! Good God! What makes you say that, old man?"

Sam tried to give an account of his experience and things he had heard said by the German officers. But he was getting tired, and he broke off in the middle to say :

"Ye haven't a bite of something to eat, I suppose,

mister, and a glass of beer ? I usually have my dinner at twelve o'clock."

Both the officers laughed, and the older said :

"Get some food, Bradshaw, and a bottle of beer from the mess. We'll keep this old man here. He interests me."

While the younger man was doing this, the chief pressed a button and summoned another junior officer.

"Gateshead," he remarked, "ring up G.H.Q. and instruct them to arrest the gardener in that convent at the top of the hill, and then to report."

The officer saluted and went out, and in a few minutes a tray of hot food and a large bottle of beer was brought to the old man and he was left alone in the corner of the room to negotiate this welcome compensation. And in the execution he did himself and his county credit. In the meanwhile the officers were very busy. People were coming and going and examining maps and telephone bells were ringing furiously. They did not disturb old Sam's gastronomic operations. He cleaned up the mess tins and finished the last drop of beer. The senior officer found time to offer him a cigarette, but he replied :

"Thank you kindly, but I'd rather smoke my pipe."

The colonel smiled, and said :

"Oh, all right. Smoke away."

He lighted up, and the fumes of the shag permeated the room. Someone opened another window, and the young officer who had addressed him at first suddenly looked at him and exclaimed :

"Innocent, by God! You couldn't get shag like that anywhere but in Norfolk."

It must have been over an hour later when another officer entered, and saluted.

Message from G.H.Q., sir," he said.

"Well?"

They have arrested the gardener at the convent of St. Eloise, and they have every reason to believe that he is the notorious Paul Jouperts."

The colonel stood up, and his eyes beamed. He came over to old Sam and shook his hand.

"Mr. Gates," he said, "you are an old brick. You will probably hear more of this. You have probably been the means of delivering something very useful into our hands. Your own honour is vindicated. A loving government will probably award you five shillings or a Victoria Cross, or something of that sort. In the meantime, what can I do for you?"

Old Sam scratched his chin.

"I want to get back home," he said.

"Well, even that might be arranged."

"I want to get back home in time for tea."

"What time do you have tea?"

"Five o'clock or thereabouts."

"I see."

A kindly smile came into the eyes of the colonel. He turned to another officer standing by the table, and said:

"Raikes, is anyone going across this afternoon with despatches?"

"Yes, sir," replied the other officer. "Commander Jennings is leaving at three o'clock."

"You might ask him to come and see me."

Within ten minutes a young man in a flight-commander's uniform entered.

"Ah, Jennings!" said the colonel, "here is a little affair which concerns the honour of the British army. My friend here, Sam Gates, has come over from Halvesham in order to give us valuable information. I have promised him that he shall get home to tea at five o'clock. Can you take a passenger?"

The young man threw back his head and laughed.

"Lord!" he exclaimed. "What an old sport! Yes, I expect I can just manage it. Where is the God-forsaken place?"

A large ordnance-map of Norfolk (which had been captured from a German officer) was produced, and the young man studied it closely.

At three o'clock precisely, old Sam, finding himself something of a hero and quite glad to escape from the embarrassment which this position entailed, once more sped skywards in an aeroplane.

At twenty minutes to five he landed once more amongst Mr. Dodge's swedes. The breezy young airman shook hands with him and departed inland. Old Sam sat down and surveyed the field.

"A nice thing, I must say," he muttered to himself as he looked along the lines of unthinned turnips. He still had twenty minutes, and so he went slowly along and completed a line which he had begun in the morning. He then deliberately packed up his dinner-things and his tools, and started out for home.

As he came round the corner of Stillway's Meadow and the cottage came in view, his niece stepped out of

the copse with a basket on her arm.

"Well," she said, "is there any news?"

It was then that old Sam became really irritated.

"News!" he said. "News! drat the girl! What news should there be? Sixty-nine years I've lived in these parts, hoeing and weeding and thinning, and minding Charlie Dodge's sheep. Am I one o' these story-book folk having news happen to me all the time? Isn't it enough, you silly, to earn enough to buy a bite to eat, and a glass o' beer, and a place to rest your head at night, without always wantin' news, news, news! I tell you, it's this that leads you to half the troubles in the world."

And turning his back on her, he went fuming up the hill.

Stacy Aumonier (1887 —) is a well-known writer of short stories. He writes with a very human touch which is well brought out in the story, *A Source of Irrigation*.

the Cowman: the name of the village inn.

up his sleeve: concealed, but ready for production at need.

dratted: a mild form of *cursed*, not to be imitated.

Gott: (German) God.

mad as a March hare: from the frolicsome gambols of the hare during the breeding season in March.

award on his head: a reward offered for his capture.

Herr: (German) Mr.

make him sit up: make him take notice—(slang expression).

detail a squad: arrange for a firing party.

Boche: German.

sit under: attend the preaching of

a brick: a warmly approved person (slang).

Victoria Cross: a highly-prized decoration, given for bravery.

