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Tono-Bungay

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Tono-Bungay:

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H. G. Wells
Tono-Bungay

BOOK THE FIRST
THE DAYS BEFORE TONO-BUNGAY WAS INVENTED

CHAPTER THE FIRST

OF BLADESOVER HOUSE, AND MY MOTHER; AND THE CONSTITUTION OF SOCIETY

I

Most people in this world seem to live "in character"; they have a beginning, a middle and an end, and the three are congruous one with another and true to the rules of their type. You can speak of them as being of this sort of people or that. They are, as theatrical people say, no more (and no less) than

"character actors." They have a class, they have a place, they know what is becoming in them and what is due to them, and their proper size of tombstone tells at last how properly they have played the part. But there is also another kind of life that is not so much living as a miscellaneous tasting of life. One gets hit by some unusual transverse force, one is jerked out of one's stratum and lives crosswise for the rest of the time, and, as it were, in a succession of samples. That has been my lot, and that is what has set me at last writing something in the nature of a novel. I have got an unusual series of impressions that I want very urgently to tell. I have seen life at very different levels, and at all these levels I have seen it with a sort of intimacy and in good faith. I have been a native in many social countries. I have been the unwelcome guest of a working baker, my cousin, who has since died in the Chatham infirmary; I have eaten illegal snacks – the unjustifiable gifts of footmen – in pantries, and been despised for my want of style (and subsequently married and divorced) by the daughter of a gasworks clerk; and – to go to my other extreme – I was once – oh, glittering days! – an item in the house-party of a countess. She was, I admit, a countess with a financial aspect, but still, you know, a countess. I've seen these people at various angles. At the dinner-table I've met not simply the titled but the great. On one occasion – it is my brightest memory – I upset my champagne over the trousers of the greatest statesman in the empire – Heaven forbid I should be so invidious as to name him! – in the warmth of our mutual admiration.

And once (though it is the most incidental thing in my life) I murdered a man…

Yes, I've seen a curious variety of people and ways of living altogether. Odd people they all are great and small, very much alike at bottom and curiously different on their surfaces. I wish I had ranged just a little further both up and down, seeing I have ranged so far. Royalty must be worth knowing and very great fun. But my contacts with princes have been limited to quite public occasions, nor at the other end of the scale have I had what I should call an inside acquaintance with that dusty but attractive class of people who go about on the high-roads drunk but enfamille (so redeeming the minor lapse), in the summertime, with a perambulator, lavender to sell, sun-brown children, a smell, and ambiguous bundles that fire the imagination. Navvies, farm-labourers, sailormen and stokers, all such as sit in 1834 beer-houses, are beyond me also, and I suppose must remain so now for ever. My intercourse with the ducal rank too has been negligible; I once went shooting with a duke, and in an outburst of what was no doubt snobbishness, did my best to get him in the legs. But that failed.

I'm sorry I haven't done the whole lot though…

You will ask by what merit I achieved this remarkable social range, this extensive cross-section of the British social organism. It was the Accident of Birth. It always is in England.

Indeed, if I may make the remark so cosmic, everything is. But that is by the way. I was my uncle's nephew, and my uncle

was no less a person than Edward Ponderevo, whose comet-like transit of the financial heavens happened – it is now ten years ago! Do you remember the days of Ponderevo, the great days, I mean, of Ponderevo? Perhaps you had a trifle in some world-shaking enterprise! Then you know him only too well. Astraddle on Tono-Bungay, he flashed athwart the empty heavens – like a comet – rather, like a stupendous rocket! – and overawed investors spoke of his star. At his zenith he burst into a cloud of the most magnificent promotions. What a time that was! The Napoleon of domestic conveniences!

I was his nephew, his peculiar and intimate nephew. I was hanging on to his coat-tails all the way through. I made pills with him in the chemist's shop at Wimblehurst before he began. I was, you might say, the stick of his rocket; and after our tremendous soar, after he had played with millions, a golden rain in the sky, after my bird's-eye view of the modern world, I fell again, a little scarred and blistered perhaps, two and twenty years older, with my youth gone, my manhood eaten in upon, but greatly edified, into this Thames-side yard, into these white heats and hammerings, amidst the fine realites of steel – to think it all over in my leisure and jot down the notes and inconsecutive observations that make this book. It was more, you know, than a figurative soar. The zenith of that career was surely our flight across the channel in the Lord Roberts B…

I warn you this book is going to be something of an agglomeration. I want to trace my social trajectory (and my

uncle's) as the main line of my story, but as this is my first novel and almost certainly my last, I want to get in, too, all sorts of things that struck me, things that amused me and impressions I got – even although they don't minister directly to my narrative at all. I want to set out my own queer love experiences too, such as they are, for they troubled and distressed and swayed me hugely, and they still seem to me to contain all sorts of irrational and debatable elements that I shall be the clearer-headed for getting on paper. And possibly I may even flow into descriptions of people who are really no more than people seen in transit, just because it amuses me to recall what they said and did to us, and more particularly how they behaved in the brief but splendid glare of Tono-Bungay and its still more glaring offspring. It lit some of them up, I can assure you! Indeed, I want to get in all sorts of things. My ideas of a novel all through are comprehensive rather than austere…

Tono-Bungay still figures on the hoardings, it stands in rows in every chemist's storeroom, it still assuages the coughs of age and brightens the elderly eye and loosens the elderly tongue; but its social glory, its financial illumination, have faded from the world for ever. And I, sole scorched survivor from the blaze, sit writing of it here in an air that is never still for the clang and thunder of machines, on a table littered with working drawings, and amid fragments of models and notes about velocities and air and water pressures and trajectories – of an altogether different sort from that of Tono-Bungay.

II

I write that much and look at it, and wonder whether, after all, this is any fair statement of what I am attempting in this book. I've given, I see, an impression that I want to make simply a hotch-potch of anecdotes and experiences with my uncle swimming in the middle as the largest lump of victual. I'll own that here, with the pen already started, I realise what a fermenting mass of things learnt and emotions experienced and theories formed I've got to deal with, and how, in a sense, hopeless my book must be from the very outset. I suppose what I'm really trying to render is nothing more nor less than Life – as one man has found it. I want to tell – MYSELF, and my impressions of the thing as a whole, to say things I have come to feel intensely of the laws, traditions, usages, and ideas we call society, and how we poor individuals get driven and lured and stranded among these windy, perplexing shoals and channels. I've got, I suppose, to a time of life when things begin to take on shapes that have an air of reality, and become no longer material for dreaming, but interesting in themselves. I've reached the criticising, novel-writing age, and here I am writing mine – my one novel – without having any of the discipline to refrain and omit that I suppose the regular novel-writer acquires.

I've read an average share of novels and made some starts before this beginning, and I've found the restraints and rules of

the art (as I made them out) impossible for me. I like to write, I am keenly interested in writing, but it is not my technique. I'm an engineer with a patent or two and a set of ideas; most of whatever artist there is in me has been given to turbine machines and boat building and the problem of flying, and do what I will I fail to see how I can be other than a lax, undisciplined story-teller. I must sprawl and flounder, comment and theorise, if I am to get the thing out I have in mind. And it isn't a constructed tale I have to tell, but unmanageable realities. My love-story – and if only I can keep up the spirit of truth-telling all through as strongly as I have now, you shall have it all – falls into no sort of neat scheme of telling. It involves three separate feminine persons. It's all mixed up with the other things…

But I've said enough, I hope, to excuse myself for the method or want of method in what follows, and I think I had better tell without further delay of my boyhood and my early impressions in the shadow of Bladesover House.

III

There came a time when I realised that Bladesover House was not all it seemed, but when I was a little boy I took the place with the entirest faith as a complete authentic microcosm. I believed that the Bladesover system was a little working-model – and not so very little either – of the whole world.

Let me try and give you the effect of it.

Bladesover lies up on the Kentish Downs, eight miles perhaps from Ashborough; and its old pavilion, a little wooden parody of the temple of Vesta at Tibur, upon the hill crest behind the house, commands in theory at least a view of either sea, of the Channel southward and the Thames to the northeast. The park is the second largest in Kent, finely wooded with well-placed beeches, many elms and some sweet chestnuts, abounding in little valleys and hollows of bracken, with springs and a stream and three fine ponds and multitudes of fallow deer. The house was built in the eighteenth century, it is of pale red brick in the style of a French chateau, and save for one pass among the crests which opens to blue distances, to minute, remote, oast-set farm-houses and copses and wheat fields and the occasional gleam of water, its hundred and seventeen windows look on nothing but its own wide and handsome territories. A semi-circular screen of great beeches masks the church and village, which cluster picturesquely about the high road along the skirts of the great park. Northward, at the remotest corner of that enclosure, is a second dependent village, Ropedean, less fortunate in its greater distance and also on account of a rector. This divine was indeed rich, but he was vindictively economical because of some shrinkage of his tithes; and by reason of his use of the word Eucharist for the Lord's Supper he had become altogether estranged from the great ladies of Bladesover. So that Ropedean was in the shadows through all that youthful time.

Now the unavoidable suggestion of that wide park and that fair

large house, dominating church, village and the country side, was that they represented the thing that mattered supremely in the world, and that all other things had significance only in relation to them. They represented the Gentry, the Quality, by and through and for whom the rest of the world, the farming folk and the labouring folk, the trades-people of Ashborough, and the upper servants and the lower servants and the servants of the estate, breathed and lived and were permitted. And the Quality did it so quietly and thoroughly, the great house mingled so solidly and effectually earth and sky, the contrast of its spacious hall and saloon and galleries, its airy housekeeper's room and warren of offices with the meagre dignities of the vicar, and the pinched and stuffy rooms of even the post-office people and the grocer, so enforced these suggestions, that it was only when I was a boy of thirteen or fourteen and some queer inherited strain of scepticism had set me doubting whether Mr. Bartlett, the vicar, did really know with certainty all about God, that as a further and deeper step in doubting I began to question the final rightness of the gentlefolks, their primary necessity in the scheme of things. But once that scepticism had awakened it took me fast and far. By fourteen I had achieved terrible blasphemies and sacrilege; I had resolved to marry a viscount's daughter, and I had blacked the left eye – I think it was the left – of her half-brother, in open and declared rebellion.

But of that in its place.

The great house, the church, the village, and the labourers

and the servants in their stations and degrees, seemed to me, I say, to be a closed and complete social system. About us were other villages and great estates, and from house to house, interlacing, correlated, the Gentry, the fine Olympians, came and went. The country towns seemed mere collections of ships, marketing places for the tenantry, centres for such education as they needed, as entirely dependent on the gentry as the village and scarcely less directly so. I thought this was the order of the whole world. I thought London was only a greater country town where the gentle-folk kept town-houses and did their greater shopping under the magnificent shadow of the greatest of all fine gentlewomen, the Queen. It seemed to be in the divine order. That all this fine appearance was already sapped, that there were forces at work that might presently carry all this elaborate social system in which my mother instructed me so carefully that I might understand my "place," to Limbo, had scarcely dawned upon me even by the time that Tono-Bungay was fairly launched upon the world.

There are many people in England to-day upon whom it has not yet dawned. There are times when I doubt whether any but a very inconsiderable minority of English people realise how extensively this ostensible order has even now passed away. The great houses stand in the parks still, the cottages cluster respectfully on their borders, touching their eaves with their creepers, the English countryside – you can range through Kent from Bladesover northward and see persists obstinately in

looking what it was. It is like an early day in a fine October. The hand of change rests on it all, unfelt, unseen; resting for awhile, as it were half reluctantly, before it grips and ends the thing for ever. One frost and the whole face of things will be bare, links snap, patience end, our fine foliage of pretences lie glowing in the mire.

For that we have still to wait a little while. The new order may have gone far towards shaping itself, but just as in that sort of lantern show that used to be known in the village as the "Dissolving Views," the scene that is going remains upon the mind, traceable and evident, and the newer picture is yet enigmatical long after the lines that are to replace those former ones have grown bright and strong, so that the new England of our children's children is still a riddle to me. The ideas of democracy, of equality, and above all of promiscuous fraternity have certainly never really entered into the English mind. But what IS coming into it? All this book, I hope, will bear a little on that. Our people never formulates; it keeps words for jests and ironies. In the meanwhile the old shapes, the old attitudes remain, subtly changed and changing still, sheltering strange tenants. Bladesover House is now let furnished to Sir Reuben Lichtenstein, and has been since old Lady Drew died; it was my odd experience to visit there, in the house of which my mother had been housekeeper, when my uncle was at the climax of Tono-Bungay. It was curious to notice then the little differences that had come to things with this substitution. To borrow an image

from my mineralogical days, these Jews were not so much a new British gentry as "pseudomorphous" after the gentry. They are a very clever people, the Jews, but not clever enough to suppress their cleverness. I wished I could have gone downstairs to savour the tone of the pantry. It would have been very different I know. Hawksnest, over beyond, I noted, had its pseudomorph too; a newspaper proprietor of the type that hustles along with stolen ideas from one loud sink-or-swim enterprise to another, had bought the place outright; Redgrave was in the hands of brewers.

But the people in the villages, so far as I could detect, saw no difference in their world. Two little girls bobbed and an old labourer touched his hat convulsively as I walked through the village. He still thought he knew his place – and mine. I did not know him, but I would have liked dearly to have asked him if he remembered my mother, if either my uncle or old Lichtenstein had been man enough to stand being given away like that.

In that English countryside of my boyhood every human being had a "place." It belonged to you from your birth like the colour of your eyes, it was inextricably your destiny. Above you were your betters, below you were your inferiors, and there were even an unstable questionable few, cases so disputable that you might for the rough purposes of every day at least, regard them as your equals. Head and centre of our system was Lady Drew, her "leddyship," shrivelled, garrulous, with a wonderful memory for genealogies and very, very old, and beside her and nearly as old, Miss Somerville, her cousin and companion. These

two old souls lived like dried-up kernels in the great shell of Bladesover House, the shell that had once been gaily full of fops, of fine ladies in powder and patches and courtly gentlemen with swords; and when there was no company they spent whole days in the corner parlour just over the housekeeper's room, between reading and slumber and caressing their two pet dogs. When I was a boy I used always to think of these two poor old creatures as superior beings living, like God, somewhere through the ceiling. Occasionally they bumped about a bit and one even heard them overhead, which gave them a greater effect of reality without mitigating their vertical predominance. Sometimes too I saw them. Of course if I came upon them in the park or in the shrubbery (where I was a trespasser) I hid or fled in pious horror, but I was upon due occasion taken into the Presence by request. I remember her "leddyship" then as a thing of black silks and a golden chain, a quavering injunction to me to be a good boy, a very shrunken loose-skinned face and neck, and a ropy hand that trembled a halfcrown into mine. Miss Somerville hovered behind, a paler thing of broken lavender and white and black, with screwed up, sandy-lashed eyes. Her hair was yellow and her colour bright, and when we sat in the housekeeper's room of a winter's night warming our toes and sipping elder wine, her maid would tell us the simple secrets of that belated flush… After my fight with young Garvell I was of course banished, and I never saw those poor old painted goddesses again.

Then there came and went on these floors over our respectful

heads, the Company; people I rarely saw, but whose tricks and manners were imitated and discussed by their maids and valets in the housekeeper's room and the steward's room – so that I had them through a medium at second hand. I gathered that none of the company were really Lady Drew's equals, they were greater and lesser after the manner of all things in our world. Once I remember there was a Prince, with a real live gentleman in attendance, and that was a little above our customary levels and excited us all, and perhaps raised our expectations unduly. Afterwards, Rabbits, the butler, came into my mother's room downstairs, red with indignation and with tears in his eyes. "Look at that!" gasped Rabbits. My mother was speechless with horror. That was a sovereign, a mere sovereign, such as you might get from any commoner!

After Company, I remember, came anxious days, for the poor old women upstairs were left tired and cross and vindictive, and in a state of physical and emotional indigestion after their social efforts…

On the lowest fringe of these real Olympians hung the vicarage people, and next to them came those ambiguous beings who are neither quality nor subjects. The vicarage people certainly hold a place by themselves in the typical English scheme; nothing is more remarkable than the progress the Church has made – socially – in the last two hundred years. In the early eighteenth century the vicar was rather under than over the house-steward, and was deemed a fitting match for

the housekeeper or any not too morally discredited discard. The eighteenth century literature is full of his complaints that he might not remain at table to share the pie. He rose above these indignities because of the abundance of younger sons. When I meet the large assumptions of the contemporary cleric, I am apt to think of these things. It is curious to note that to-day that down-trodden, organ-playing creature, the Church of England village Schoolmaster, holds much the same position as the seventeenth century parson. The doctor in Bladesover ranked below the vicar but above the "vet," artists and summer visitors squeezed in above or below this point according to their appearance and expenditure, and then in a carefully arranged scale came the tenantry, the butler and housekeeper, the village shopkeeper, the head keeper, the cook, the publican, the second keeper, the blacksmith (whose status was complicated by his daughter keeping the post-office – and a fine hash she used to make of telegrams too!) the village shopkeeper's eldest son, the first footman, younger sons of the village shopkeeper, his first assistant, and so forth.

All these conceptions and applications of a universal precedence and much else I drank in at Bladesover, as I listened to the talk of valets, ladies'-maids, Rabbits the butler and my mother in the much-cupboarded, white-painted, chintz-brightened housekeeper's room where the upper servants assembled, or of footmen and Rabbits and estate men of all sorts among the green baize and Windsor chairs of the pantry – where

Rabbits, being above the law, sold beer without a license or any compunction – or of housemaids and still-room maids in the bleak, matting-carpeted still-room or of the cook and her kitchen maids and casual friends among the bright copper and hot glow of the kitchens.

Of course their own ranks and places came by implication to these people, and it was with the ranks and places of the Olympians that the talk mainly concerned itself. There was an old peerage and a Crockford together with the books of recipes, the Whitaker's Almanack, the Old Moore's Almanack, and the eighteenth century dictionary, on the little dresser that broke the cupboards on one side of my mother's room; there was another peerage, with the covers off, in the pantry; there was a new peerage in the billiard-room, and I seem to remember another in the anomalous apartment that held the upper servants' bagatelle board and in which, after the Hall dinner, they partook of the luxury of sweets. And if you had asked any of those upper servants how such and such a Prince of Battenberg was related to, let us say, Mr. Cunninghame Graham or the Duke of Argyle, you would have been told upon the nail. As a boy, I heard a great deal of that sort of thing, and if to this day I am still a little vague about courtesy titles and the exact application of honorifics, it is, I can assure you, because I hardened my heart, and not from any lack of adequate opportunity of mastering these succulent particulars.

Dominating all these memories is the figure of my mother

– my mother who did not love me because I grew liker my father every day – and who knew with inflexible decision her place and the place of every one in the world – except the place that concealed my father – and in some details mine. Subtle points were put to her. I can see and hear her saying now, "No, Miss Fison, peers of England go in before peers of the United Kingdom, and he is merely a peer of the United Kingdom." She had much exercise in placing people's servants about her tea-table, where the etiquette was very strict. I wonder sometimes if the etiquette of housekeepers' rooms is as strict to-day, and what my mother would have made of a chauffeur…

On the whole I am glad that I saw so much as I did of Bladesover – if for no other reason than because seeing it when I did, quite naively, believing in it thoroughly, and then coming to analyse it, has enabled me to understand much that would be absolutely incomprehensible in the structure of English society. Bladesover is, I am convinced, the clue to almost all that is distinctively British and perplexing to the foreign inquirer in England and the English-speaking peoples. Grasp firmly that England was all Bladesover two hundred years ago; that it has had Reform Acts indeed, and such – like changes of formula, but no essential revolution since then; that all that is modern and different has come in as a thing intruded or as a gloss upon this predominant formula, either impertinently or apologetically; and you will perceive at once the reasonableness, the necessity, of that snobbishness which is the distinctive quality

of English thought. Everybody who is not actually in the shadow of a Bladesover is as it were perpetually seeking after lost orientations. We have never broken with our tradition, never even symbolically hewed it to pieces, as the French did in quivering fact in the Terror. But all the organizing ideas have slackened, the old habitual bonds have relaxed or altogether come undone. And America too, is, as it were, a detached, outlying part of that estate which has expanded in queer ways. George Washington, Esquire, was of the gentlefolk, and he came near being a King. It was Plutarch, you know, and nothing intrinsically American that prevented George Washington being a King…

IV

I hated teatime in the housekeeper's room more than anything else at Bladesover. And more particularly I hated it when Mrs. Mackridge and Mrs. Booch and Mrs. Latude-Fernay were staying in the house. They were, all three of them, pensioned-off servants.

Old friends of Lady Drew's had rewarded them posthumously for a prolonged devotion to their minor comforts, and Mrs. Booch was also trustee for a favourite Skye terrier. Every year Lady Drew gave them an invitation – a reward and encouragement of virtue with especial reference to my mother and Miss Fison, the maid. They sat about in black and shiny and flouncey clothing adorned with gimp and beads, eating great

quantities of cake, drinking much tea in a stately manner and reverberating remarks.

I remember these women as immense. No doubt they were of negotiable size, but I was only a very little chap and they have assumed nightmare proportions in my mind. They loomed, they bulged, they impended. Mrs. Mackridge was large and dark; there was a marvel about her head, inasmuch as she was bald. She wore a dignified cap, and in front of that upon her brow, hair was PAINTED. I have never seen the like since. She had been maid to the widow of Sir Roderick Blenderhasset Impey, some sort of governor or such-like portent in the East Indies, and from her remains – in Mrs. Mackridge – I judge Lady Impey was a very stupendous and crushing creature indeed. Lady Impey had been of the Juno type, haughty, unapproachable, given to irony and a caustic wit. Mrs. Mackridge had no wit, but she had acquired the caustic voice and gestures along with the old satins and trimmings of the great lady. When she told you it was a fine morning, she seemed also to be telling you you were a fool and a low fool to boot; when she was spoken to, she had a way of acknowledging your poor tinkle of utterance with a voluminous, scornful “Haw!” that made you want to burn her alive. She also had a way of saying “Indade!” with a droop of the eyelids.

Mrs. Booch was a smaller woman, brown haired, with queer little curls on either side of her face, large blue eyes and a small set of stereotyped remarks that constituted her entire mental range. Mrs. Latude-Fernay has left, oddly enough, no memory

at all except her name and the effect of a green-grey silk dress, all set with gold and blue buttons. I fancy she was a large blonde. Then there was Miss Fison, the maid who served both Lady Drew and Miss Somerville, and at the end of the table opposite my mother, sat Rabbits the butler. Rabbits, for a butler, was an unassuming man, and at tea he was not as you know butlers, but in a morning coat and a black tie with blue spots. Still, he was large, with side whiskers, even if his clean-shaven mouth was weak and little. I sat among these people on a high, hard, early Gregorian chair, trying to exist, like a feeble seedling amidst great rocks, and my mother sat with an eye upon me, resolute to suppress the slightest manifestation of vitality. It was hard on me, but perhaps it was also hard upon these rather over-fed, ageing, pretending people, that my youthful restlessness and rebellious unbelieving eyes should be thrust in among their dignities.

Tea lasted for nearly three-quarters of an hour, and I sat it out perforce; and day after day the talk was exactly the same.

"Sugar, Mrs. Mackridge?" my mother used to ask.

"Sugar, Mrs. Latude-Fernay?"

The word sugar would stir the mind of Mrs. Mackridge. "They say," she would begin, issuing her proclamation – at least half her sentences began "they say" – "sugar is fatt-an-ing, nowadays. Many of the best people do not take it at all."

"Not with their tea, ma'am," said Rabbits intelligently.

"Not with anything," said Mrs. Mackridge, with an air of crushing repartee, and drank.

“What won’t they say next?” said Miss Fison.

“They do say such things!” said Mrs. Booch.

“They say,” said Mrs. Mackridge, inflexibly, “the doctors are not recomm-an-ding it now.”

My Mother: “No, ma’am?”

Mrs. Mackridge: “No, ma’am.”

Then, to the table at large: “Poor Sir Roderick, before he died, consumed great quan-ta-ties of sugar. I have sometimes fancied it may have hastened his end.”

This ended the first skirmish. A certain gloom of manner and a pause was considered due to the sacred memory of Sir Roderick.

“George,” said my mother, “don’t kick the chair!”

Then, perhaps, Mrs. Booch would produce a favourite piece from her repertoire. “The evenings are drawing out nicely,” she would say, or if the season was decadent, “How the evenings draw in!” It was an invaluable remark to her; I do not know how she would have got along without it.

My mother, who sat with her back to the window, would always consider it due to Mrs. Booch to turn about and regard the evening in the act of elongation or contraction, whichever phase it might be.

A brisk discussion of how long we were to the longest or shortest day would ensue, and die away at last exhausted.

Mrs. Mackridge, perhaps, would reopen. She had many intelligent habits; among others she read the paper – The

Morning Post. The other ladies would at times tackle that sheet, but only to read the births, marriages, and deaths on the front page. It was, of course, the old Morning Post that cost threepence, not the brisk coruscating young thing of to-day. "They say," she would open, "that Lord Tweedums is to go to Canada."

"Ah!" said Mr. Rabbits; "dew they?"

"Isn't he," said my mother, "the Earl of Slumgold's cousin?" She knew he was; it was an entirely irrelevant and unnecessary remark, but still, something to say.

"The same, ma'am," said Mrs. Mackridge. "They say he was extremelay popular in New South Wales. They looked up to him greatlay. I knew him, ma'am, as a young man. A very nice pleasant young fella."

Interlude of respect.

"'Is predecessor," said Rabbits, who had acquired from some clerical model a precise emphatic articulation without acquiring at the same time the aspirates that would have graced it, "got into trouble at Sydney."

"Haw!" said Mrs. Mackridge, scornfully, "so am tawled."

"'E came to Templemorton after 'e came back, and I remember them talking 'im over after 'e'd gone again."

"Haw?" said Mrs. Mackridge, interrogatively.

"'Is fuss was quotin' poetry, ma'am. 'E said – what was it 'e said – 'They lef' their country for their country's good,' – which in some way was took to remind them of their being originally

convic's, though now reformed. Every one I 'eard speak, agreed it was takless of 'im."

"Sir Roderick used to say," said Mrs. Mackridge, "that the First Thing," – here Mrs. Mackridge paused and looked dreadfully at me – "and the Second Thing" – here she fixed me again – "and the Third Thing" – now I was released – "needed in a colonial governor is Tact." She became aware of my doubts again, and added predominantly, "It has always struck me that that was a Singularly True Remark."

I resolved that if ever I found this polypus of Tact growing up in my soul, I would tear it out by the roots, throw it forth and stamp on it.

"They're queer people – colonials," said Rabbits, "very queer. When I was at Templemorton I see something of 'em. Queer fellows, some of 'em. Very respectful of course, free with their money in a spasammy sort of way, but – Some of 'em, I must confess, make me nervous. They have an eye on you. They watch you – as you wait. They let themselves appear to be lookin' at you…"

My mother said nothing in that discussion. The word colonies always upset her. She was afraid, I think, that if she turned her mind in that direction my errant father might suddenly and shockingly be discovered, no doubt conspicuously bigamic and altogether offensive and revolutionary. She did not want to rediscover my father at all.

It is curious that when I was a little listening boy I had such an

idea of our colonies that I jeered in my heart at Mrs. Mackridge's colonial ascendancy. These brave emancipated sunburnt English of the open, I thought, suffer these aristocratic invaders as a quaint anachronism, but as for being gratified – !

I don't jeer now. I'm not so sure.

V

It is a little difficult to explain why I did not come to do what was the natural thing for any one in my circumstances to do, and take my world for granted. A certain innate scepticism, I think, explains it and a certain inaptitude for sympathetic assimilation. My father, I believe, was a sceptic; my mother was certainly a hard woman.

I was an only child, and to this day I do not know whether my father is living or dead. He fled my mother's virtues before my distincter memories began. He left no traces in his flight, and she, in her indignation, destroyed every vestige that she could of him. Never a photograph nor a scrap of his handwriting have I seen; and it was, I know, only the accepted code of virtue and discretion that prevented her destroying her marriage certificate and me, and so making a clean sweep of her matrimonial humiliation. I suppose I must inherit something of the moral stupidity that would enable her to make a holocaust of every little personal thing she had of him. There must have been presents made by him as a lover, for example – books with kindly

inscriptions, letters perhaps, a flattened flower, a ring, or suchlike gage. She kept her wedding-ring, of course, but all the others she destroyed. She never told me his christian name or indeed spoke a word to me of him; though at times I came near daring to ask her: add what I have of him – it isn't much – I got from his brother, my hero, my uncle Ponderevo. She wore her ring; her marriage certificate she kept in a sealed envelope in the very bottom of her largest trunk, and me she sustained at a private school among the Kentish hills. You must not think I was always at Bladesover – even in my holidays. If at the time these came round, Lady Drew was vexed by recent Company, or for any other reason wished to take it out of my mother, then she used to ignore the customary reminder my mother gave her, and I "stayed on" at the school.

But such occasions were rare, and I suppose that between ten and fourteen I averaged fifty days a year at Bladesover.

Don't imagine I deny that was a fine thing for me. Bladesover, in absorbing the whole countryside, had not altogether missed greatness. The Bladesover system has at least done one good thing for England, it has abolished the peasant habit of mind. If many of us still live and breathe pantry and housekeeper's room, we are quit of the dream of living by economising parasitically on hens and pigs… About that park there were some elements of a liberal education; there was a great space of greensward not given over to manure and food grubbing; there was mystery, there was matter for the imagination. It was still a park of deer.

I saw something of the life of these dappled creatures, heard the belling of stags, came upon young fawns among the bracken, found bones, skulls, and antlers in lonely places. There were corners that gave a gleam of meaning to the word forest, glimpses of unstudied natural splendour. There was a slope of bluebells in the broken sunlight under the newly green beeches in the west wood that is now precious sapphire in my memory; it was the first time that I knowingly met Beauty.

And in the house there were books. The rubbish old Lady Drew read I never saw; stuff of the Maria Monk type, I have since gathered, had a fascination for her; but back in the past there had been a Drew of intellectual enterprise, Sir Cuthbert, the son of Sir Matthew who built the house; and thrust away, neglected and despised, in an old room upstairs, were books and treasures of his that my mother let me rout among during a spell of wintry wet. Sitting under a dormer window on a shelf above great stores of tea and spices, I became familiar with much of Hogarth in a big portfolio, with Raphael, there was a great book of engravings from the stanzas of Raphael in the Vatican – and with most of the capitals of Europe as they had looked about 1780, by means of several pig iron-moulded books of views. There was also a broad eighteenth century atlas with huge wandering maps that instructed me mightily. It had splendid adornments about each map title; Holland showed a fisherman and his boat; Russia a Cossack; Japan, remarkable people attired in pagodas – I say it deliberately, “pagodas.” There were Terrae

Incognitae in every continent then, Poland, Sarmatia, lands since lost; and many a voyage I made with a blunted pin about that large, incorrect and dignified world. The books in that little old closet had been banished, I suppose, from the saloon during the Victorian revival of good taste and emasculated orthodoxy, but my mother had no suspicion of their character. So I read and understood the good sound rhetoric of Tom Paine's "Rights of Man," and his "Common Sense," excellent books, once praised by bishops and since sedulously lied about. Gulliver was there unexpurgated, strong meat for a boy perhaps but not too strong I hold – I have never regretted that I escaped niceness in these affairs. The satire of Traldragdubh made my blood boil as it was meant to do, but I hated Swift for the Houyhnhnms and never quite liked a horse afterwards. Then I remember also a translation of Voltaire's "Candide," and "Rasselas;" and, vast book though it was, I really believe I read, in a muzzy sort of way of course, from end to end, and even with some reference now and then to the Atlas, Gibbon – in twelve volumes.

These readings whetted my taste for more, and surreptitiously I raided the bookcases in the big saloon. I got through quite a number of books before my sacrilegious temerity was discovered by Ann, the old head-housemaid. I remember that among others I tried a translation of Plato's "Republic" then, and found extraordinarily little interest in it; I was much too young for that; but "Vathek" – "Vathek" was glorious stuff. That kicking affair! When everybody HAD to kick!

The thought of “Vathek” always brings back with it my boyish memory of the big saloon at Bladesover.

It was a huge long room with many windows opening upon the park, and each window – there were a dozen or more reaching from the floor up – had its elaborate silk or satin curtains, heavily fringed, a canopy (is it?) above, its completely white shutters folding into the deep thickness of the wall. At either end of that great still place was an immense marble chimney-piece; the end by the bookcase showed the wolf and Romulus and Remus, with Homer and Virgil for supporters; the design of the other end I have forgotten. Frederick, Prince of Wales, swaggered flatly over the one, twice life-size, but mellowed by the surface gleam of oil; and over the other was an equally colossal group of departed Drews as sylvan deities, scantily clad, against a storm-rent sky. Down the centre of the elaborate ceiling were three chandeliers, each bearing some hundreds of dangling glass lustres, and over the interminable carpet – it impressed me as about as big as Sarmatia in the store-room Atlas – were islands and archipelagoes of chintz-covered chairs and couches, tables, great Sevres vases on pedestals, a bronze man and horse. Somewhere in this wilderness one came, I remember, upon – a big harp beside a lyre-shaped music stand, and a grand piano…

The book-borrowing raid was one of extraordinary dash and danger.

One came down the main service stairs – that was legal, and illegality began in a little landing when, very cautiously, one

went through a red baize door. A little passage led to the hall, and here one reconnoitered for Ann, the old head-housemaid – the younger housemaids were friendly and did not count. Ann located, came a dash across the open space at the foot of that great staircase that has never been properly descended since powder went out of fashion, and so to the saloon door. A beast of an oscillating Chinaman in china, as large as life, grimaced and quivered to one's lightest steps. That door was the perilous place; it was double with the thickness of the wall between, so that one could not listen beforehand for the whisk of the feather-brush on the other side. Oddly rat-like, is it not, this darting into enormous places in pursuit of the abandoned crumbs of thought?

And I found Langhorne's "Plutarch" too, I remember, on those shelves. It seems queer to me now to think that I acquired pride and self-respect, the idea of a state and the germ of public spirit, in such a furtive fashion; queer, too, that it should rest with an old Greek, dead these eighteen hundred years to teach that.

VI

The school I went to was the sort of school the Bladesover system permitted. The public schools that add comic into existence in the brief glow of the Renascence had been taken possession of by the ruling class; the lower classes were not supposed to stand in need of schools, and our middle stratum got the schools it deserved, private schools, schools any unqualified

pretender was free to establish. Mine was kept by a man who had had the energy to get himself a College of Preceptors diploma, and considering how cheap his charges were, I will readily admit the place might have been worse. The building was a dingy yellow-brick residence outside the village, with the schoolroom as an outbuilding of lath and plaster.

I do not remember that my school-days were unhappy – indeed I recall a good lot of fine mixed fun in them – but I cannot without grave risk of misinterpretation declare that we were at all nice and refined. We fought much, not sound formal fighting, but "scrapping" of a sincere and murderous kind, into which one might bring one's boots – it made us tough at any rate – and several of us were the sons of London publicans, who distinguished "scraps" where one meant to hurt from ordered pugilism, practising both arts, and having, moreover, precocious linguistic gifts. Our cricket-field was bald about the wickets, and we played without style and disputed with the umpire; and the teaching was chiefly in the hands of a lout of nineteen, who wore ready-made clothes and taught despicably. The head-master and proprietor taught us arithmetic, algebra, and Euclid, and to the older boys even trigonometry, himself; he had a strong mathematical bias, and I think now that by the standard of a British public school he did rather well by us.

We had one inestimable privilege at that school, and that was spiritual neglect. We dealt with one another with the forcible simplicity of natural boys, we "cheeked," and "punched" and

"clouted"; we thought ourselves Red Indians and cowboys and such-like honourable things, and not young English gentlemen; we never felt the strain of "Onward Christian soldiers," nor were swayed by any premature piety in the cold oak pew of our Sunday devotions. All that was good. We spent our rare pennies in the uncensored reading matter of the village dame's shop, on the Boys of England, and honest penny dreadfuls – ripping stuff, stuff that anticipated Haggard and Stevenson, badly printed and queerly illustrated, and very very good for us. On our half-holidays we were allowed the unusual freedom of rambling in twos and threes wide and far about the land, talking experimentally, dreaming wildly. There was much in those walks! To this day the landscape of the Kentish world, with its low broad distances, its hop gardens and golden stretches of wheat, its oasts and square church towers, its background of downland and hangers, has for me a faint sense of adventure added to the pleasure of its beauty. We smoked on occasion, but nobody put us up to the proper "boyish" things to do; we never "robbed an orchard" for example, though there were orchards all about us, we thought stealing was sinful, we stole incidental apples and turnips and strawberries from the fields indeed, but in a criminal inglorious fashion, and afterwards we were ashamed. We had our days of adventure, but they were natural accidents, our own adventures. There was one hot day when several of us, walking out towards Maidstone, were incited by the devil to despise ginger beer, and we fuddled ourselves dreadfully with

ale; and a time when our young minds were infected to the pitch of buying pistols, by the legend of the Wild West. Young Roots from Highbury came back with a revolver and cartridges, and we went off six strong to live a free wild life one holiday afternoon. We fired our first shot deep in the old flint mine at Chiselstead, and nearly burst our ear drums; then we fired in a primrose studded wood by Pickthorn Green, and I gave a false alarm of "keeper," and we fled in disorder for a mile. After which Roots suddenly shot at a pheasant in the high road by Chiselstead, and then young Barker told lies about the severity of the game laws and made Roots sore afraid, and we hid the pistol in a dry ditch outside the school field. A day or so after we got in again, and ignoring a certain fouling and rusting of the barrel, tried for a rabbit at three hundred yards. Young Roots blew a molehill at twenty paces into a dust cloud, burnt his fingers, and scorched his face; and the weapon having once displayed this strange disposition to flame back upon the shooter, was not subsequently fired.

One main source of excitement for us was "cheeking" people in vans and carts upon the Goudhurst road; and getting myself into a monstrous white mess in the chalk pits beyond the village, and catching yellow jaundice as a sequel to bathing stark naked with three other Adamites, old Ewart leading that function, in the rivulet across Hickson's meadows, are among my memorabilia. Those free imaginative afternoons! how much they were for us! how much they did for us! All streams came from the then

undiscovered "sources of the Nile" in those days, all thickets were Indian jungles, and our best game, I say it with pride, I invented. I got it out of the Bladesover saloon. We found a wood where "Trespassing" was forbidden, and did the "Retreat of the Ten Thousand" through it from end to end, cutting our way bravely through a host of nettle beds that barred our path, and not forgetting to weep and kneel when at last we emerged within sight of the High Road Sea. So we have burst at times, weeping and rejoicing, upon startled wayfarers. Usually I took the part of that distinguished general Xenophen – and please note the quantity of the o. I have all my classical names like that, – Socrates rhymes with Bates for me, and except when the bleak eye of some scholar warns me of his standards of judgment, I use those dear old mispronunciations still. The little splash into Latin made during my days as a chemist washed off nothing of the habit. Well, – if I met those great gentlemen of the past with their accents carelessly adjusted I did at least meet them alive, as an equal, and in a living tongue. Altogether my school might easily have been worse for me, and among other good things it gave me a friend who has lasted my life out.

This was Ewart, who is now a monumental artist at Woking, after many vicissitudes. Dear chap, how he did stick out of his clothes to be sure! He was a longlimbed lout, ridiculously tall beside my more youth full compactness, and, except that there was no black moustache under his nose blob, he had the same round knobby face as he has to-day, the same bright and

active hazel brown eyes, the stare, the meditative moment, the insinuating reply. Surely no boy ever played the fool as Bob Ewart used to play it, no boy had a readier knack of mantling the world with wonder. Commonness vanished before Ewart, at his expository touch all things became memorable and rare. From him I first heard tell of love, but only after its barbs were already sticking in my heart. He was, I know now the bastard of that great improvident artist, Rickmann Ewart; he brought the light of a lax world that at least had not turned its back upon beauty, into the growing fermentation of my mind.

I won his heart by a version of Vathek, and after that we were inseparable yarning friends. We merged our intellectual stock so completely that I wonder sometimes how much I did not become Ewart, how much Ewart is not vicariously and derivatively me.

VII

And then when I had newly passed my fourteenth birthday, came my tragic disgrace.

It was in my midsummer holidays that the thing happened, and it was through the Honourable Beatrice Normandy. She had "come into my life," as they say, before I was twelve.

She descended unexpectedly into a peaceful interlude that followed the annual going of those Three Great Women. She came into the old nursery upstairs, and every day she had tea with us in the housekeeper's room. She was eight, and she came with

a nurse called Nannie; and to begin with, I did not like her at all.

Nobody liked this irruption into the downstairs rooms; the two "gave trouble," – a dire offence; Nannie's sense of duty to her charge led to requests and demands that took my mother's breath away. Eggs at unusual times, the reboiling of milk, the rejection of an excellent milk pudding – not negotiated respectfully but dictated as of right. Nannie was a dark, longfeatured, taciturn woman in a grey dress; she had a furtive inflexibility of manner that finally dismayed and crushed and overcame. She conveyed she was "under orders" – like a Greek tragedy. She was that strange product of the old time, a devoted, trusted servant; she had, as it were, banked all her pride and will with the greater, more powerful people who employed her, in return for a life-long security of servitude – the bargain was nonetheless binding for being implicit. Finally they were to pension her, and she would die the hated treasure of a boarding-house. She had built up in herself an enormous habit of reference to these upstairs people, she had curbed down all discordant murmurings of her soul, her very instincts were perverted or surrendered. She was sexless, her personal pride was all transferred, she mothered another woman's child with a hard, joyless devotion that was at least entirely compatible with a stoical separation. She treated us all as things that counted for nothing save to fetch and carry for her charge. But the Honourable Beatrice could condescend.

The queer chances of later years come between me and a distinctly separated memory of that childish face. When I think

of Beatrice, I think of her as I came to know her at a later time, when at last I came to know her so well that indeed now I could draw her, and show a hundred little delicate things you would miss in looking at her. But even then I remember how I noted the infinite delicacy of her childish skin and the fine eyebrow, finer than the finest feather that ever one felt on the breast of a bird. She was one of those elfin, rather precocious little girls, quick coloured, with dark hair, naturally curling dusky hair that was sometimes astray over her eyes, and eyes that were sometimes impishly dark, and sometimes a clear brown yellow. And from the very outset, after a most cursory attention to Rabbits, she decided that the only really interesting thing at the tea-table was myself.

The elders talked in their formal dull way – telling Nannie the trite old things about the park and the village that they told every one, and Beatrice watched me across the table with a pitiless little curiosity that made me uncomfortable.

"Nannie," she said, pointing, and Nannie left a question of my mother's disregarded to attend to her; "is he a servant boy?"

"S-s-sh," said Nannie. "He's Master Ponderevo."

"Is he a servant boy?" repeated Beatrice.

"He's a schoolboy," said my mother.

"Then may I talk to him, Nannie?"

Nannie surveyed me with brutal inhumanity. "You mustn't talk too much," she said to her charge, and cut cake into fingers for her.

"No," she added decisively, as Beatrice made to speak.

Beatrice became malignant. Her eyes explored me with unjustifiable hostility. "He's got dirty hands," she said, stabbing at the forbidden fruit. "And there's a fray to his collar."

Then she gave herself up to cake with an appearance of entire forgetfulness of me that filled me with hate and a passionate desire to compel her to admire me… And the next day before tea, I did for the first time in my life, freely, without command or any compulsion, wash my hands.

So our acquaintance began, and presently was deepened by a whim of hers. She had a cold and was kept indoors, and confronted Nannie suddenly with the alternative of being hopelessly naughty, which in her case involved a generous amount of screaming unsuitable for the ears of an elderly, shaky, rich aunt, or having me up to the nursery to play with her all the afternoon. Nannie came downstairs and borrowed me in a careworn manner; and I was handed over to the little creature as if I was some large variety of kitten. I had never had anything to do with a little girl before, I thought she was more beautiful and wonderful and bright than anything else could possibly be in life, and she found me the gentlest of slaves – though at the same time, as I made evident, fairly strong. And Nannie was amazed to find the afternoon slip cheerfully and rapidly away. She praised my manners to Lady Drew and to my mother, who said she was glad to hear well of me, and after that I played with Beatrice several times. The toys she had remain in my memory still as

great splendid things, gigantic to all my previous experience of toys, and we even went to the great doll's house on the nursery landing to play discreetly with that, the great doll's house that the Prince Regent had given Sir Harry Drew's first-born (who died at five), that was a not ineffectual model of Bladesover itself, and contained eighty-five dolls and had cost hundreds of pounds. I played under imperious direction with that toy of glory.

I went back to school when that holiday was over, dreaming of beautiful things, and got Ewart to talk to me of love; and I made a great story out of the doll's house, a story that, taken over into Ewart's hands, speedily grew to an island doll's city all our own.

One of the dolls, I privately decided, was like Beatrice.

One other holiday there was when I saw something of her – oddly enough my memory of that second holiday in which she played a part is vague – and then came a gap of a year, and then my disgrace.

VIII

Now I sit down to write my story and tell over again things in their order, I find for the first time how inconsecutive and irrational a thing the memory can be. One recalls acts and cannot recall motives; one recalls quite vividly moments that stand out inexplicably – things adrift, joining on to nothing, leading nowhere. I think I must have seen Beatrice and her half-brother quite a number of times in my last holiday at Bladesover, but

I really cannot recall more than a little of the quality of the circumstances. That great crisis of my boyhood stands out very vividly as an effect, as a sort of cardinal thing for me, but when I look for details, particularly details that led up to the crisis – I cannot find them in any developing order at all. This halfbrother, Archie Garvell, was a new factor in the affair. I remember him clearly as a fair-haired, supercilious looking, weedily-lank boy, much taller than I, but I should imagine very little heavier, and that we hated each other by a sort of instinct from the beginning; and yet I cannot remember my first meeting with him at all.

Looking back into these past things – it is like rummaging in a neglected attic that has experienced the attentions of some whimsical robber – I cannot even account for the presence of these children at Bladesover. They were, I know, among the innumerable cousins of Lady Drew, and according to the theories of downstairs candidates for the ultimate possession of Bladesover. If they were, their candidature was unsuccessful. But that great place, with all its faded splendour, its fine furniture, its large traditions, was entirely at the old lady's disposition; and I am inclined to think it is true that she used this fact to torment and dominate a number of eligible people. Lord Osprey was among the number of these, and she showed these hospitalities to his motherless child and step-child, partly, no doubt, because he was poor, but quite as much, I nowadays imagine, in the dim hope of finding some affectionate or imaginative outcome of contact with them. Nannie had dropped out of the world this second

time, and Beatrice was in the charge of an extremely amiable and ineffectual poor army-class young woman whose name I never knew. They were, I think, two remarkably illmanaged and enterprising children. I seem to remember too, that it was understood that I was not a fit companion for them, and that our meetings had to be as unostentatious as possible. It was Beatrice who insisted upon our meeting.

I am certain I knew quite a lot about love at fourteen and that I was quite as much in love with Beatrice then as any impassioned adult could be, and that Beatrice was, in her way, in love with me. It is part of the decent and useful pretences of our world that children of the age at which we were, think nothing, feel nothing, know nothing of love. It is wonderful what people the English are for keeping up pretences. But indeed I cannot avoid telling that Beatrice and I talked of love and kissed and embraced one another.

I recall something of one talk under the overhanging bushes of the shrubbery – I on the park side of the stone wall, and the lady of my worship a little inelegantly astride thereon. Inelegantly do I say? you should have seen the sweet imp as I remember her. Just her poise on the wall comes suddenly clear before me, and behind her the light various branches of the bushes of the shrubbery that my feet might not profane, and far away and high behind her, dim and stately, the cornice of the great facade of Bladesover rose against the dappled sky. Our talk must have been serious and business-like, for we were discussing my social position.

"I don't love Archie," she had said, apropos of nothing; and then in a whisper, leaning forward with the hair about her face, "I love YOU!"

But she had been a little pressing to have it clear that I was not and could not be a servant.

"You'll never be a servant – ever!"

I swore that very readily, and it is a vow I have kept by nature.

"What will you be?" said she.

I ran my mind hastily over the professions.

"Will you be a soldier?" she asked.

"And be bawled at by duffers? No fear!" said I. "Leave that to the plough-boys."

"But an officer?"

"I don't know," I said, evading a shameful difficulty.

"I'd rather go into the navy."

"Wouldn't you like to fight?"

"I'd like to fight," I said. "But a common soldier it's no honour to have to be told to fight and to be looked down upon while you do it, and how could I be an officer?"

"Couldn't you be?" she said, and looked at me doubtfully; and the spaces of the social system opened between us.

Then, as became a male of spirit, I took upon myself to brag and lie my way through this trouble. I said I was a poor man, and poor men went into the navy; that I "knew" mathematics, which no army officer did; and I claimed Nelson for an exemplar, and spoke very highly of my outlook upon blue water. "He loved Lady

Hamilton," I said, "although she was a lady – and I will love you."

We were somewhere near that when the egregious governess became audible, calling "Beeee-atrice! Beeee-e-atrice!"

"Snifty beast!" said my lady, and tried to get on with the conversation; but that governess made things impossible.

"Come here!" said my lady suddenly, holding out a grubby hand; and I went very close to her, and she put her little head down upon the wall until her black fog of hair tickled my cheek.

"You are my humble, faithful lover," she demanded in a whisper, her warm flushed face near touching mine, and her eyes very dark and lustrous.

"I am your humble, faithful lover," I whispered back.

And she put her arm about my head and put out her lips and we kissed, and boy though I was, I was all atremble. So we two kissed for the first time.

"Beeee-e-e-a-trice!" fearfully close.

My lady had vanished, with one wild kick of her black-stocking leg. A moment after, I heard her sustaining the reproaches of her governess, and explaining her failure to answer with an admirable lucidity and disingenuousness.

I felt it was unnecessary for me to be seen just then, and I vanished guiltily round the corner into the West Wood, and so to love-dreams and single-handed play, wandering along one of those meandering bracken valleys that varied Bladesover park. And that day and for many days that kiss upon my lips was a seal, and by night the seed of dreams.

Then I remember an expedition we made – she, I, and her half-brother – into those West Woods – they two were supposed to be playing in the shrubbery – and how we were Indians there, and made a wigwam out of a pile of beech logs, and how we stalked deer, crept near and watched rabbits feeding in a glade, and almost got a squirrel. It was play seasoned with plentiful disputing between me and young Garvell, for each firmly insisted upon the leading roles, and only my wider reading – I had read ten stories to his one – gave me the ascendency over him. Also I scored over him by knowing how to find the eagle in a bracken stem. And somehow – I don't remember what led to it at all – I and Beatrice, two hot and ruffled creatures, crept in among the tall bracken and hid from him. The great fronds rose above us, five feet or more, and as I had learnt how to wriggle through that undergrowth with the minimum of betrayal by tossing greenery above, I led the way. The ground under bracken is beautifully clear and faintly scented in warm weather; the stems come up black and then green; if you crawl flat, it is a tropical forest in miniature. I led the way and Beatrice crawled behind, and then as the green of the further glade opened before us, stopped. She crawled up to me, her hot little face came close to mine; once more she looked and breathed close to me, and suddenly she flung her arm about my neck and dragged me to earth beside her, and kissed me and kissed me again. We kissed, we embraced and kissed again, all without a word; we desisted, we stared and hesitated – then in a suddenly damped mood and a little perplexed at ourselves,

crawled out, to be presently run down and caught in the tamest way by Archie.

That comes back very clearly to me, and other vague memories – I know old Hall and his gun, out shooting at jackdaws, came into our common experiences, but I don't remember how; and then at last, abruptly, our fight in the Warren stands out. The Warren, like most places in England that have that name, was not particularly a warren, it was a long slope of thorns and beeches through which a path ran, and made an alternative route to the downhill carriage road between Bladesover and Ropedean. I don't know how we three got there, but I have an uncertain fancy it was connected with a visit paid by the governess to the Ropedean vicarage people. But suddenly Archie and I, in discussing a game, fell into a dispute for Beatrice. I had made him the fairest offer: I was to be a Spanish nobleman, she was to be my wife, and he was to be a tribe of Indians trying to carry her off. It seems to me a fairly attractive offer to a boy to be a whole tribe of Indians with a chance of such a booty. But Archie suddenly took offence.

"No," he said; "we can't have that!"

"Can't have what?"

"You can't be a gentleman, because you aren't. And you can't play Beatrice is your wife. It's – it's impertinent."

"But" I said, and looked at her.

Some earlier grudge in the day's affairs must have been in Archie's mind. "We let you play with us," said Archie; "but we

can't have things like that."

"What rot!" said Beatrice. "He can if he likes."

But he carried his point. I let him carry it, and only began to grow angry three or four minutes later. Then we were still discussing play and disputing about another game. Nothing seemed right for all of us.

"We don't want you to play with us at all," said Archie.

"Yes, we do," said Beatrice.

"He drops his aitches like anything."

"No, 'e doesn't," said I, in the heat of the moment.

"There you go!" he cried. "E, he says. E! E! E!"

He pointed a finger at me. He had struck to the heart of my shame. I made the only possible reply by a rush at him. "Hello!" he cried, at my blackavised attack. He dropped back into an attitude that had some style in it, parried my blow, got back at my cheek, and laughed with surprise and relief at his own success. Whereupon I became a thing of murderous rage. He could box as well or better than I – he had yet to realise I knew anything of that at all – but I had fought once or twice to a finish with bare fists. I was used to inflicting and enduring savage hurting, and I doubt if he had ever fought. I hadn't fought ten seconds before I felt this softness in him, realised all that quality of modern upper-class England that never goes to the quick, that hedges about rules and those petty points of honour that are the ultimate comminution of honour, that claims credit for things demonstrably half done. He seemed to think that first hit of his and one or two others

were going to matter, that I ought to give in when presently my lip bled and dripped blood upon my clothes. So before we had been at it a minute he had ceased to be aggressive except in momentary spurts, and I was knocking him about almost as I wanted to do; and demanding breathlessly and fiercely, after our school manner, whether he had had enough, not knowing that by his high code and his soft training it was equally impossible for him to either buck-up and beat me, or give in.

I have a very distinct impression of Beatrice dancing about us during the affair in a state of unladylike appreciation, but I was too preoccupied to hear much of what she was saying. But she certainly backed us both, and I am inclined to think now – it may be the disillusionment of my ripened years – whichever she thought was winning.

Then young Garvell, giving way before my slogging, stumbled and fell over a big flint, and I, still following the tradition of my class and school, promptly flung myself on him to finish him. We were busy with each other on the ground when we became aware of a dreadful interruption.

"Shut up, you FOOL!" said Archie.

"Oh, Lady Drew!" I heard Beatrice cry. "They're fighting! They're fighting something awful!"

I looked over my shoulder. Archie's wish to get up became irresistible, and my resolve to go on with him vanished altogether.

I became aware of the two old ladies, presences of black and purple silk and fur and shining dark things; they had walked

up through the Warren, while the horses took the hill easily, and so had come upon us. Beatrice had gone to them at once with an air of taking refuge, and stood beside and a little behind them. We both rose dejectedly. The two old ladies were evidently quite dreadfully shocked, and peering at us with their poor old eyes; and never had I seen such a tremblement in Lady Drew's lorgnettes.

"You've never been fighting?" said Lady Drew.

"You have been fighting."

"It wasn't proper fighting," snapped Archie, with accusing eyes on me.

"It's Mrs. Ponderevo's George!" said Miss Somerville, so adding a conviction for ingratitude to my evident sacrilege.

"How could he DARE?" cried Lady Drew, becoming very awful.

"He broke the rules" said Archie, sobbing for breath. "I slipped, and – he hit me while I was down. He knelt on me."

"How could you DARE?" said Lady Drew.

I produced an experienced handkerchief rolled up into a tight ball, and wiped the blood from my chin, but I offered no explanation of my daring. Among other things that prevented that, I was too short of breath.

"He didn't fight fair," sobbed Archie.

Beatrice, from behind the old ladies, regarded me intently and without hostility. I am inclined to think the modification of my face through the damage to my lip interested her. It became

dimly apparent to my confused intelligence that I must not say these two had been playing with me. That would not be after the rules of their game. I resolved in this difficult situation upon a sulky silence, and to take whatever consequences might follow.

IX

The powers of justice in Bladesover made an extraordinary mess of my case.

I have regretfully to admit that the Honourable Beatrice Normandy did, at the age of ten, betray me, abandon me, and lie most abominably about me. She was, as a matter of fact, panic-stricken about me, conscience stricken too; she bolted from the very thought of my being her affianced lover and so forth, from the faintest memory of kissing; she was indeed altogether disgraceful and human in her betrayal. She and her half-brother lied in perfect concord, and I was presented as a wanton assailant of my social betters. They were waiting about in the Warren, when I came up and spoke to them, etc.

On the whole, I now perceive Lady Drew's decisions were, in the light of the evidence, reasonable and merciful.

They were conveyed to me by my mother, who was, I really believe, even more shocked by the grossness of my social insubordination than Lady Drew. She dilated on her ladyship's kindnesses to me, on the effrontery and wickedness of my procedure, and so came at last to the terms of my penance. "You

must go up to young Mr. Garvell, and beg his pardon."

"I won't beg his pardon," I said, speaking for the first time.

My mother paused, incredulous.

I folded my arms on her table-cloth, and delivered my wicked little ultimatum. "I won't beg his pardon nohow," I said. "See?"

"Then you will have to go off to your uncle Frapp at Chatham."

"I don't care where I have to go or what I have to do, I won't beg his pardon," I said.

And I didn't.

After that I was one against the world. Perhaps in my mother's heart there lurked some pity for me, but she did not show it. She took the side of the young gentleman; she tried hard, she tried very hard, to make me say I was sorry I had struck him. Sorry!

I couldn't explain.

So I went into exile in the dog-cart to Redwood station, with Jukes the coachman, coldly silent, driving me, and all my personal belongings in a small American cloth portmanteau behind.

I felt I had much to embitter me; the game had and the beginnings of fairness by any standards I knew… But the thing that embittered me most was that the Honourable Beatrice Normandy should have repudiated and fled from me as though I was some sort of leper, and not even have taken a chance or so, to give me a good-bye. She might have done that anyhow! Supposing I had told on her! But the son of a servant counts as

a servant. She had forgotten and now remembered.

I solaced myself with some extraordinary dream of coming back to Bladesover, stern, powerful, after the fashion of Coriolanus. I do not recall the details, but I have no doubt I displayed great magnanimity…

Well, anyhow I never said I was sorry for pounding young Garvell, and I am not sorry to this day.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

OF MY LAUNCH INTO THE WORLD AND THE LAST I SAW OF BLADESOVER

I

When I was thus banished from Bladesover House, as it was then thought for good and all, I was sent by my mother in a vindictive spirit, first to her cousin Nicodemus Frapp, and then, as a fully indentured apprentice, to my uncle Ponderevo.

I ran away from the care of my cousin Nicodemus back to Bladesover House.

My cousin Nicodemus Frapp was a baker in a back street – a slum rather – just off that miserable narrow mean high road that threads those exquisite beads, Rochester and Chatham. He was, I must admit, a shock to me, much dominated by a young, plump, prolific, malingering wife; a bent, slow-moving, unwilling dark man with flour in his hair and eyelashes, in the lines of his face and the seams of his coat. I've never had a chance to correct my early impression of him, and he still remains an almost dreadful memory, a sort of caricature of incompetent

simplicity. As I remember him, indeed, he presented the servile tradition perfected. He had no pride in his person; fine clothes and dressing up wasn't "for the likes of" him, so that he got his wife, who was no artist at it, to cut his black hair at irregular intervals, and let his nails become disagreeable to the fastidious eye; he had no pride in his business nor any initiative; his only virtues were not doing certain things and hard work. "Your uncle," said my mother – all grown-up cousins were uncles by courtesy among the Victorian middle-class – "isn't much to look at or talk to, but he's a Good Hard-Working Man." There was a sort of base honourableness about toil, however needless, in that system of inversion. Another point of honour was to rise at or before dawn, and then laboriously muddle about.

It was very distinctly impressed on my mind that the Good Hard-Working Man would have thought it "fal-lallish" to own a pocket handkerchief. Poor old Frapp – dirty and crushed by, product of, Bladesover's magnificence! He made no fight against the world at all, he was floundering in small debts that were not so small but that finally they overwhelmed him, whenever there was occasion for any exertion his wife fell back upon pains and her "condition," and God sent them many children, most of whom died, and so, by their coming and going, gave a double exercise in the virtues of submission.

Resignation to God's will was the common device of these people in the face of every duty and every emergency. There were no books in the house; I doubt if either of them had retained the

capacity for reading consecutively for more than a minute or so, and it was with amazement that day after day, over and above stale bread, one beheld food and again more food amidst the litter that held permanent session on the living-room table.

One might have doubted if either of them felt discomfort in this dusty darkness of existence, if it was not that they did visibly seek consolation. They sought this and found it of a Sunday, not in strong drink and raving, but in imaginary draughts of blood. They met with twenty or thirty other darkened and unclean people, all dressed in dingy colours that would not show the dirt, in a little brick-built chapel equipped with a spavined roarer of a harmonium, and there solaced their minds on the thought that all that was fair and free in life, all that struggled, all that planned and made, all pride and beauty and honour, all fine and enjoyable things, were irrevocably damned to everlasting torments. They were the self-appointed confidants of God's mockery of his own creation. So at any rate they stick in my mind. Vaguer, and yet hardly less agreeable than this cosmic jest, this coming "Yah, clever!" and general serving out and "showing up" of the lucky, the bold, and the cheerful, was their own predestination to Glory.

> "There is a Fountain, filled with Blood
> Drawn from Emmanuel's Veins,"

so they sang. I hear the drone and wheeze of that hymn now. I hated them with the bitter uncharitable condemnation

of boyhood, and a twinge of that hate comes back to me. As I write the words, the sounds and then the scene return, these obscure, undignified people, a fat woman with asthma, an old Welsh milk-seller with a tumour on his bald head, who was the intellectual leader of the sect, a huge-voiced haberdasher with a big black beard, a white-faced, extraordinarily pregnant woman, his wife, a spectacled rate collector with a bent back… I hear the talk about souls, the strange battered old phrases that were coined ages ago in the seaports of the sun-dry Levant, of balm of Gilead and manna in the desert, of gourds that give shade and water in a thirsty land; I recall again the way in which at the conclusion of the service the talk remained pious in form but became medical in substance, and how the women got together for obstetric whisperings. I, as a boy, did not matter, and might overhear.

If Bladesover is my key for the explanation of England, I think my invincible persuasion that I understand Russia was engendered by the circle of Uncle Frapp.

I slept in a dingy sheeted bed with the two elder survivors of Frapp fecundity, and spent my week days in helping in the laborious disorder of the shop and bakehouse, in incidental deliveries of bread and so forth, and in parrying the probings of my uncle into my relations with the Blood, and his confidential explanations that ten shillings a week – which was what my mother paid him – was not enough to cover my accommodation. He was very anxious to keep that, but also he wanted more.

There were neither books nor any seat nor corner in that house where reading was possible, no newspaper ever brought the clash of worldly things into its heavenward seclusion; horror of it all grew in me daily, and whenever I could I escaped into the streets and tramped about Chatham. The news shops appealed to me particularly. One saw there smudgy illustrated sheets, the Police News in particular, in which vilely drawn pictures brought home to the dullest intelligence an interminable succession of squalid crimes, women murdered and put into boxes, buried under floors, old men bludgeoned at midnight by robbers, people thrust suddenly out of trains, happy lovers shot, vitrioled and so forth by rivals. I got my first glimpse of the life of pleasure in foully drawn pictures of “police raids” on this and that. Interspersed with these sheets were others in which Sloper, the urban John Bull, had his fling with gin bottle and obese umbrella, or the kindly empty faces of the Royal Family appeared and reappeared, visiting this, opening that, getting married, getting offspring, lying in state, doing everything but anything, a wonderful, good-meaning, impenetrable race apart.

I have never revisited Chatham; the impression it has left on my mind is one of squalid compression, unlit by any gleam of a maturer charity. All its effects arranged themselves as antithetical to the Bladesover effects. They confirmed and intensified all that Bladesover suggested. Bladesover declared itself to be the land, to be essentially England; I have already told how its airy spaciousness, its wide dignity, seemed to thrust village, church,

and vicarage into corners, into a secondary and conditional significance. Here one gathered the corollary of that. Since the whole wide country of Kent was made up of contiguous Bladesovers and for the gentlefolk, the surplus of population, all who were not good tenants nor good labourers, Church of England, submissive and respectful, were necessarily thrust together, jostled out of sight, to fester as they might in this place that had the colours and even the smells of a well-packed dustbin. They should be grateful even for that; that, one felt, was the theory of it all.

And I loafed about this wilderness of crowded dinginess, with young, receptive, wide-open eyes, and through the blessing (or curse) of some fairy godmother of mine, asking and asking again: “But after all, WHY – ”

I wandered up through Rochester once, and had a glimpse of the Stour valley above the town, all horrible with cement works and foully smoking chimneys and rows of workmen’s cottages, minute, ugly, uncomfortable, and grimy. So I had my first intimation of how industrialism must live in a landlord’s land. I spent some hours, too, in the streets that give upon the river, drawn by the spell of the sea. But I saw barges and ships stripped of magic and mostly devoted to cement, ice, timber, and coal. The sailors looked to me gross and slovenly men, and the shipping struck me as clumsy, ugly, old, and dirty. I discovered that most sails don’t fit the ships that hoist them, and that there may be as pitiful and squalid a display of poverty with a vessel as

with a man. When I saw colliers unloading, watched the workers in the hold filling up silly little sacks and the succession of blackened, half-naked men that ran to and fro with these along a plank over a thirty-foot drop into filth and mud, I was first seized with admiration of their courage and toughness and then, "But after all, WHY – ?" and the stupid ugliness of all this waste of muscle and endurance came home to me. Among other things it obviously wasted and deteriorated the coal… And I had imagined great things of the sea!

Well, anyhow, for a time that vocation was stilled.

But such impressions came into my leisure, and of that I had no excess. Most of my time was spent doing things for Uncle Frapp, and my evenings and nights perforce in the company of the two eldest of my cousins. He was errand boy at an oil shop and fervently pious, and of him I saw nothing until the evening except at meals; the other was enjoying the midsummer holidays without any great elation; a singularly thin and abject, stunted creature he was, whose chief liveliness was to pretend to be a monkey, and who I am now convinced had some secret disease that drained his vitality away. If I met him now I should think him a pitiful little creature and be extremely sorry for him. Then I felt only a wondering aversion. He sniffed horribly, he was tired out by a couple of miles of loafing, he never started any conversation, and he seemed to prefer his own company to mine. His mother, poor woman, said he was the "thoughtful one."

Serious trouble came suddenly out of a conversation we held

in bed one night. Some particularly pious phrase of my elder cousin's irritated me extremely, and I avowed outright my entire disbelief in the whole scheme of revealed religion. I had never said a word about my doubts to any one before, except to Ewart who had first evolved them. I had never settled my doubts until at this moment when I spoke. But it came to me then that the whole scheme of salvation of the Frappes was not simply doubtful, but impossible. I fired this discovery out into the darkness with the greatest promptitude.

My abrupt denials certainly scared my cousin amazingly.

At first they could not understand what I was saying, and when they did I fully believe they expected an instant answer in thunderbolts and flames. They gave me more room in the bed forthwith, and then the elder sat up and expressed his sense of my awfulness. I was already a little frightened at my temerity, but when he asked me categorically to unsay what I had said, what could I do but confirm my repudiation?

"There's no hell," I said, "and no eternal punishment. No God would be such a fool as that."

My elder cousin cried aloud in horror, and the younger lay scared, but listening. "Then you mean," said my elder cousin, when at last he could bring himself to argue, "you might do just as you liked?"

"If you were cad enough," said I.

Our little voices went on interminably, and at one stage my cousin got out of bed and made his brother do likewise, and knelt

in the night dimness and prayed at me. That I found trying, but I held out valiantly. "Forgive him," said my cousin, "he knows not what he sayeth."

"You can pray if you like," I said, "but if you're going to cheek me in your prayers I draw the line."

The last I remember of that great discussion was my cousin deploring the fact that he "should ever sleep in the same bed with an Infidel!"

The next day he astonished me by telling the whole business to his father. This was quite outside all my codes. Uncle Nicodemus sprang it upon me at the midday meal.

"You been sayin' queer things, George," he said abruptly. "You better mind what you're saying."

"What did he say, father?" said Mrs. Frapp.

"Things I couldn't' repeat," said he.

"What things?" I asked hotly.

"Ask 'IM," said my uncle, pointing with his knife to his informant, and making me realise the nature of my offence. My aunt looked at the witness. "Not – ?" she framed a question.

"Wuss," said my uncle. "Blarsphemy."

My aunt couldn't touch another mouthful. I was already a little troubled in my conscience by my daring, and now I began to feel the black enormity of the course upon which I had embarked.

"I was only talking sense," I said.

I had a still more dreadful moment when presently I met my cousin in the brick alley behind the yard, that led back to his

grocer’s shop.

“You sneak!” I said, and smacked his face hard forthwith. “Now then,” said I.

He started back, astonished and alarmed. His eyes met mine, and I saw a sudden gleam of resolution. He turned his other cheek to me.

“‘It ‘it,” he said. “‘It ‘it. I’LL forgive you.”

I felt I had never encountered a more detestable way of evading a licking. I shoved him against the wall and left him there, forgiving me, and went back into the house.

“You better not speak to your cousins, George,” said my aunt, “till you’re in a better state of mind.”

I became an outcast forthwith. At supper that night a gloomy silence was broken by my cousin saying,

“‘E ‘it me for telling you, and I turned the other cheek, muvver.”

“‘E’s got the evil one be’ind ‘im now, a ridin’ on ‘is back,” said my aunt, to the grave discomfort of the eldest girl, who sat beside me.

After supper my uncle, in a few ill-chosen words, prayed me to repent before I slept.

“Suppose you was took in your sleep, George,” he said; “where’d you be then? You jest think of that me boy.” By this time I was thoroughly miserable and frightened, and this suggestion unnerved me dreadfully but I kept up an impenitent front. “To wake in ‘ell,” said Uncle Nicodemus, in gentle tones.

"You don't want to wake in 'ell, George, burnin' and screamin' for ever, do you? You wouldn't like that?"

He tried very hard to get me to "jest 'ave a look at the bake'ouse fire" before I retired. "It might move you," he said.

I was awake longest that night. My cousins slept, the sleep of faith on either side of me. I decided I would whisper my prayers, and stopped midway because I was ashamed, and perhaps also because I had an idea one didn't square God like that.

"No," I said, with a sudden confidence, "damn me if you're coward enough… But you're not. No! You couldn't be!"

I woke my cousins up with emphatic digs, and told them as much, triumphantly, and went very peacefully to sleep with my act of faith accomplished.

I slept not only through that night, but for all my nights since then. So far as any fear of Divine injustice goes, I sleep soundly, and shall, I know, to the end of things. That declaration was an epoch in my spiritual life.

II

But I didn't expect to have the whole meeting on Sunday turned on to me.

It was. It all comes back to me, that convergence of attention, even the faint leathery smell of its atmosphere returns, and the coarse feel of my aunt's black dress beside me in contact with my hand. I see again the old Welsh milkman "wrestling" with

me, they all wrestled with me, by prayer or exhortation. And I was holding out stoutly, though convinced now by the contagion of their universal conviction that by doing so I was certainly and hopelessly damned. I felt that they were right, that God was probably like them, and that on the whole it didn't matter. And to simplify the business thoroughly I had declared I didn't believe anything at all. They confuted me by texts from Scripture which I now perceive was an illegitimate method of reply. When I got home, still impenitent and eternally lost and secretly very lonely and miserable and alarmed, Uncle Nicodemus docked my Sunday pudding.

One person only spoke to me like a human being on that day of wrath, and that was the younger Frapp. He came up to me in the afternoon while I was confined upstairs with a Bible and my own thoughts.

"'Ello," he said, and fretted about.

"D'you mean to say there isn't – no one," he said, funking the word.

"No one?"

"No one watching yer – always."

"Why should there be?" I asked.

"You can't 'elp thoughts," said my cousin, "anyhow. You mean – " He stopped hovering. "I s'pose I oughtn't to be talking to you."

He hesitated and flitted away with a guilty back glance over his shoulder…

The following week made life quite intolerable for me; these

people forced me at last into an Atheism that terrified me. When I learnt that next Sunday the wrestling was to be resumed, my courage failed me altogether.

I happened upon a map of Kent in a stationer's window on Saturday, and that set me thinking of one form of release. I studied it intently for half an hour perhaps, on Saturday night, got a route list of villages well fixed in my memory, and got up and started for Bladesover about five on Sunday morning while my two bed mates were still fast asleep.

III

I remember something, but not so much of it as I should like to recall, of my long tramp to Bladesover House. The distance from Chatham is almost exactly seventeen miles, and it took me until nearly one. It was very interesting and I do not think I was very fatigued, though I got rather pinched by one boot.

The morning must have been very clear, because I remember that near Itchinstow Hall I looked back and saw the estuary of the Thames, that river that has since played so large a part in my life. But at the time I did not know it was the Thames, I thought this great expanse of mud flats and water was the sea, which I had never yet seen nearly. And out upon it stood ships, sailing ships and a steamer or so, going up to London or down out into the great seas of the world. I stood for a long time watching these and thinking whether after all I should not have done better to

have run away to sea.

The nearer I drew to Bladesover, the more doubtful I grew of the duality of my reception, and the more I regretted that alternative. I suppose it was the dirty clumsiness of the shipping I had seen nearly, that put me out of mind of that. I took a short cut through the Warren across the corner of the main park to intercept the people from the church. I wanted to avoid meeting any one before I met my mother, and so I went to a place where the path passed between banks, and without exactly hiding, stood up among the bushes. This place among other advantages eliminated any chance of seeing Lady Drew, who would drive round by the carriage road.

Standing up to waylay in this fashion I had a queer feeling of brigandage, as though I was some intrusive sort of bandit among these orderly things. It is the first time I remember having that outlaw feeling distinctly, a feeling that has played a large part in my subsequent life. I felt there existed no place for me that I had to drive myself in.

Presently, down the hill, the servants appeared, straggling by twos and threes, first some of the garden people and the butler's wife with them, then the two laundry maids, odd inseparable old creatures, then the first footman talking to the butler's little girl, and at last, walking grave and breathless beside old Ann and Miss Fison, the black figure of my mother.

My boyish mind suggested the adoption of a playful form of appearance. "Coo-ee, mother" said I, coming out against the sky,

"Coo-ee!"

My mother looked up, went very white, and put her hand to her bosom.

I suppose there was a fearful fuss about me. And of course I was quite unable to explain my reappearance. But I held out stoutly, "I won't go back to Chatham; I'll drown myself first." The next day my mother carried me off to Wimblehurst, took me fiercely and aggressively to an uncle I had never heard of before, near though the place was to us. She gave me no word as to what was to happen, and I was too subdued by her manifest wrath and humiliation at my last misdemeanour to demand information. I don't for one moment think Lady Drew was "nice" about me. The finality of my banishment was endorsed and underlined and stamped home. I wished very much now that I had run away to sea, in spite of the coal dust and squalour Rochester had revealed to me. Perhaps over seas one came to different lands.

IV

I do not remember much of my journey to Wimblehurst with my mother except the image of her as sitting bolt upright, as rather disdaining the third-class carriage in which we traveled, and how she looked away from me out of the window when she spoke of my uncle. "I have not seen your uncle," she said, "since he was a boy…" She added grudgingly, "Then he was supposed to be clever."

She took little interest in such qualities as cleverness.

"He married about three years ago, and set up for himself in Wimblehurst… So I suppose she had some money."

She mused on scenes she had long dismissed from her mind. "Teddy," she said at last in the tone of one who has been feeling in the dark and finds. "He was called Teddy… about your age… Now he must be twenty-six or seven."

I thought of my uncle as Teddy directly I saw him; there was something in his personal appearance that in the light of that memory phrased itself at once as Teddiness – a certain Teddidity. To describe it in and other terms is more difficult. It is nimbleness without grace, and alertness without intelligence. He whisked out of his shop upon the pavement, a short figure in grey and wearing grey carpet slippers; one had a sense of a young fattish face behind gilt glasses, wiry hair that stuck up and forward over the forehead, an irregular nose that had its aquiline moments, and that the body betrayed an equatorial laxity, an incipient "bow window" as the image goes. He jerked out of the shop, came to a stand on the pavement outside, regarded something in the window with infinite appreciation, stroked his chin, and, as abruptly, shot sideways into the door again, charging through it as it were behind an extended hand.

"That must be him," said my mother, catching at her breath.

We came past the window whose contents I was presently to know by heart, a very ordinary chemist's window except that there was a frictional electrical machine, an air pump and

two or three tripods and retorts replacing the customary blue, yellow, and red bottles above. There was a plaster of Paris horse to indicate veterinary medicines among these breakables, and below were scent packets and diffusers and sponges and soda-water syphons and such-like things. Only in the middle there was a rubricated card, very neatly painted by hand, with these words —

Buy Ponderevo's Cough Linctus NOW

NOW!

WHY?

Twopence Cheaper than in Winter

You Store apples! why not the Medicine

You are Bound to Need?

in which appeal I was to recognise presently my uncle's distinctive note.

My uncle's face appeared above a card of infant's comforters in the glass pane of the door. I perceived his eyes were brown, and that his glasses creased his nose. It was manifest he did not know us from Adam. A stare of scrutiny allowed an expression

of commercial deference to appear in front of it, and my uncle flung open the door.

"You don't know me?" panted my mother.

My uncle would not own he did not, but his curiosity was manifest. My mother sat down on one of the little chairs before the soap and patent medicine-piled counter, and her lips opened and closed.

"A glass of water, madam," said my uncle, waved his hand in a sort of curve and shot away.

My mother drank the water and spoke. "That boy," she said, "takes after his father. He grows more like him every day… And so I have brought him to you."

"His father, madam?"

"George."

For a moment the chemist was still at a loss. He stood behind the counter with the glass my mother had returned to him in his hand. Then comprehension grew.

"By Gosh!" he said. "Lord!" he cried. His glasses fell off. He disappeared replacing them, behind a pile of boxed-up bottles of blood mixture. "Eleven thousand virgins!" I heard him cry. The glass was banged down. "O-ri-ental Gums!"

He shot away out of the shop through some masked door. One heard his voice. "Susan! Susan!"

Then he reappeared with an extended hand. "Well, how are you?" he said. "I was never so surprised in my life. Fancy!.. You!"

He shook my mother's impassive hand and then mine very

warmly holding his glasses on with his left forefinger.

"Come right in!" he cried – "come right in! Better late than never!" and led the way into the parlour behind the shop.

After Bladesover that apartment struck me as stuffy and petty, but it was very comfortable in comparison with the Frapp living-room. It had a faint, disintegrating smell of meals about it, and my most immediate impression was of the remarkable fact that something was hung about or wrapped round or draped over everything. There was bright-patterned muslin round the gas-bracket in the middle of the room, round the mirror over the mantel, stuff with ball-fringe along the mantel and casing in the fireplace, – I first saw ball-fringe here – and even the lamp on the little bureau wore a shade like a large muslin hat. The table-cloth had ball-fringe and so had the window curtains, and the carpet was a bed of roses. There were little cupboards on either side of the fireplace, and in the recesses, ill-made shelves packed with books, and enriched with pinked American cloth. There was a dictionary lying face downward on the table, and the open bureau was littered with foolscap paper and the evidences of recently abandoned toil. My eye caught "The Ponderevo Patent Flat, a Machine you can Live in," written in large firm letters. My uncle opened a little door like a cupboard door in the corner of this room, and revealed the narrowest twist of staircase I had ever set eyes upon. "Susan!" he bawled again. "Wantje. Some one to see you. Surprisin'."

There came an inaudible reply, and a sudden loud bump over

our heads as of some article of domestic utility pettishly flung aside, then the cautious steps of someone descending the twist, and then my aunt appeared in the doorway with her hand upon the jamb.

"It's Aunt Ponderevo," cried my uncle. "George's wife – and she's brought over her son!" His eye roamed about the room. He darted to the bureau with a sudden impulse, and turned the sheet about the patent flat face down. Then he waved his glasses at us, "You know, Susan, my elder brother George. I told you about 'im lots of times."

He fretted across to the hearthrug and took up a position there, replaced his glasses and coughed.

My aunt Susan seemed to be taking it in. She was then rather a pretty slender woman of twenty-three or four, I suppose, and I remember being struck by the blueness of her eyes and the clear freshness of her complexion. She had little features, a button nose, a pretty chin and a long graceful neck that stuck out of her pale blue cotton morning dress. There was a look of half-assumed perplexity on her face, a little quizzical wrinkle of the brow that suggested a faintly amused attempt to follow my uncle's mental operations, a vain attempt and a certain hopelessness that had in succession become habitual. She seemed to be saying, "Oh Lord! What's he giving me THIS time?" And as came to know her better I detected, as a complication of her effort of apprehension, a subsidiary riddle to "What's he giving me?" and that was – to borrow a phrase from my schoolboy language "Is

it keeps?" She looked at my mother and me, and back to her husband again.

"You know," he said. "George."

"Well," she said to my mother, descending the last three steps of the staircase and holding out her hand! "you're welcome. Though it's a surprise… I can't ask you to HAVE anything, I'm afraid, for there isn't anything in the house." She smiled, and looked at her husband banteringly. "Unless he makes up something with his old chemicals, which he's quite equal to doing."

My mother shook hands stiffly, and told me to kiss my aunt…

"Well, let's all sit down," said my uncle, suddenly whistling through his clenched teeth, and briskly rubbing his hands together. He put up a chair for my mother, raised the blind of the little window, lowered it again, and returned to his hearthrug. "I'm sure," he said, as one who decides, "I'm very glad to see you."

V

As they talked I gave my attention pretty exclusively to my uncle.

I noted him in great detail. I remember now his partially unbuttoned waistcoat, as though something had occurred to distract him as he did it up, and a little cut upon his chin. I liked a certain humour in his eyes. I watched, too, with the fascination

that things have for an observant boy, the play of his lips – they were a little oblique, and there was something "slipshod," if one may strain a word so far, about his mouth, so that he lisped and sibilated ever and again and the coming and going of a curious expression, triumphant in quality it was, upon his face as he talked. He fingered his glasses, which did not seem to fit his nose, fretted with things in his waistcoat pockets or put his hands behind him, looked over our heads, and ever and again rose to his toes and dropped back on his heels. He had a way of drawing air in at times through his teeth that gave a whispering zest to his speech It's a sound I can only represent as a soft Zzzz.

He did most of the talking. My mother repeated what she had already said in the shop, "I have brought George over to you," and then desisted for a time from the real business in hand. "You find this a comfortable house?" she asked; and this being affirmed: "It looks – very convenient… Not too big to be a trouble – no. You like Wimblehurst, I suppose?"

My uncle retorted with some inquiries about the great people of Bladesover, and my mother answered in the character of a personal friend of Lady Drew's. The talk hung for a time, and then my uncle embarked upon a dissertation upon Wimblehurst.

"This place," he began, "isn't of course quite the place I ought to be in."

My mother nodded as though she had expected that.

"It gives me no Scope," he went on. "It's dead-and-alive. Nothing happens."

"He's always wanting something to happen," said my aunt Susan. "Some day he'll get a shower of things and they'll be too much for him."

"Not they," said my uncle, buoyantly.

"Do you find business – slack?" asked my mother.

"Oh! one rubs along. But there's no Development – no growth. They just come along here and buy pills when they want 'em – and a horseball or such. They've got to be ill before there's a prescription. That sort they are. You can't get 'em to launch out, you can't get 'em to take up anything new. For instance, I've been trying lately – induce them to buy their medicines in advance, and in larger quantities. But they won't look for it! Then I tried to float a little notion of mine, sort of an insurance scheme for colds; you pay so much a week, and when you've got a cold you get a bottle of Cough Linctus so long as you can produce a substantial sniff. See? But Lord! they've no capacity for ideas, they don't catch on; no Jump about the place, no Life. Live! – they trickle, and what one has to do here is to trickle too – Zzzz."

"Ah!" said my mother.

"It doesn't suit me," said my uncle. "I'm the cascading sort."

"George was that," said my mother after a pondering moment.

My aunt Susan took up the parable with an affectionate glance at her husband.

"He's always trying to make his old business jump," she said. "Always putting fresh cards in the window, or getting up to something. You'd hardly believe. It makes ME jump sometimes."

"But it does no good," said my uncle.

"It does no good," said his wife. "It's not his miloo…"

Presently they came upon a wide pause.

From the beginning of their conversation there had been the promise of this pause, and I pricked my ears. I knew perfectly what was bound to come; they were going to talk of my father. I was enormously strengthened in my persuasion when I found my mother's eyes resting thoughtfully upon me in the silence, and than my uncle looked at me and then my aunt. I struggled unavailingly to produce an expression of meek stupidity.

"I think," said my uncle, "that George will find it more amusing to have a turn in the market-place than to sit here talking with us. There's a pair of stocks there, George – very interesting. Old-fashioned stocks."

"I don't mind sitting here," I said.

My uncle rose and in the most friendly way led me through the shop. He stood on his doorstep and jerked amiable directions to me.

"Ain't it sleepy, George, eh? There's the butcher's dog over there, asleep in the road-half an hour from midday! If the last Trump sounded I don't believe it would wake. Nobody would wake! The chaps up there in the churchyard – they'd just turn over and say: 'Naar – you don't catch us, you don't! See?'… Well, you'll find the stocks just round that corner."

He watched me out of sight.

So I never heard what they said about my father after all.

VI

When I returned, my uncle had in some remarkable way become larger and central. “Tha’chu, George?” he cried, when the shop-door bell sounded. “Come right through”; and I found him, as it were, in the chairman’s place before the draped grate.

The three of them regarded me.

“We have been talking of making you a chemist, George,” said my uncle.

My mother looked at me. “I had hoped,” she said, “that Lady Drew would have done something for him – ” She stopped.

“In what way?” said my uncle.

“She might have spoken to some one, got him into something perhaps…” She had the servant’s invincible persuasion that all good things are done by patronage.

“He is not the sort of boy for whom things are done,” she added, dismissing these dreams. “He doesn’t accommodate himself. When he thinks Lady Drew wishes a thing, he seems not to wish it. Towards Mr. Redgrave, too, he has been – disrespectful – he is like his father.”

“Who’s Mr. Redgrave?”

“The Vicar.”

“A bit independent?” said my uncle, briskly.

“Disobedient,” said my mother. “He has no idea of his place. He seems to think he can get on by slighting people and flouting

them. He'll learn perhaps before it is too late."

My uncle stroked his cut chin and me. "Have you learnt any Latin?" he asked abruptly.

I said I had not.

"He'll have to learn a little Latin," he explained to my mother, "to qualify. H'm. He could go down to the chap at the grammar school here – it's just been routed into existence again by the Charity Commissioners and have lessons."

"What, me learn Latin!" I cried, with emotion.

"A little," he said.

"I've always wanted" I said and; "LATIN!"

I had long been obsessed by the idea that having no Latin was a disadvantage in the world, and Archie Garvell had driven the point of this pretty earnestly home. The literature I had read at Bladesover had all tended that way. Latin had had a quality of emancipation for me that I find it difficult to convey. And suddenly, when I had supposed all learning was at an end for me, I heard this!

"It's no good to you, of course," said my uncle, "except to pass exams with, but there you are!"

"You'll have to learn Latin because you have to learn Latin," said my mother, "not because you want to. And afterwards you will have to learn all sorts of other things…"

The idea that I was to go on learning, that to read and master the contents of books was still to be justifiable as a duty, overwhelmed all other facts. I had had it rather clear in my mind

for some weeks that all that kind of opportunity might close to me for ever. I began to take a lively interest in this new project.

“Then shall I live here?” I asked, “with you, and study… as well as work in the shop?”

“That’s the way of it,” said my uncle.

I parted from my mother that day in a dream, so sudden and important was this new aspect of things to me. I was to learn Latin! Now that the humiliation of my failure at Bladesover was past for her, now that she had a little got over her first intense repugnance at this resort to my uncle and contrived something that seemed like a possible provision for my future, the tenderness natural to a parting far more significant than any of our previous partings crept into her manner.

She sat in the train to return, I remember, and I stood at the open door of her compartment, and neither of us knew how soon we should cease for ever to be a trouble to one another.

“You must be a good boy, George,” she said. “You must learn… And you mustn’t set yourself up against those who are above you and better than you… Or envy them.”

“No, mother,” I said.

I promised carelessly. Her eyes were fixed upon me. I was wondering whether I could by any means begin Latin that night.

Something touched her heart then, some thought, some memory; perhaps some premonition… The solitary porter began slamming carriage doors.

“George” she said hastily, almost shamefully, “kiss me!”

I stepped up into her compartment as she bent downward.

She caught me in her arms quite eagerly, she pressed me to her – a strange thing for her to do. I perceived her eyes were extraordinarily bright, and then this brightness burst along the lower lids and rolled down her cheeks.

For the first and last time in my life I saw my mother's tears. Then she had gone, leaving me discomforted and perplexed, forgetting for a time even that I was to learn Latin, thinking of my mother as of something new and strange.

The thing recurred though I sought to dismiss it, it stuck itself into my memory against the day of fuller understanding. Poor, proud, habitual, sternly narrow soul! poor difficult and misunderstanding son! it was the first time that ever it dawned upon me that my mother also might perhaps feel.

VII

My mother died suddenly and, it was thought by Lady Drew, inconsiderately, the following spring. Her ladyship instantly fled to Folkestone with Miss Somerville and Fison, until the funeral should be over and my mother's successor installed.

My uncle took me over to the funeral. I remember there was a sort of prolonged crisis in the days preceding this because, directly he heard of my loss, he had sent a pair of check trousers to the Judkins people in London to be dyed black, and they did not come back in time. He became very excited on the third

day, and sent a number of increasingly fiery telegrams without any result whatever, and succumbed next morning with a very ill grace to my aunt Susan's insistence upon the resources of his dress-suit. In my memory those black legs of his, in a particularly thin and shiny black cloth – for evidently his dress-suit dated from adolescent and slenderer days – straddle like the Colossus of Rhodes over my approach to my mother's funeral. Moreover, I was inconvenienced and distracted by a silk hat he had bought me, my first silk hat, much ennobled, as his was also, by a deep mourning band.

I remember, but rather indistinctly, my mother's white paneled housekeeper's room and the touch of oddness about it that she was not there, and the various familiar faces made strange by black, and I seem to recall the exaggerated self-consciousness that arose out of their focussed attention. No doubt the sense of the new silk hat came and went and came again in my emotional chaos. Then something comes out clear and sorrowful, rises out clear and sheer from among all these rather base and inconsequent things, and once again I walk before all the other mourners close behind her coffin as it is carried along the churchyard path to her grave, with the old vicar's slow voice saying regretfully and unconvincingly above me, triumphant solemn things.

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Never die! The day was a high and glorious morning in spring, and all the trees were budding and bursting into green. Everywhere there were blossoms and flowers; the pear trees and cherry trees in the sexton's garden were sunlit snow, there were nodding daffodils and early tulips in the graveyard beds, great multitudes of daisies, and everywhere the birds seemed singing. And in the middle was the brown coffin end, tilting on men's shoulders and half occluded by the vicar's Oxford hood.

And so we came to my mother's waiting grave.

For a time I was very observant, watching the coffin lowered, hearing the words of the ritual. It seemed a very curious business altogether.

Suddenly as the service drew to its end, I felt something had still to be said which had not been said, realised that she had withdrawn in silence, neither forgiving me nor hearing from me – those now lost assurances. Suddenly I knew I had not understood. Suddenly I saw her tenderly; remembered not so much tender or kindly things of her as her crossed wishes and the ways in which I had thwarted her. Surprisingly I realised that behind all her hardness and severity she had loved me, that I was the only thing she had ever loved and that until this moment I had never loved her. And now she was there and deaf and blind to me, pitifully defeated in her designs for me, covered from me so that she could not know…

I dug my nails into the palms of my hands, I set my teeth, but tears blinded me, sobs would have choked me had speech been

required of me. The old vicar read on, there came a mumbled response – and so on to the end. I wept as it were internally, and only when we had come out of the churchyard could I think and speak calmly again.

Stamped across this memory are the little black figures of my uncle and Rabbits, telling Avebury, the sexton and undertaker, that "it had all passed off very well – very well indeed."

VIII

That is the last I shall tell of Bladesover. The dropscene falls on that, and it comes no more as an actual presence into this novel. I did indeed go back there once again, but under circumstances quite immaterial to my story. But in a sense Bladesover has never left me; it is, as I said at the outset, one of those dominant explanatory impressions that make the framework of my mind. Bladesover illuminates England; it has become all that is spacious, dignified pretentious, and truly conservative in English life. It is my social datum. That is why I have drawn it here on so large a scale.

When I came back at last to the real Bladesover on an inconsequent visit, everything was far smaller than I could have supposed possible. It was as though everything had shivered and shrivelled a little at the Lichtenstein touch. The harp was still in the saloon, but there was a different grand piano with a painted lid and a metrostyle pianola, and an extraordinary

quantity of artistic litter and bric-a-brac scattered about. There was the trail of the Bond Street showroom over it all. The furniture was still under chintz, but it wasn't the same sort of chintz although it pretended to be, and the lustre-dangling chandeliers had passed away. Lady Lichtenstein's books replaced the brown volumes I had browsed among – they were mostly presentation copies of contemporary novels and the National Review and the Empire Review, and the Nineteenth Century and after jostled current books on the tables – English new books in gaudy catchpenny "artistic" covers, French and Italian novels in yellow, German art handbooks of almost incredible ugliness. There were abundant evidences that her ladyship was playing with the Keltic renascence, and a great number of ugly cats made of china – she "collected" china and stoneware cats – stood about everywhere – in all colours, in all kinds of deliberately comic, highly glazed distortion.

It is nonsense to pretend that finance makes any better aristocrats than rent. Nothing can make an aristocrat but pride, knowledge, training, and the sword. These people were no improvement on the Drews, none whatever. There was no effect of a beneficial replacement of passive unintelligent people by active intelligent ones. One felt that a smaller but more enterprising and intensely undignified variety of stupidity had replaced the large dullness of the old gentry, and that was all. Bladesover, I thought, had undergone just the same change between the seventies and the new century that had overtaken

the dear old Times, and heaven knows how much more of the decorous British fabric. These Lichtensteins and their like seem to have no promise in them at all of any fresh vitality for the kingdom. I do not believe in their intelligence or their power – they have nothing new about them at all, nothing creative nor rejuvenescent, no more than a disorderly instinct of acquisition; and the prevalence of them and their kind is but a phase in the broad slow decay of the great social organism of England. They could not have made Bladesover they cannot replace it; they just happen to break out over it – saprophytically.

Well – that was my last impression of Bladesover.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE WIMBLEHURST APPRENTICESHIP

I

So far as I can remember now, except for that one emotional phase by the graveside, I passed through all these experiences rather callously. I had already, with the facility of youth, changed my world, ceased to think at all of the old school routine and put Bladesover aside for digestion at a latter stage. I took up my new world in Wimblehurst with the chemist's shop as its hub, set to work at Latin and materia medica, and concentrated upon the present with all my heart. Wimblehurst is an exceptionally quiet and grey Sussex town rare among south of England towns in being largely built of stone. I found something very agreeable and picturesque in its clean cobbled streets, its odd turnings and abrupt corners; and in the pleasant park that crowds up one side of the town. The whole place is under the Eastry dominion and it was the Eastry influence and dignity that kept its railway station a mile and three-quarters away. Eastry House is so close that it dominates the whole; one goes across the marketplace (with its

old lock-up and stocks), past the great pre-reformation church, a fine grey shell, like some empty skull from which the life has fled, and there at once are the huge wrought-iron gates, and one peeps through them to see the facade of this place, very white and large and fine, down a long avenue of yews. Eastry was far greater than Bladesover and an altogether completer example of the eighteenth century system. It ruled not two villages, but a borough, that had sent its sons and cousins to parliament almost as a matter of right so long as its franchise endured. Every one was in the system, every one – except my uncle. He stood out and complained.

My uncle was the first real breach I found in the great front of Bladesover the world had presented me, for Chatham was not so much a breach as a confirmation. But my uncle had no respect for Bladesover and Eastry – none whatever. He did not believe in them. He was blind even to what they were. He propounded strange phrases about them, he exfoliated and wagged about novel and incredible ideas.

“This place,” said my uncle, surveying it from his open doorway in the dignified stillness of a summer afternoon, “wants Waking Up!”

I was sorting up patent medicines in the corner.

“I’d like to let a dozen young Americans loose into it,” said my uncle. “Then we’d see.”

I made a tick against Mother Shipton’s Sleeping Syrup. We had cleared our forward stock.

“Things must be happening SOMEWHERE, George,” he broke out in a querulously rising note as he came back into the little shop. He fiddled with the piled dummy boxes of fancy soap and scent and so forth that adorned the end of the counter, then turned about petulantly, stuck his hands deeply into his pockets and withdrew one to scratch his head. “I must do SOMETHING,” he said. “I can’t stand it.

“I must invent something. And shove it… I could.

“Or a play. There’s a deal of money in a play, George. What would you think of me writing a play eh?.. There’s all sorts of things to be done.

“Or the stog-igschange.”

He fell into that meditative whistling of his.

“Sac-ramental wine!” he swore, “this isn’t the world – it’s Cold Mutton Fat! That’s what Wimblehurst is! Cold Mutton Fat! – dead and stiff! And I’m buried in it up to the arm pits. Nothing ever happens, nobody wants things to happen ‘scept me! Up in London, George, things happen. America! I wish to Heaven, George, I’d been born American – where things hum.

“What can one do here? How can one grow? While we’re sleepin’ here with our Capital oozing away into Lord Eastry’s pockets for rent-men are up there…” He indicated London as remotely over the top of the dispensing counter, and then as a scene of great activity by a whirl of the hand and a wink and a meaning smile at me.

“What sort of things do they do?” I asked.

"Rush about," he said. "Do things! Somethin' glorious. There's cover gambling. Ever heard of that, George?" He drew the air in through his teeth. "You put down a hundred say, and buy ten thousand pounds worth. See? That's a cover of one per cent. Things go up one, you sell, realise cent per cent; down, whiff, it's gone! Try again! Cent per cent, George, every day. Men are made or done for in an hour. And the shoutin'! Zzzz… Well, that's one way, George. Then another way – there's Corners!"

"They're rather big things, aren't they?" I ventured.

"Oh, if you go in for wheat or steel – yes. But suppose you tackled a little thing, George. Just some little thing that only needed a few thousands. Drugs for example. Shoved all you had into it – staked your liver on it, so to speak. Take a drug – take ipecac, for example. Take a lot of ipecac. Take all there is! See? There you are! There aren't unlimited supplies of ipecacuanha – can't be! – and it's a thing people must have. Then quinine again! You watch your chance, wait for a tropical war breaking out, let's say, and collar all the quinine. Where ARE they? Must have quinine, you know. Eh? Zzzz.

"Lord! there's no end of things – no end of little things. Dill-water – all the suffering babes yowling for it. Eucalyptus again – cascara – witch hazel – menthol – all the toothache things. Then there's antiseptics, and curare, cocaine…"

"Rather a nuisance to the doctors," I reflected.

"They got to look out for themselves. By Jove, yes. They'll do you if they can, and you do them. Like brigands. That makes it

romantic. That's the Romance of Commerce, George. You're in the mountains there! Think of having all the quinine in the world, and some millionaire's pampered wife gone ill with malaria, eh? That's a squeeze, George, eh? Eh? Millionaire on his motor car outside, offering you any price you liked. That 'ud wake up Wimblehurst… Lord! You haven't an Idea down here. Not an idea. Zzzz."

He passed into a rapt dream, from which escaped such fragments as: "Fifty per cent. advance sir; security – to-morrow. Zzzz."

The idea of cornering a drug struck upon my mind then as a sort of irresponsible monkey trick that no one would ever be permitted to do in reality. It was the sort of nonsense one would talk to make Ewart laugh and set him going on to still odder possibilities. I thought it was part of my uncle's way of talking. But I've learnt differently since. The whole trend of modern money-making is to foresee something that will presently be needed and put it out of reach, and then to haggle yourself wealthy. You buy up land upon which people will presently want to build houses, you secure rights that will bar vitally important developments, and so on, and so on. Of course the naive intelligence of a boy does not grasp the subtler developments of human inadequacy. He begins life with a disposition to believe in the wisdom of grown-up people, he does not realise how casual and disingenuous has been the development of law and custom, and he thinks that somewhere in the state there is a power as

irresistible as a head master's to check mischievous and foolish enterprises of every sort. I will confess that when my uncle talked of cornering quinine, I had a clear impression that any one who contrived to do that would pretty certainly go to jail. Now I know that any one who could really bring it off would be much more likely to go to the House of Lords!

My uncle ranged over the gilt labels of his bottles and drawers for a while, dreaming of corners in this and that. But at last he reverted to Wimblehurst again.

"You got to be in London when these things are in hand. Down here – !

"Jee-rusalem!" he cried. "Why did I plant myself here? Everything's done. The game's over. Here's Lord Eastry, and he's got everything, except what his lawyers get, and before you get any more change this way you'll have to dynamite him – and them. HE doesn't want anything more to happen. Why should he? Any chance 'ud be a loss to him. He wants everything to burble along and burble along and go on as it's going for the next ten thousand years, Eastry after Eastry, one parson down another come, one grocer dead, get another! Any one with any ideas better go away. They HAVE gone away! Look at all these blessed people in this place! Look at 'em! All fast asleep, doing their business out of habit – in a sort of dream, Stuffed men would do just as well – just. They've all shook down into their places. THEY don't want anything to happen either. They're all broken in. There you are! Only what are they all alive for?..

"Why can't they get a clockwork chemist?"

He concluded as he often concluded these talks. "I must invent something, – that's about what I must do. Zzzz. Some convenience. Something people want… Strike out… You can't think, George, of anything everybody wants and hasn't got? I mean something you could turn out retail under a shilling, say? Well, YOU think, whenever you haven't got anything better to do. See?"

II

So I remember my uncle in that first phase, young, but already a little fat, restless, fretful, garrulous, putting in my fermenting head all sorts of discrepant ideas. Certainly he was educational…

For me the years at Wimblehurst were years of pretty active growth. Most of my leisure and much of my time in the shop I spent in study. I speedily mastered the modicum of Latin necessary for my qualifying examinations, and – a little assisted by the Government Science and Art Department classes that were held in the Grammar School – went on with my mathematics. There were classes in physics, in chemistry, in mathematics and machine drawing, and I took up these subjects with considerable avidity. Exercise I got chiefly in the form of walks. There was some cricket in the summer and football in the winter sustained by young men's clubs that levied a parasitic blackmail of the big people and the sitting member, but I was

never very keen at these games. I didn't find any very close companions among the youths of Wimblehurst. They struck me, after my cockney schoolmates, as loutish and slow, servile and furtive, spiteful and mean. WE used to swagger, but these countrymen dragged their feet and hated an equal who didn't; we talked loud, but you only got the real thoughts of Wimblehurst in a knowing undertone behind its hand. And even then they weren't much in the way of thoughts.

No, I didn't like those young countrymen, and I'm no believer in the English countryside under the Bladesover system as a breeding ground for honourable men. One hears a frightful lot of nonsense about the Rural Exodus and the degeneration wrought by town life upon our population. To my mind, the English townsman, even in the slums, is infinitely better spiritually, more courageous, more imaginative and cleaner, than his agricultural cousin. I've seen them both when they didn't think they were being observed, and I know. There was something about my Wimblehurst companions that disgusted me. It's hard to define. Heaven knows that at that cockney boarding-school at Goudhurst we were coarse enough; the Wimblehurst youngsters had neither words nor courage for the sort of thing we used to do – for our bad language, for example; but, on the other hand, they displayed a sort of sluggish, real lewdness, lewdness is the word – a baseness of attitude. Whatever we exiled urbans did at Goudhurst was touched with something, however coarse, of romantic imagination. We had read the Boys of England, and

told each other stories. In the English countryside there are no books at all, no songs, no drama, no valiant sin even; all these things have never come or they were taken away and hidden generations ago, and the imagination aborts and bestialises. That, I think, is where the real difference against the English rural man lies. It is because I know this that I do not share in the common repinings because our countryside is being depopulated, because our population is passing through the furnace of the towns. They starve, they suffer, no doubt, but they come out of it hardened, they come out of it with souls.

Of an evening the Wimblehurst blade, shiny-faced from a wash and with some loud finery, a coloured waistcoat or a vivid tie, would betake himself to the Eastry Arms billiard-room, or to the bar parlour of some minor pub where nap could be played. One soon sickened of his slow knowingness, the cunning observation of his deadened eyes, his idea of a "good story," always, always told in undertones, poor dirty worm! his shrewd, elaborate maneuvers for some petty advantage, a drink to the good or such-like deal. There rises before my eyes as I write, young Hopley Dodd, the son of the Wimblehurst auctioneer, the pride of Wimblehurst, its finest flower, with his fur waistcoat and his bulldog pipe, his riding breeches – he had no horse – and his gaiters, as he used to sit, leaning forward and watching the billiard-table from under the brim of his artfully tilted hat. A half-dozen phrases constituted his conversation: "hard lines!" he used to say, and "Good baazness," in a bass bleat. Moreover,

he had a long slow whistle that was esteemed the very cream of humorous comment. Night after night he was there.

Also you knew he would not understand that *I* could play billiards, and regarded every stroke I made as a fluke. For a beginner I didn't play so badly, I thought. I'm not so sure now; that was my opinion at the time. But young Dodd's scepticism and the "good baazness" finally cured me of my disposition to frequent the Eastry Arms, and so these noises had their value in my world.

I made no friends among the young men of the place at all, and though I was entering upon adolescence I have no love-affair to tell of here. Not that I was not waking up to that aspect of life in my middle teens I did, indeed, in various slightly informal ways scrape acquaintance with casual Wimblehurst girls; with a little dressmaker's apprentice I got upon shyly speaking terms, and a pupil teacher in the National School went further and was "talked about" in connection with me but I was not by any means touched by any reality of passion for either of these young people; love – love as yet came to me only in my dreams. I only kissed these girls once or twice. They rather disconcerted than developed those dreams. They were so clearly not "it." I shall have much to say of love in this story, but I may break it to the reader now that it is my role to be a rather ineffectual lover. Desire I knew well enough – indeed, too well; but love I have been shy of. In all my early enterprises in the war of the sexes, I was torn between the urgency of the body and a habit of romantic fantasy that wanted

every phase of the adventure to be generous and beautiful. And I had a curiously haunting memory of Beatrice, of her kisses in the bracken and her kiss upon the wall, that somehow pitched the standard too high for Wimblehurst's opportunities. I will not deny I did in a boyish way attempt a shy, rude adventure or so in love-making at Wimblehurst; but through these various influences, I didn't bring things off to any extent at all. I left behind me no devastating memories, no splendid reputation. I came away at last, still inexperienced and a little thwarted, with only a natural growth of interest and desire in sexual things.

If I fell in love with any one in Wimblehurst it was with my aunt. She treated me with a kindliness that was only half maternal – she petted my books, she knew about my certificates, she made fun of me in a way that stirred my heart to her. Quite unconsciously I grew fond of her…

My adolescent years at Wimblehurst were on the whole laborious, uneventful years that began in short jackets and left me in many ways nearly a man, years so uneventful that the Calculus of Variations is associated with one winter, and an examination in Physics for Science and Art department Honours marks an epoch. Many divergent impulses stirred within me, but the master impulse was a grave young disposition to work and learn and thereby in some not very clearly defined way get out of the Wimblehurst world into which I had fallen. I wrote with some frequency to Ewart, self-conscious, but, as I remember them, not intelligent letters, dated in Latin and with lapses into Latin

quotation that roused Ewart to parody. There was something about me in those days more than a little priggish. But it was, to do myself justice, something more than the petty pride of learning. I had a very grave sense of discipline and preparation that I am not ashamed at all to remember. I was serious. More serious than I am at the present time. More serious, indeed, than any adult seems to be. I was capable then of efforts – of nobilities… They are beyond me now. I don't see why, at forty, I shouldn't confess I respect my own youth. I had dropped being a boy quite abruptly. I thought I was presently to go out into a larger and quite important world and do significant things there. I thought I was destined to do something definite to a world that had a definite purpose. I did not understand then, as I do now, that life was to consist largely in the world's doing things to me. Young people never do seem to understand that aspect of things. And, as I say, among my educational influences my uncle, all unsuspected, played a leading part, and perhaps among other things gave my discontent with Wimblehurst, my desire to get away from that clean and picturesque emptiness, a form and expression that helped to emphasise it. In a way that definition made me patient. "Presently I shall get to London," I said, echoing him.

I remember him now as talking, always talking, in those days. He talked to me of theology, he talked of politics, of the wonders of science and the marvels of art, of the passions and the affections, of the immortality of the soul and the peculiar

actions of drugs; but predominantly and constantly he talked of getting on, of enterprises, of inventions and great fortunes, of Rothschilds, silver kings, Vanderbilts, Goulds, flotations, realisations and the marvelous ways of Chance with men – in all localities, that is to say, that are not absolutely sunken to the level of Cold Mutton Fat.

When I think of those early talks, I figure him always in one of three positions. Either we were in the dispensing lair behind a high barrier, he pounding up things in a mortar perhaps, and I rolling pill-stuff into long rolls and cutting it up with a sort of broad, fluted knife, or he stood looking out of the shop door against the case of sponges and spray-diffusers, while I surveyed him from behind the counter, or he leant against the little drawers behind the counter, and I hovered dusting in front. The thought of those early days brings back to my nostrils the faint smell of scent that was always in the air, marbled now with streaks of this drug and now of that, and to my eyes the rows of jejune glass bottles with gold labels, mirror-reflected, that stood behind him. My aunt, I remember, used sometimes to come into the shop in a state of aggressive sprightliness, a sort of connubial ragging expedition, and get much fun over the abbreviated Latinity of those gilt inscriptions. "Ol Amjig, George," she would read derisively, "and he pretends it's almond oil! Snap! – and that's mustard. Did you ever, George?

"Look at him, George, looking dignified. I'd like to put an old label on to him round the middle like his bottles are, with Ol

Pondo on it. That's Latin for Impostor, George MUST be. He'd look lovely with a stopper."

"YOU want a stopper," said my uncle, projecting his face…

My aunt, dear soul, was in those days quite thin and slender, with a delicate rosebud completion and a disposition to connubial badinage, to a sort of gentle skylarking. There was a silvery ghost of lisping in her speech. She was a great humourist, and as the constraint of my presence at meals wore off, I became more and more aware of a filmy but extensive net of nonsense she had woven about her domestic relations until it had become the reality of her life. She affected a derisive attitude to the world at large and applied the epithet "old" to more things than I have ever heard linked to it before or since. "Here's the old news-paper," she used to say – to my uncle. "Now don't go and get it in the butter, you silly old Sardine!"

"What's the day of the week, Susan?" my uncle would ask.

"Old Monday, Sossidge," she would say, and add, "I got all my Old Washing to do. Don't I KNOW it!"…

She had evidently been the wit and joy of a large circle of schoolfellows, and this style had become a second nature with her. It made her very delightful to me in that quiet place. Her customary walk even had a sort of hello! in it. Her chief preoccupation in life was, I believe, to make my uncle laugh, and when by some new nickname, some new quaintness or absurdity, she achieved that end, she was, behind a mask of sober amazement, the happiest woman on earth. My uncle's laugh when

it did come, I must admit was, as Baedeker says, "rewarding." It began with gusty blowings and snortings, and opened into a clear "Ha ha!" but in fullest development it included, in those youthful days, falling about anyhow and doubling up tightly, and whackings of the stomach, and tears and cries of anguish. I never in my life heard my uncle laugh to his maximum except at her; he was commonly too much in earnest for that, and he didn't laugh much at all, to my knowledge, after those early years. Also she threw things at him to an enormous extent in her resolve to keep things lively in spite of Wimblehurst; sponges out of stock she threw, cushions, balls of paper, clean washing, bread; and once up the yard when they thought that I and the errand boy and the diminutive maid of all work were safely out of the way, she smashed a boxful of eight-ounce bottles I had left to drain, assaulting my uncle with a new soft broom. Sometimes she would shy things at me – but not often. There seemed always laughter round and about her – all three of us would share hysterics at times – and on one occasion the two of them came home from church shockingly ashamed of themselves, because of a storm of mirth during the sermon. The vicar, it seems, had tried to blow his nose with a black glove as well as the customary pocket-handkerchief. And afterwards she had picked up her own glove by the finger, and looking innocently but intently sideways, had suddenly by this simple expedient exploded my uncle altogether. We had it all over again at dinner.

"But it shows you," cried my uncle, suddenly becoming grave,

"what Wimblehurst is, to have us all laughing at a little thing like that! We weren't the only ones that giggled. Not by any means! And, Lord! it was funny!"

Socially, my uncle and aunt were almost completely isolated. In places like Wimblehurst the tradesmen's lives always are isolated socially, all of them, unless they have a sister or a bosom friend among the other wives, but the husbands met in various bar-parlours or in the billiard-room of the Eastry Arms. But my uncle, for the most part, spent his evenings at home. When first he arrived in Wimblehurst I think he had spread his effect of abounding ideas and enterprise rather too aggressively; and Wimblehurst, after a temporary subjugation, had rebelled and done its best to make a butt of him. His appearance in a public-house led to a pause in any conversation that was going on.

"Come to tell us about everything, Mr. Pond'revo?" some one would say politely.

"You wait," my uncle used to answer, disconcerted, and sulk for the rest of his visit.

Or some one with an immense air of innocence would remark to the world generally, "They're talkin' of rebuildin' Wimblehurst all over again, I'm told. Anybody heard anything of it? Going to make it a reg'lar smartgoin', enterprisin' place – kind of Crystal Pallas."

"Earthquake and a pestilence before you get that," my uncle would mutter, to the infinite delight of every one, and add something inaudible about "Cold Mutton Fat."…

III

We were torn apart by a financial accident to my uncle of which I did not at first grasp the full bearings. He had developed what I regarded as an innocent intellectual recreation which he called stock-market meteorology. I think he got the idea from one use of curves in the graphic presentation of associated variations that he saw me plotting. He secured some of my squared paper and, having cast about for a time, decided to trace the rise and fall of certain lines and railways. "There's something in this, George," he said, and I little dreamt that among other things that were in it, was the whole of his spare money and most of what my mother had left to him in trust for me.

"It's as plain as can be," he said. "See, here's one system of waves and here's another! These are prices for Union Pacifics – extending over a month. Now next week, mark my words, they'll be down one whole point. We're getting near the steep part of the curve again. See? It's absolutely scientific. It's verifiable. Well, and apply it! You buy in the hollow and sell on the crest, and there you are!"

I was so convinced of the triviality of this amusement that to find at last that he had taken it in the most disastrous earnest overwhelmed me.

He took me for a long walk to break it to me, over the hills towards Yare and across the great gorse commons by Hazelbrow.

“There are ups and downs in life, George,” he said – halfway across that great open space, and paused against the sky… “I left out one factor in the Union Pacific analysis.”

“DID you?” I said, struck by the sudden chance in his voice. “But you don’t mean?”

I stopped and turned on him in the narrow sandy rut of pathway and he stopped likewise.

“I do, George. I DO mean. It’s bust me! I’m a bankrupt here and now.”

“Then – ?”

“The shop’s bust too. I shall have to get out of that.”

“And me?”

“Oh, you! – YOU’RE all right. You can transfer your apprenticeship, and – er – well, I’m not the sort of man to be careless with trust funds, you can be sure. I kept that aspect in mind. There’s some of it left George – trust me! – quite a decent little sum.”

“But you and aunt?”

“It isn’t QUITE the way we meant to leave Wimblehurst, George; but we shall have to go. Sale; all the things shoved about and ticketed – lot a hundred and one. Ugh!.. It’s been a larky little house in some ways. The first we had. Furnishing – a spree in its way… Very happy…” His face winced at some memory. “Let’s go on, George,” he said shortly, near choking, I could see.

I turned my back on him, and did not look round again for a little while.

"That's how it is, you see, George." I heard him after a time.

When we were back in the high road again he came alongside, and for a time we walked in silence.

"Don't say anything home yet," he said presently. "Fortunes of War. I got to pick the proper time with Susan – else she'll get depressed. Not that she isn't a first-rate brick whatever comes along."

"All right," I said, "I'll be careful"; and it seemed to me for the time altogether too selfish to bother him with any further inquiries about his responsibility as my trustee. He gave a little sigh of relief at my note of assent, and was presently talking quite cheerfully of his plans… But he had, I remember, one lapse into moodiness that came and went suddenly. "Those others!" he said, as though the thought had stung him for the first time.

"What others?" I asked.

"Damn them!" said he.

"But what others?"

"All those damned stick-in-the-mud-and-die-slowly tradespeople: Ruck, the butcher, Marbel, the grocer. Snape! Gord! George, HOW they'll grin!"

I thought him over in the next few weeks, and I remember now in great detail the last talk we had together before he handed over the shop and me to his successor. For he had the good luck to sell his business, "lock, stock, and barrel" – in which expression I found myself and my indentures included. The horrors of a sale by auction of the furniture even were avoided.

I remember that either coming or going on that occasion, Ruck, the butcher, stood in his doorway and regarded us with a grin that showed his long teeth.

"You half-witted hog!" said my uncle. "You grinning hyaena"; and then, "Pleasant day, Mr. Ruck."

"Goin' to make your fortun' in London, then?" said Mr. Ruck, with slow enjoyment.

That last excursion took us along the causeway to Beeching, and so up the downs and round almost as far as Steadhurst, home. My moods, as we went, made a mingled web. By this time I had really grasped the fact that my uncle had, in plain English, robbed me; the little accumulations of my mother, six hundred pounds and more, that would have educated me and started me in business, had been eaten into and was mostly gone into the unexpected hollow that ought to have been a crest of the Union Pacific curve, and of the remainder he still gave no account. I was too young and inexperienced to insist on this or know how to get it, but the thought of it all made streaks of decidedly black anger in that scheme of interwoven feelings. And you know, I was also acutely sorry for him – almost as sorry as I was for my aunt Susan. Even then I had quite found him out. I knew him to be weaker than myself; his incurable, irresponsible childishness was as clear to me then as it was on his deathbed, his redeeming and excusing imaginative silliness. Through some odd mental twist perhaps I was disposed to exonerate him even at the cost of blaming my poor old mother who had left things in his untrustworthy hands.

I should have forgiven him altogether, I believe, if he had been in any manner apologetic to me; but he wasn't that. He kept reassuring me in a way I found irritating. Mostly, however, his solicitude was for Aunt Susan and himself.

"It's these Crises, George," he said, "try Character. Your aunt's come out well, my boy."

He made meditative noises for a space.

"Had her cry of course," – the thing had been only too painfully evident to me in her eyes and swollen face – "who wouldn't? But now – buoyant again!.. She's a Corker.

"We'll be sorry to leave the little house of course. It's a bit like Adam and Eve, you know. Lord! what a chap old Milton was!

> "'The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.'

"It sounds, George… Providence their guide!.. Well – thank goodness there's no imeedgit prospect of either Cain or Abel!"

"After all, it won't be so bad up there. Not the scenery, perhaps, or the air we get here, but – LIFE! We've got very comfortable little rooms, very comfortable considering, and I shall rise. We're not done yet, we're not beaten; don't think that, George. I shall pay twenty shillings in the pound before I've done – you mark my words, George, – twenty – five to you… I got this situation within twenty-four hours – others offered. It's an important firm – one of the best in London. I looked to that. I

might have got four or five shillings a week more – elsewhere. Quarters I could name. But I said to them plainly, wages to go on with, but opportunity's my game – development. We understood each other."

He threw out his chest, and the little round eyes behind his glasses rested valiantly on imaginary employers.

We would go on in silence for a space while he revised and restated that encounter. Then he would break out abruptly with some banal phrase.

"The Battle of Life, George, my boy," he would cry, or "Ups and Downs!"

He ignored or waived the poor little attempts I made to ascertain my own position. "That's all right," he would say; or, "Leave all that to me. I'LL look after them." And he would drift away towards the philosophy and moral of the situation. What was I to do?

"Never put all your resources into one chance, George; that's the lesson I draw from this. Have forces in reserve. It was a hundred to one, George, that I was right – a hundred to one. I worked it out afterwards. And here we are spiked on the off-chance. If I'd have only kept back a little, I'd have had it on U.P. next day, like a shot, and come out on the rise. There you are!"

His thoughts took a graver turn.

"It's where you'll bump up against Chance like this, George, that you feel the need of religion. Your hard-and-fast scientific men – your Spencers and Huxleys – they don't understand that. I

do. I've thought of it a lot lately – in bed and about. I was thinking of it this morning while I shaved. It's not irreverent for me to say it, I hope – but God comes in on the off-chance, George. See? Don't you be too cocksure of anything, good or bad. That's what I make out of it. I could have sworn. Well, do you think I – particular as I am – would have touched those Union Pacifics with trust money at all, if I hadn't thought it a thoroughly good thing – good without spot or blemish?.. And it was bad!

"It's a lesson to me. You start in to get a hundred percent. and you come out with that. It means, in a way, a reproof for Pride. I've thought of that, George – in the Night Watches. I was thinking this morning when I was shaving, that that's where the good of it all comes in. At the bottom I'm a mystic in these affairs. You calculate you're going to do this or that, but at bottom who knows at all WHAT he's doing? When you most think you're doing things, they're being done right over your head. YOU'RE being done – in a sense. Take a hundred-to one chance, or one to a hundred – what does it matter? You're being Led."

It's odd that I heard this at the time with unutterable contempt, and now that I recall it – well, I ask myself, what have I got better?

"I wish," said I, becoming for a moment outrageous, "YOU were being Led to give me some account of my money, uncle."

"Not without a bit of paper to figure on, George, I can't. But you trust me about that never fear. You trust me."

And in the end I had to.

I think the bankruptcy hit my aunt pretty hard. There was,

so far as I can remember now, a complete cessation of all those cheerful outbreaks of elasticity, no more skylarking in the shop nor scampering about the house. But there was no fuss that I saw, and only little signs in her complexion of the fits of weeping that must have taken her. She didn't cry at the end, though to me her face with its strain of self-possession was more pathetic than any weeping. "Well" she said to me as she came through the shop to the cab, "Here's old orf, George! Orf to Mome number two! Good-bye!" And she took me in her arms and kissed me and pressed me to her. Then she dived straight for the cab before I could answer her.

My uncle followed, and he seemed to me a trifle too valiant and confident in his bearing for reality. He was unusually white in the face. He spoke to his successor at the counter. "Here we go!" he said. "One down, the other up. You'll find it a quiet little business so long as you run it on quiet lines – a nice quiet little business. There's nothing more? No? Well, if you want to know anything write to me. I'll always explain fully. Anything – business, place or people. You'll find Pil Antibil. a little overstocked by-the-by, I found it soothed my mind the day before yesterday making 'em, and I made 'em all day. Thousands! And where's George? Ah! there you are! I'll write to you, George, FULLY, about all that affair. Fully!"

It became clear to me as if for the first time, that I was really parting from my aunt Susan. I went out on to the pavement and saw her head craned forward, her wide-open blue eyes and

her little face intent on the shop that had combined for her all the charms of a big doll's house and a little home of her very own. "Good-bye!" she said to it and to me. Our eyes met for a moment – perplexed. My uncle bustled out and gave a few totally unnecessary directions to the cabman and got in beside her. "All right?" asked the driver. "Right," said I; and he woke up the horse with a flick of his whip. My aunt's eyes surveyed me again. "Stick to your old science and things, George, and write and tell me when they make you a Professor," she said cheerfully.

She stared at me for a second longer with eyes growing wider and brighter and a smile that had become fixed, glanced again at the bright little shop still saying "Ponderevo" with all the emphasis of its fascia, and then flopped back hastily out of sight of me into the recesses of the cab. Then it had gone from before me and I beheld Mr. Snape, the hairdresser, inside his store regarding its departure with a quiet satisfaction and exchanging smiles and significant headshakes with Mr. Marbel.

IV

I was left, I say, as part of the lock, stock, and barrel, at Wimblehurst with my new master, a Mr. Mantell; who plays no part in the progress of this story except in so far as he effaced my uncle's traces. So soon as the freshness of this new personality faded, I began to find Wimblehurst not only a dull but a lonely place, and to miss my aunt Susan immensely.

The advertisements of the summer terms for Cough Linctus were removed; the bottles of coloured water – red, green, and yellow – restored to their places; the horse announcing veterinary medicine, which my uncle, sizzling all the while, had coloured in careful portraiture of a Goodwood favourite, rewhitened; and I turned myself even more resolutely than before to Latin (until the passing of my preliminary examination enabled me to drop that), and then to mathematics and science.

There were classes in Electricity and Magnetism at the Grammar School. I took a little "elementary" prize in that in my first year and a medal in my third; and in Chemistry and Human Physiology and Sound, Light and Heat, I did well. There was also a lighter, more discursive subject called Physiography, in which one ranged among the sciences and encountered Geology as a process of evolution from Eozoon to Eastry House, and Astronomy as a record of celestial movements of the most austere and invariable integrity. I learnt out of badly-written, condensed little text-books, and with the minimum of experiment, but still I learnt. Only thirty years ago it was, and I remember I learnt of the electric light as an expensive, impracticable toy, the telephone as a curiosity, electric traction as a practical absurdity. There was no argon, no radium, no phagocytes – at least to my knowledge, and aluminium was a dear, infrequent metal. The fastest ships in the world went then at nineteen knots, and no one but a lunatic here and there ever thought it possible that men might fly.

Many things have happened since then, but the last glance I had of Wimblehurst two years ago remarked no change whatever in its pleasant tranquillity. They had not even built any fresh houses – at least not actually in the town, though about the station there had been some building. But it was a good place to do work in, for all its quiescence. I was soon beyond the small requirements of the Pharmaceutical Society's examination, and as they do not permit candidates to sit for that until one and twenty, I was presently filling up my time and preventing my studies becoming too desultory by making an attack upon the London University degree of Bachelor of Science, which impressed me then as a very splendid but almost impossible achievement. The degree in mathematics and chemistry appealed to me as particularly congenial – albeit giddily inaccessible. I set to work. I had presently to arrange a holiday and go to London to matriculate, and so it was I came upon my aunt and uncle again. In many ways that visit marked an epoch. It was my first impression of London at all. I was then nineteen, and by a conspiracy of chances my nearest approach to that human wilderness had been my brief visit to Chatham. Chatham too had been my largest town. So that I got London at last with an exceptional freshness of effect, as the sudden revelation of a whole unsuspected other side to life.

I came to it on a dull and smoky day by the South Eastern Railway, and our train was half an hour late, stopping and going on and stopping again. I marked beyond Chiselhurst the

growing multitude of villas, and so came stage by stage through multiplying houses and diminishing interspaces of market garden and dingy grass to regions of interlacing railway lines, big factories, gasometers and wide reeking swamps of dingy little homes, more of them and more and more. The number of these and their dinginess and poverty increased, and here rose a great public house and here a Board School and there a gaunt factory; and away to the east there loomed for a time a queer, incongruous forest of masts and spars. The congestion of houses intensified and piled up presently into tenements; I marveled more and more at this boundless world of dingy people; whiffs of industrial smell, of leather, of brewing, drifted into the carriage; the sky darkened, I rumbled thunderously over bridges, van-crowded streets, peered down on and crossed the Thames with an abrupt eclat of sound. I got an effect of tall warehouses, of grey water, barge crowded, of broad banks of indescribable mud, and then I was in Cannon Street Station – a monstrous dirty cavern with trains packed across its vast floor and more porters standing along the platform than I had ever been in my life before. I alighted with my portmanteau and struggled along, realising for the first time just how small and weak I could still upon occasion feel. In this world, I felt, an Honours medal in Electricity and magnetism counted for nothing at all.

Afterwards I drove in a cab down a canon of rushing street between high warehouses, and peeped up astonished at the blackened greys of Saint Paul’s. The traffic of Cheapside – it was

mostly in horse omnibuses in those days – seemed stupendous, its roar was stupendous; I wondered where the money came from to employ so many cabs, what industry could support the endless jostling stream of silk-hatted, frock-coated, hurrying men. Down a turning I found the Temperance Hotel Mr. Mantell had recommended to me. The porter in a green uniform who took over my portmanteau, seemed, I thought, to despise me a good deal.

V

Matriculation kept me for four full days and then came an afternoon to spare, and I sought out Tottenham Court Road through a perplexing network of various and crowded streets. But this London was vast! it was endless! it seemed the whole world had changed into packed frontages and hoardings and street spaces. I got there at last and made inquiries, and I found my uncle behind the counter of the pharmacy he managed, an establishment that did not impress me as doing a particularly high-class trade. "Lord!" he said at the sight of me, "I was wanting something to happen!"

He greeted me warmly. I had grown taller, and he, I thought, had grown shorter and smaller and rounder but otherwise he was unchanged. He struck me as being rather shabby, and the silk hat he produced and put on, when, after mysterious negotiations in the back premises he achieved his freedom to accompany me,

was past its first youth; but he was as buoyant and confident as ever.

"Come to ask me about all THAT," he cried. "I've never written yet."

"Oh, among other things," said I, with a sudden regrettable politeness, and waived the topic of his trusteeship to ask after my aunt Susan.

"We'll have her out of it," he said suddenly; "we'll go somewhere. We don't get you in London every day."

"It's my first visit," I said, "I've never seen London before"; and that made him ask me what I thought of it, and the rest of the talk was London, London, to the exclusion of all smaller topics. He took me up the Hampstead Road almost to the Cobden statue, plunged into some back streets to the left, and came at last to a blistered front door that responded to his latch-key, one of a long series of blistered front doors with fanlights and apartment cards above. We found ourselves in a drab-coloured passage that was not only narrow and dirty but desolatingly empty, and then he opened a door and revealed my aunt sitting at the window with a little sewing-machine on a bamboo occasional table before her, and "work" – a plum-coloured walking dress I judged at its most analytical stage – scattered over the rest of the apartment.

At the first glance I judged my aunt was plumper than she had been, but her complexion was just as fresh and her China blue eye as bright as in the old days.

"London," she said, didn't "get blacks" on her.

She still “cheeked” my uncle, I was pleased to find. “What are you old Poking in for at THIS time – Gubbitt?” she said when he appeared, and she still looked with a practised eye for the facetious side of things. When she saw me behind him, she gave a little cry and stood up radiant. Then she became grave.

I was surprised at my own emotion in seeing her. She held me at arm’s length for a moment, a hand on each shoulder, and looked at me with a sort of glad scrutiny. She seemed to hesitate, and then pecked little kiss off my cheek.

“You’re a man, George,” she said, as she released me, and continued to look at me for a while.

Their menage was one of a very common type in London. They occupied what is called the dining-room floor of a small house, and they had the use of a little inconvenient kitchen in the basement that had once been scullery. The two rooms, bedroom behind and living room in front, were separated by folding-doors that were never now thrown back, and indeed, in the presence of a visitor, not used at all. There was of course no bathroom or anything of that sort available, and there was no water supply except to the kitchen below. My aunt did all the domestic work, though she could have afforded to pay for help if the build of the place had not rendered that inconvenient to the pitch of impossibility. There was no sort of help available except that of indoor servants, for whom she had no accommodation. The furniture was their own; it was partly secondhand, but on the whole it seemed cheerful to my eye, and my aunt’s bias for

cheap, gay-figured muslin had found ample score. In many ways I should think it must have been an extremely inconvenient and cramped sort of home, but at the time I took it, as I was taking everything, as being there and in the nature of things. I did not see the oddness of solvent decent people living in a habitation so clearly neither designed nor adapted for their needs, so wasteful of labour and so devoid of beauty as this was, and it is only now as I describe this that I find myself thinking of the essential absurdity of an intelligent community living in such makeshift homes. It strikes me now as the next thing to wearing second-hand clothes.

You see it was a natural growth, part of that system to which Bladesover, I hold, is the key. There are wide regions of London, miles of streets of houses, that appear to have been originally designed for prosperous-middle-class homes of the early Victorian type. There must have been a perfect fury of such building in the thirties, forties, and fifties. Street after street must have been rushed into being, Campden Town way, Pentonville way, Brompton way, West Kensington way in the Victoria region and all over the minor suburbs of the south side.

I am doubtful if many of these houses had any long use as the residences of single families if from the very first almost their tenants did not makeshift and take lodgers and sublet. They were built with basements, in which their servants worked and lived – servants of a more submissive and troglodytic generation who did not mind stairs. The dining-room (with folding doors) was a

little above the ground level, and in that the wholesome boiled and roast with damp boiled potatoes and then pie to follow, was consumed and the numerous family read and worked in the evening, and above was the drawing-room (also with folding doors), where the infrequent callers were received. That was the vision at which those industrious builders aimed. Even while these houses were being run up, the threads upon the loom of fate were shaping to abolish altogether the type of household that would have fitted them. Means of transit were developing to carry the moderately prosperous middle-class families out of London, education and factory employment were whittling away at the supply of rough, hardworking, obedient girls who would stand the subterranean drudgery of these places, new classes of hard-up middle-class people such as my uncle, employees of various types, were coming into existence, for whom no homes were provided. None of these classes have ideas of what they ought to be, or fit in any legitimate way into the Bladesover theory that dominates our minds. It was nobody's concern to see them housed under civilised conditions, and the beautiful laws of supply and demand had free play. They had to squeeze in. The landlords came out financially intact from their blundering enterprise. More and more these houses fell into the hands of married artisans, or struggling widows or old servants with savings, who became responsible for the quarterly rent and tried to sweat a living by sub-letting furnished or unfurnished apartments.

I remember now that a poor grey-haired old woman who had an air of having been roused from a nap in the dust bin, came out into the area and looked up at us as we three went out from the front door to “see London” under my uncle’s direction. She was the sub-letting occupier; she squeezed out a precarious living by taking the house whole and sub-letting it in detail and she made her food and got the shelter of an attic above and a basement below by the transaction. And if she didn’t chance to “let” steadily, out she went to pauperdom and some other poor, sordid old adventurer tried in her place…

It is a foolish community that can house whole classes, useful and helpful, honest and loyal classes, in such squalidly unsuitable dwellings. It is by no means the social economy it seems, to use up old women, savings and inexperience in order to meet the landlord’s demands. But any one who doubts this thing is going on right up to to-day need only spend an afternoon in hunting for lodgings in any of the regions of London I have named.

But where has my story got to? My uncle, I say, decided I must be shown London, and out we three went as soon as my aunt had got her hat on, to catch all that was left of the day.

VI

It pleased my uncle extremely to find I had never seen London before. He took possession of the metropolis forthwith. “London, George,” he said, “takes a lot of understanding. It’s a great place.

Immense. The richest town in the world, the biggest port, the greatest manufacturing town, the Imperial city – the centre of civilisation, the heart of the world! See those sandwich men down there! That third one's hat! Fair treat! You don't see poverty like that in Wimblehurst George! And many of them high Oxford honour men too. Brought down by drink! It's a wonderful place, George – a whirlpool, a maelstrom! whirls you up and whirls you down."

I have a very confused memory of that afternoon's inspection of London. My uncle took us to and fro showing us over his London, talking erratically, following a route of his own. Sometimes we were walking, sometimes we were on the tops of great staggering horse omnibuses in a heaving jumble of traffic, and at one point we had tea in an Aerated Bread Shop. But I remember very distinctly how we passed down Park Lane under an overcast sky, and how my uncle pointed out the house of this child of good fortune and that with succulent appreciation.

I remember, too, that as he talked I would find my aunt watching my face as if to check the soundness of his talk by my expression.

"Been in love yet, George?" she asked suddenly, over a bun in the tea-shop.

"Too busy, aunt," I told her.

She bit her bun extensively, and gesticulated with the remnant to indicate that she had more to say.

"How are YOU going to make your fortune?" she said so soon

as she could speak again. "You haven't told us that."

"'Lectricity," said my uncle, taking breath after a deep draught of tea.

"If I make it at all," I said. "For my part I think shall be satisfied with something less than a fortune."

"We're going to make ours – suddenly," she said.

"So HE old says." She jerked her head at my uncle.

"He won't tell me when – so I can't get anything ready. But it's coming. Going to ride in our carriage and have a garden. Garden – like a bishop's."

She finished her bun and twiddled crumbs from her fingers. "I shall be glad of the garden," she said. "It's going to be a real big one with rosaries and things. Fountains in it. Pampas grass. Hothouses."

"You'll get it all right," said my uncle, who had reddened a little.

"Grey horses in the carriage, George," she said. "It's nice to think about when one's dull. And dinners in restaurants often and often. And theatres – in the stalls. And money and money and money."

"You may joke," said my uncle, and hummed for a moment.

"Just as though an old Porpoise like him would ever make money," she said, turning her eyes upon his profile with a sudden lapse to affection. "He'll just porpoise about."

"I'll do something," said my uncle, "you bet! Zzzz!" and rapped with a shilling on the marble table.

“When you do you’ll have to buy me a new pair of gloves,” she said, “anyhow. That finger’s past mending. Look! you Cabbage – you.” And she held the split under his nose, and pulled a face of comical fierceness.

My uncle smiled at these sallies at the time, but afterwards, when I went back with him to the Pharmacy – the low-class business grew brisker in the evening and they kept open late – he reverted to it in a low expository tone. “Your aunt’s a bit impatient, George. She gets at me. It’s only natural… A woman doesn’t understand how long it takes to build up a position. No… In certain directions now – I am – quietly – building up a position. Now here… I get this room. I have my three assistants. Zzzz. It’s a position that, judged by the criterion of imeedjit income, isn’t perhaps so good as I deserve, but strategically – yes. It’s what I want. I make my plans. I rally my attack.”

“What plans,” I said, “are you making?”

“Well, George, there’s one thing you can rely upon, I’m doing nothing in a hurry. I turn over this one and that, and I don’t talk – indiscreetly. There’s – No! I don’t think I can tell you that. And yet, why NOT?”

He got up and closed the door into the shop. “I’ve told no one,” he remarked, as he sat down again. “I owe you something.”

His face flushed slightly, he leant forward over the little table towards me.

“Listen!” he said.

I listened.

"Tono-Bungay," said my uncle very slowly and distinctly.

I thought he was asking me to hear some remote, strange noise. "I don't hear anything," I said reluctantly to his expectant face. He smiled undefeated. "Try again," he said, and repeated, "Tono-Bungay."

"Oh, THAT!" I said.

"Eh?" said he.

"But what is it?"

"Ah!" said my uncle, rejoicing and expanding. "What IS it? That's what you got to ask? What won't it be?" He dug me violently in what he supposed to be my ribs. "George," he cried – "George, watch this place! There's more to follow."

And that was all I could get from him.

That, I believe, was the very first time that the words Tono-Bungay ever heard on earth – unless my uncle indulged in monologues in his chamber – a highly probable thing. Its utterance certainly did not seem to me at the time to mark any sort of epoch, and had I been told this word was the Open Sesame to whatever pride and pleasure the grimy front of London hid from us that evening, I should have laughed aloud.

"Coming now to business," I said after a pause, and with a chill sense of effort; and I opened the question of his trust.

My uncle sighed, and leant back in his chair. "I wish I could make all this business as clear to you as it is to me," he said. "However – Go on! Say what you have to say."

VII

After I left my uncle that evening I gave way to a feeling of profound depression. My uncle and aunt seemed to me to be leading – I have already used the word too often, but I must use it again – DINGY lives. They seemed to be adrift in a limitless crowd of dingy people, wearing shabby clothes, living uncomfortably in shabby second-hand houses, going to and fro on pavements that had always a thin veneer of greasy, slippery mud, under grey skies that showed no gleam of hope of anything for them but dinginess until they died. It seemed absolutely clear to me that my mother's little savings had been swallowed up and that my own prospect was all too certainly to drop into and be swallowed up myself sooner or later by this dingy London ocean. The London that was to be an adventurous escape from the slumber of Wimblehurst, had vanished from my dreams. I saw my uncle pointing to the houses in Park Lane and showing a frayed shirt-cuff as he did so. I heard my aunt: "I'm to ride in my carriage then. So he old says."

My feelings towards my uncle were extraordinarily mixed. I was intensely sorry not only for my aunt Susan but for him – for it seemed indisputable that as they were living then so they must go on – and at the same time I was angry with the garrulous vanity and illness that had elipped all my chance of independent study, and imprisoned her in those grey apartments. When I got back to

Wimblehurst I allowed myself to write him a boyishly sarcastic and sincerely bitter letter. He never replied. Then, believing it to be the only way of escape for me, I set myself far more grimly and resolutely to my studies than I had ever done before. After a time I wrote to him in more moderate terms, and he answered me evasively. And then I tried to dismiss him from my mind and went on working.

Yes, that first raid upon London under the moist and chilly depression of January had an immense effect upon me. It was for me an epoch-making disappointment. I had thought of London as a large, free, welcoming, adventurous place, and I saw it slovenly and harsh and irresponsive.

I did not realise at all what human things might be found behind those grey frontages, what weakness that whole forbidding facade might presently confess. It is the constant error of youth to over-estimate the Will in things. I did not see that the dirt, the discouragement, the discomfort of London could be due simply to the fact that London was a witless old giantess of a town, too slack and stupid to keep herself clean and maintain a brave face to the word. No! I suffered from the sort of illusion that burnt witches in the seventeenth century. I endued her grubby disorder with a sinister and magnificent quality of intention.

And my uncle's gestures and promises filled me with doubt and a sort of fear for him. He seemed to me a lost little creature, too silly to be silent, in a vast implacable condemnation. I

was full of pity and a sort of tenderness for my aunt Susan, who was doomed to follow his erratic fortunes mocked by his grandiloquent promises.

I was to learn better. But I worked with the terror of the grim underside of London in my soul during all my last year at Wimblehurst.

BOOK THE SECOND
THE RISE OF TONO-BUNGAY

CHAPTER THE FIRST

HOW I BECAME A LONDON STUDENT AND WENT ASTRAY

I came to live in London, as I shall tell you, when I was nearly twenty-two. Wimblehurst dwindles in perspective, is now in this book a little place far off, Bladesover no more than a small pinkish speck of frontage among the distant Kentish hills; the scene broadens out, becomes multitudinous and limitless, full of the sense of vast irrelevant movement. I do not remember my second coming to London as I do my first, for my early impressions, save that an October memory of softened amber sunshine stands out, amber sunshine falling on grey house fronts I know not where. That, and a sense of a large tranquillity.

I could fill a book, I think, with a more or less imaginary account of how I came to apprehend London, how first in one aspect and then in another it grew in my mind. Each day my accumulating impressions were added to and qualified and

brought into relationship with new ones; they fused inseparably with others that were purely personal and accidental. I find myself with a certain comprehensive perception of London, complete indeed, incurably indistinct in places and yet in some way a whole that began with my first visit and is still being mellowed and enriched.

London!

At first, no doubt, it was a chaos of streets and people and buildings and reasonless going to and fro. I do not remember that I ever struggled very steadily to understand it, or explored it with any but a personal and adventurous intention. Yet in time there has grown up in me a kind of theory of London; I do think I see lines of an ordered structure out of which it has grown, detected a process that is something more than a confusion of casual accidents though indeed it may be no more than a process of disease.

I said at the outset of my first book that I find in Bladesover the clue to all England. Well, I certainly imagine it is the clue to the structure of London. There have been no revolutions no deliberate restatements or abandonments of opinion in England since the days of the fine gentry, since 1688 or thereabouts, the days when Bladesover was built; there have been changes, dissolving forest replacing forest, if you will; but then it was that the broad lines of the English system set firmly. And as I have gone to and fro in London in certain regions constantly the thought has recurred this is Bladesover House, this answers to

Bladesover House. The fine gentry may have gone; they have indeed largely gone, I think; rich merchants may have replaced them, financial adventurers or what not. That does not matter; the shape is still Bladesover.

I am most reminded of Bladesover and Eastry by all those regions round about the West End parks; for example, estate parks, each more or less in relation to a palace or group of great houses. The roads and back ways of Mayfair and all about St. James's again, albeit perhaps of a later growth in point of time, were of the very spirit and architectural texture of the Bladesover passages and yards; they had the same smells, the space, the large cleanest and always going to and fro where one met unmistakable Olympians and even more unmistakable valets, butlers, footmen in mufti. There were moments when I seemed to glimpse down areas the white panelling, the very chintz of my mother's room again.

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