

ALLEN GRANT

THE BRITISH
BARBARIANS

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The British Barbarians

«Public Domain»

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The British Barbarians / G. Allen — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
I	9
II	14
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	18

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INTRODUCTION

Which every reader of this book is requested to read before beginning the story.

This is a Hill-top Novel. I dedicate it to all who have heart enough, brain enough, and soul enough to understand it.

What do I mean by a Hill-top Novel? Well, of late we have been flooded with stories of evil tendencies: a Hill-top Novel is one which raises a protest in favour of purity.

Why have not novelists raised the protest earlier? For this reason. Hitherto, owing to the stern necessity laid upon the modern seer for earning his bread, and, incidentally, for finding a publisher to assist him in promulgating his prophetic opinions, it has seldom happened that writers of exceptional aims have been able to proclaim to the world at large the things which they conceived to be best worth their telling it. Especially has this been the case in the province of fiction. Let me explain the situation. Most novels nowadays have to run as serials through magazines or newspapers; and the editors of these periodicals are timid to a degree which outsiders would hardly believe with regard to the fiction they admit into their pages. Endless spells surround them. This story or episode would annoy their Catholic readers; that one would repel their Wesleyan Methodist subscribers; such an incident is unfit for the perusal of the young person; such another would drive away the offended British matron. I do not myself believe there is any real ground for this excessive and, to be quite frank, somewhat ridiculous timidity. Incredible as it may seem to the ordinary editor, I am of opinion that it would be possible to tell the truth, and yet preserve the circulation. A first-class journal does not really suffer because two or three formalists or two or three bigots among its thousands of subscribers give it up for six weeks in a pet of ill-temper—and then take it on again. Still, the effect remains: it is almost impossible to get a novel printed in an English journal unless it is warranted to contain nothing at all to which anybody, however narrow, could possibly object, on any grounds whatever, religious, political, social, moral, or aesthetic. The romance that appeals to the average editor must say or hint at nothing at all that is not universally believed and received by everybody everywhere in this realm of Britain. But literature, as Thomas Hardy says with truth, is mainly the expression of souls in revolt. Hence the antagonism between literature and journalism.

Why, then, publish one's novels serially at all? Why not appeal at once to the outside public, which has few such prejudices? Why not deliver one's message direct to those who are ready to consider it or at least to hear it? Because, unfortunately, the serial rights of a novel at the present day are three times as valuable, in money worth, as the final book rights. A man who elects to publish direct, instead of running his story through the columns of a newspaper, is forfeiting, in other words, three-quarters of his income. This loss the prophet who cares for his mission could cheerfully endure, of course, if only the diminished income were enough for him to live upon. But in order to write, he must first eat. In my own case, for example, up till the time when I published *The Woman who Did*, I could never live on the proceeds of direct publication; nor could I even secure a publisher who would consent to aid me in introducing to the world what I thought most important for it. Having now found such a publisher—having secured my mountain—I am prepared to go on delivering my message from its top, as long as the world will consent to hear it. I will willingly forgo the serial value of my novels, and forfeit three-quarters of the amount I might otherwise earn, for the sake of uttering the truth that is in me, boldly and openly, to a perverse generation.

For this reason, and in order to mark the distinction between these books which are really mine—my own in thought, in spirit, in teaching—and those which I have produced, sorely against my

will, to satisfy editors, I propose in future to add the words, “A Hill-top Novel,” to every one of my stories which I write of my own accord, simply and solely for the sake of embodying and enforcing my own opinions.

Not that, as critics have sometimes supposed me to mean, I ever wrote a line, even in fiction, contrary to my own profound beliefs. I have never said a thing I did not think: but I have sometimes had to abstain from saying many things I did think. When I wished to purvey strong meat for men, I was condemned to provide milk for babes. In the Hill-top Novels, I hope to reverse all that—to say my say in my own way, representing the world as it appears to me, not as editors and formalists would like me to represent it.

The Hill-top Novels, however, will not constitute, in the ordinary sense, a series. I shall add the name, as a Trade Mark, to any story, by whomsoever published, which I have written as the expression of my own individuality. Nor will they necessarily appear in the first instance in volume form. If ever I should be lucky enough to find an editor sufficiently bold and sufficiently righteous to venture upon running a Hill-top Novel as a serial through his columns, I will gladly embrace that mode of publication. But while editors remain as pusillanimous and as careless of moral progress as they are at present, I have little hope that I shall persuade any one of them to accept a work written with a single eye to the enlightenment and bettering of humanity.

Whenever, therefore, in future, the words “A Hill-top Novel” appear upon the title-page of a book by me, the reader who cares for truth and righteousness may take it for granted that the book represents my own original thinking, whether good or bad, on some important point in human society or human evolution.

Not, again, that any one of these novels will deliberately attempt to PROVE anything. I have been amused at the allegations brought by certain critics against *The Woman who Did* that it “failed to prove” the practicability of unions such as Herminia’s and Alan’s. The famous Scotsman, in the same spirit, objected to *Paradise Lost* that it “proved naething”: but his criticism has not been generally endorsed as valid. To say the truth, it is absurd to suppose a work of imagination can prove or disprove anything. The author holds the strings of all his puppets, and can pull them as he likes, for good or evil: he can make his experiments turn out well or ill: he can contrive that his unions should end happily or miserably: how, then, can his story be said to PROVE anything? A novel is not a proposition in Euclid. I give due notice beforehand to reviewers in general, that if any principle at all is “proved” by any of my Hill-top Novels, it will be simply this: “Act as I think right, for the highest good of human kind, and you will infallibly and inevitably come to a bad end for it.”

Not to prove anything, but to suggest ideas, to arouse emotions, is, I take it, the true function of fiction. One wishes to make one’s readers THINK about problems they have never considered, FEEL with sentiments they have disliked or hated. The novelist as prophet has his duty defined for him in those divine words of Shelley’s:

“Singing songs unbidden
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.”

That, too, is the reason that impels me to embody such views as these in romantic fiction, not in deliberate treatises. “Why sow your ideas broadcast,” many honest critics say, “in novels where mere boys and girls can read them? Why not formulate them in serious and argumentative books, where wise men alone will come across them?” The answer is, because wise men are wise already: it is the boys and girls of a community who stand most in need of suggestion and instruction. Women, in particular, are the chief readers of fiction; and it is women whom one mainly desires to arouse to interest in profound problems by the aid of this vehicle. Especially should one arouse them to such living interest while they are still young and plastic, before they have crystallised and hardened into

the conventional marionettes of polite society. Make them think while they are young: make them feel while they are sensitive: it is then alone that they will think and feel, if ever. I will venture, indeed, to enforce my views on this subject by a little apologue which I have somewhere read, or heard,—or invented.

A Revolutionist desired to issue an Election Address to the Working Men of Bermondsey. The Rector of the Parish saw it at the printer's, and came to him, much perturbed. "Why write it in English?" he asked. "It will only inflame the minds of the lower orders. Why not allow me to translate it into Ciceronian Latin? It would then be comprehensible to all University men; your logic would be duly and deliberately weighed: and the tanners and tinkers, who are so very impressionable, would not be poisoned by it." "My friend," said the Revolutionist, "it is the tanners and tinkers *I* want to get at. My object is, to win this election; University graduates will not help me to win it."

The business of the preacher is above all things to preach; but in order to preach, he must first reach his audience. The audience in this case consists in large part of women and girls, who are most simply and easily reached by fiction. Therefore, fiction is today the best medium for the preacher of righteousness who addresses humanity.

Why, once more, this particular name, "A Hill-top Novel"? For something like this reason.

I am writing in my study on a heather-clad hill-top. When I raise my eye from my sheet of foolscap, it falls upon miles and miles of broad open moorland. My window looks out upon unsullied nature. Everything around is fresh and pure and wholesome. Through the open casement, the scent of the pines blows in with the breeze from the neighbouring firwood. Keen airs sigh through the pine-needles. Grasshoppers chirp from deep tangles of bracken. The song of a skylark drops from the sky like soft rain in summer; in the evening, a nightjar croons to us his monotonously passionate love-wail from his perch on the gnarled boughs of the wind-swept larch that crowns the upland. But away below in the valley, as night draws on, a lurid glare reddens the north-eastern horizon. It marks the spot where the great wen of London heaves and festers. Up here on the free hills, the sharp air blows in upon us, limpid and clear from a thousand leagues of open ocean; down there in the crowded town, it stagnates and ferments, polluted with the diseases and vices of centuries.

This is an urban age. The men of the villages, alas, are leaving behind them the green fields and purple moors of their childhood, are foolishly crowding into the narrow lanes and purlieus of the great cities. Strange decadent sins and morbid pleasures entice them thither. But I desire in these books to utter a word once more in favour of higher and purer ideals of life and art. Those who sicken of the foul air and lurid light of towns may still wander side by side with me on these heathery highlands. Far, far below, the theatre and the music-hall spread their garish gas-lamps. Let who will heed them. But here on the open hill-top we know fresher and more wholesome delights. Those feverish joys allure us not. O decadents of the town, we have seen your sham idyls, your tinsel Arcadias. We have tired of their stuffy atmosphere, their dazzling jets, their weary ways, their gaudy dresses; we shun the sunken cheeks, the lack-lustre eyes, the heart-sick souls of your painted goddesses. We love not the fetid air, thick and hot with human breath, and reeking with tobacco smoke, of your modern Parnassus—a Parnassus whose crags were reared and shaped by the hands of the stage-carpenter! Your studied dalliance with your venal muses is little to our taste. Your halls are too stifling with carbonic acid gas; for us, we breathe oxygen.

And the oxygen of the hill-tops is purer, keener, rarer, more ethereal. It is rich in ozone. Now, ozone stands to common oxygen itself as the clean-cut metal to the dull and leaden exposed surface. Nascent and ever renascent, it has electrical attraction; it leaps to the embrace of the atom it selects, but only under the influence of powerful affinities; and what it clasps once, it clasps for ever. That is the pure air which we drink in on the heather-clad heights—not the venomous air of the crowded casino, nor even the close air of the middle-class parlour. It thrills and nerves us. How we smile, we who live here, when some dweller in the mists and smoke of the valley confounds our delicate atmosphere, redolent of honey and echoing the manifold murmur of bees, with that stifling miasma

of the gambling hell and the dancing saloon! Trust me, dear friend, the moorland air is far other than you fancy. You can wander up here along the purple ridges, hand locked in hand with those you love, without fear of harm to yourself or your comrade. No Bloom of Ninon here, but fresh cheeks like the peach-blossom where the sun has kissed it: no casual fruition of loveless, joyless harlots, but life-long saturation of your own heart's desire in your own heart's innocence. Ozone is better than all the champagne in the Strand or Piccadilly. If only you will believe it, it is purity and life and sympathy and vigour. Its perfect freshness and perpetual fount of youth keep your age from withering. It crimson the sunset and lives in the afterglow. If these delights thy mind may move, leave, oh, leave the meretricious town, and come to the airy peaks. Such joy is ours, unknown to the squalid village which spreads its swamps where the poet's silver Thames runs dull and leaden.

Have we never our doubts, though, up here on the hill-tops? Ay, marry, have we! Are we so sure that these gospels we preach with all our hearts are the true and final ones? Who shall answer that question? For myself, as I lift up my eyes from my paper once more, my gaze falls first on the golden bracken that waves joyously over the sandstone ridge without, and then, within, on a little white shelf where lies the greatest book of our greatest philosopher. I open it at random and consult its sortes. What comfort and counsel has Herbert Spencer for those who venture to see otherwise than the mass of their contemporaries?

“Whoever hesitates to utter that which he thinks the highest truth, lest it should be too much in advance of the time, may reassure himself by looking at his acts from an impersonal point of view. Let him duly realise the fact that opinion is the agency through which character adapts external arrangements to itself—that his opinion rightly forms part of this agency—is a unit of force, constituting, with other such units, the general power which works out social changes; and he will perceive that he may properly give full utterance to his innermost conviction; leaving it to produce what effect it may. It is not for nothing that he has in him these sympathies with some principles and repugnances to others. He, with all his capacities, and aspirations, and beliefs, is not an accident, but a product of the time. He must remember that while he is a descendant of the past, he is a parent of the future; and that his thoughts are as children born to him, which he may not carelessly let die. He, like every other man, may properly consider himself as one of the myriad agencies through whom works the Unknown Cause; and when the Unknown Cause produces in him a certain belief, he is thereby authorised to profess and act out that belief. For, to render in their highest sense the words of the poet—

‘Nature is made better by no mean,
But nature makes that mean; over that art
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes.’

“Not as adventitious therefore will the wise man regard the faith which is in him. The highest truth he sees he will fearlessly utter; knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world—knowing that if he can effect the change he aims at—well: if not—well also; though not SO well.”

That passage comforts me. These, then, are my ideas. They may be right, they may be wrong. But at least they are the sincere and personal convictions of an honest man, warranted in him by that spirit of the age, of which each of us is but an automatic mouthpiece.

G. A.

I

The time was Saturday afternoon; the place was Surrey; the person of the drama was Philip Christy.

He had come down by the early fast train to Brackenhurst. All the world knows Brackenhurst, of course, the greenest and leafiest of our southern suburbs. It looked even prettier than its wont just then, that town of villas, in the first fresh tenderness of its wan spring foliage, the first full flush of lilac, laburnum, horse-chestnut, and guelder-rose. The air was heavy with the odour of May and the hum of bees. Philip paused a while at the corner, by the ivied cottage, admiring it silently. He was glad he lived there—so very aristocratic! What joy to glide direct, on the enchanted carpet of the South-Eastern Railway, from the gloom and din and bustle of Cannon Street, to the breadth and space and silence and exclusiveness of that upland village! For Philip Christy was a gentlemanly clerk in Her Majesty's Civil Service.

As he stood there admiring it all with roving eyes, he was startled after a moment by the sudden, and as it seemed to him unannounced apparition of a man in a well-made grey tweed suit, just a yard or two in front of him. He was aware of an intruder. To be sure, there was nothing very remarkable at first sight either in the stranger's dress, appearance, or manner. All that Philip noticed for himself in the newcomer's mien for the first few seconds was a certain distinct air of social superiority, an innate nobility of gait and bearing. So much at least he observed at a glance quite instinctively. But it was not this quiet and unobtrusive tone, as of the Best Society, that surprised and astonished him; Brackenhurst prided itself, indeed, on being a most well-bred and distinguished neighbourhood; people of note grew as thick there as heather or whortleberries. What puzzled him more was the abstruser question, where on earth the stranger could have come from so suddenly. Philip had glanced up the road and down the road just two minutes before, and was prepared to swear when he withdrew his eyes not a soul loomed in sight in either direction. Whence, then, could the man in the grey suit have emerged? Had he dropped from the clouds? No gate opened into the road on either side for two hundred yards or more; for Brackenhurst is one of those extremely respectable villa neighbourhoods where every house—an eligible family residence—stands in its own grounds of at least six acres. Now Philip could hardly suspect that so well dressed a man of such distinguished exterior would be guilty of such a gross breach of the recognised code of Brackenhurstian manners as was implied in the act of vaulting over a hedgerow. So he gazed in blank wonder at the suddenness of the apparition, more than half inclined to satisfy his curiosity by inquiring of the stranger how the dickens he had got there.

A moment's reflection, however, sufficed to save the ingenuous young man from the pitfall of so serious a social solecism. It would be fatal to accost him. For, mark you, no matter how gentlemanly and well-tailored a stranger may look, you can never be sure nowadays (in these topsy-turvy times of subversive radicalism) whether he is or is not really a gentleman. That makes acquaintanceship a dangerous luxury. If you begin by talking to a man, be it ever so casually, he may desire to thrust his company upon you, willy-nilly, in future; and when you have ladies of your family living in a place, you really CANNOT be too particular what companions you pick up there, were it even in the most informal and momentary fashion. Besides, the fellow might turn out to be one of your social superiors, and not care to know you; in which case, of course, you would only be letting yourself in for a needless snubbing. In fact, in this modern England of ours, this fatherland of snobdom, one passes one's life in a see-saw of doubt, between the Scylla and Charybdis of those two antithetical social dangers. You are always afraid you may get to know somebody you yourself do not want to know, or may try to know somebody who does not want to know you.

Guided by these truly British principles of ancestral wisdom, Philip Christy would probably never have seen anything more of the distinguished-looking stranger had it not been for a passing accident of muscular action, over which his control was distinctly precarious. He happened in

brushing past to catch the stranger's eye. It was a clear blue eye, very deep and truthful. It somehow succeeded in riveting for a second Philip's attention. And it was plain the stranger was less afraid of speaking than Philip himself was. For he advanced with a pleasant smile on his open countenance, and waved one gloveless hand in a sort of impalpable or half-checked salute, which impressed his new acquaintance as a vaguely polite Continental gesture. This affected Philip favourably: the newcomer was a somebody then, and knew his place: for just in proportion as Philip felt afraid to begin conversation himself with an unplaced stranger, did he respect any other man who felt so perfectly sure of his own position that he shared no such middle-class doubts or misgivings. A duke is never afraid of accosting anybody. Philip was strengthened, therefore, in his first idea, that the man in the grey suit was a person of no small distinction in society, else surely he would not have come up and spoken with such engaging frankness and ease of manner.

"I beg your pardon," the stranger said, addressing him in pure and limpid English, which sounded to Philip like the dialect of the very best circles, yet with some nameless difference of intonation or accent which certainly was not foreign, still less provincial, or Scotch, or Irish; it seemed rather like the very purest well of English undefiled Philip had ever heard,—only, if anything, a little more so; "I beg your pardon, but I'm a stranger hereabouts, and I should be so VERY much obliged if you could kindly direct me to any good lodgings."

His voice and accent attracted Philip even more now he stood near at hand than his appearance had done from a little distance. It was impossible, indeed, to say definitely in set terms what there was about the man that made his personality and his words so charming; but from that very first minute, Philip freely admitted to himself that the stranger in the grey suit was a perfect gentleman. Nay, so much did he feel it in his ingenuous way that he threw off at once his accustomed cloak of dubious reserve, and, standing still to think, answered after a short pause, "Well, we've a great many very nice furnished houses about here to let, but not many lodgings. Brackenhurst's a cut above lodgings, don't you know; it's a residential quarter. But I should think Miss Blake's, at Heathercliff House, would perhaps be just the sort of thing to suit you."

"Oh, thank you," the stranger answered, with a deferential politeness which charmed Philip once more by its graceful expressiveness. "And could you kindly direct me to them? I don't know my way about at all, you see, as yet, in this country."

"With pleasure," Philip replied, quite delighted at the chance of solving the mystery of where the stranger had dropped from. "I'm going that way myself, and can take you past her door. It's only a few steps. Then you're a stranger in England?"

The newcomer smiled a curious self-restrained smile. He was both young and handsome. "Yes, I'm a stranger in your England," he answered, gravely, in the tone of one who wishes to avoid an awkward discussion. "In fact, an Alien. I only arrived here this very morning."

"From the Continent?" Philip inquired, arching his eyebrows slightly.

The stranger smiled again. "No, not from the Continent," he replied, with provoking evasiveness.

"I thought you weren't a foreigner," Philip continued in a blandly suggestive voice. "That is to say," he went on, after a second's pause, during which the stranger volunteered no further statement, "you speak English like an Englishman."

"Do I?" the stranger answered. "Well, I'm glad of that. It'll make intercourse with your Englishmen so much more easy."

By this time Philip's curiosity was thoroughly whetted. "But you're not an Englishman, you say?" he asked, with a little natural hesitation.

"No, not exactly what you call an Englishman," the stranger replied, as if he didn't quite care for such clumsy attempts to examine his antecedents. "As I tell you, I'm an Alien. But we always spoke English at home," he added with an afterthought, as if ready to vouchsafe all the other information that lay in his power.

“You can’t be an American, I’m sure,” Philip went on, unabashed, his eagerness to solve the question at issue, once raised, getting the better for the moment of both reserve and politeness.

“No, I’m certainly not an American,” the stranger answered with a gentle courtesy in his tone that made Philip feel ashamed of his rudeness in questioning him.

“Nor a Colonist?” Philip asked once more, unable to take the hint.

“Nor a Colonist either,” the Alien replied curtly. And then he relapsed into a momentary silence which threw upon Philip the difficult task of continuing the conversation.

The member of Her Britannic Majesty’s Civil Service would have given anything just that minute to say to him frankly, “Well, if you’re not an Englishman, and you’re not an American, and you’re not a Colonist, and you ARE an Alien, and yet you talk English like a native, and have always talked it, why, what in the name of goodness do you want us to take you for?” But he restrained himself with difficulty. There was something about the stranger that made him feel by instinct it would be more a breach of etiquette to question him closely than to question any one he had ever met with.

They walked on along the road for some minutes together, the stranger admiring all the way the golden tresses of the laburnum and the rich perfume of the lilac, and talking much as he went of the quaintness and prettiness of the suburban houses. Philip thought them pretty, too (or rather, important), but failed to see for his own part where the quaintness came in. Nay, he took the imputation as rather a slur on so respectable a neighbourhood: for to be quaint is to be picturesque, and to be picturesque is to be old-fashioned. But the stranger’s voice and manner were so pleasant, almost so ingratiating, that Philip did not care to differ from him on the abstract question of a qualifying epithet. After all, there’s nothing positively insulting in calling a house quaint, though Philip would certainly have preferred, himself, to hear the Eligible Family Residences of that Aristocratic Neighbourhood described in auctioneering phrase as “imposing,” “noble,” “handsome,” or “important-looking.”

Just before they reached Miss Blake’s door, the Alien paused for a second. He took out a loose handful of money, gold and silver together, from his trouser pocket. “One more question,” he said, with that pleasant smile on his lips, “if you’ll excuse my ignorance. Which of these coins is a pound, now, and which is a sovereign?”

“Why, a pound IS a sovereign, of course,” Philip answered briskly, smiling the genuine British smile of unfeigned astonishment that anybody should be ignorant of a minor detail in the kind of life he had always lived among. To be sure, he would have asked himself with equal simplicity what was the difference between a twenty-franc piece, a napoleon, and a louis, or would have debated as to the precise numerical relation between twenty-five cents and a quarter of a dollar; but then, those are mere foreign coins, you see, which no fellow can be expected to understand, unless he happens to have lived in the country they are used in. The others are British and necessary to salvation. That feeling is instinctive in the thoroughly provincial English nature. No Englishman ever really grasps for himself the simple fact that England is a foreign country to foreigners; if strangers happen to show themselves ignorant of any petty matter in English life, he regards their ignorance as silly and childish, not to be compared for a moment to his own natural unfamiliarity with the absurd practices of foreign nations.

The Alien, indeed, seemed to have learned beforehand this curious peculiarity of the limited English intellect; for he blushed slightly as he replied, “I know your currency, as a matter of arithmetic, of course: twelve pence make one shilling; twenty shillings make one pound—”

“Of course,” Philip echoed in a tone of perfect conviction; it would never have occurred to him to doubt for a moment that everybody knew intuitively those beggarly elements of the inspired British monetary system.

“Though they’re singularly awkward units of value for any one accustomed to a decimal coinage: so unreasonable and illogical,” the stranger continued blandly, turning over the various pieces with a dubious air of distrust and uncertainty.

“I BEG your pardon,” Philip said, drawing himself up very stiff, and scarcely able to believe his ears (he was an official of Her Britannic Majesty’s Government, and unused to such blasphemy). “Do I understand you to say, you consider pounds, shillings, and pence UNREASONABLE?”

He put an emphasis on the last word that might fairly have struck terror to the stranger’s breast; but somehow it did not. “Why, yes,” the Alien went on with imperturbable gentleness: “no order or principle, you know. No rational connection. A mere survival from barbaric use. A score, and a dozen. The score is one man, ten fingers and ten toes; the dozen is one man with shoes on—fingers and feet together. Twelve pence make one shilling; twenty shillings one pound. How very confusing! And then, the nomenclature’s so absurdly difficult! Which of these is half-a-crown, if you please, and which is a florin? and what are their respective values in pence and shillings?”

Philip picked out the coins and explained them to him separately. The Alien meanwhile received the information with evident interest, as a traveller in that vast tract that is called Abroad might note the habits and manners of some savage tribe that dwells within its confines, and solemnly wrapped each coin up in paper, as his instructor named it for him, writing the designation and value outside in a peculiarly beautiful and legible hand. “It’s so puzzling, you see,” he said in explanation, as Philip smiled another superior and condescending British smile at this infantile proceeding; “the currency itself has no congruity or order: and then, even these queer unrelated coins haven’t for the most part their values marked in words or figures upon them.”

“Everybody knows what they are,” Philip answered lightly. Though for a moment, taken aback by the novelty of the idea, he almost admitted in his own mind that to people who had the misfortune to be born foreigners, there WAS perhaps a slight initial difficulty in this unlettered system. But then, you cannot expect England to be regulated throughout for the benefit of foreigners! Though, to be sure, on the one occasion when Philip had visited the Rhine and Switzerland, he had grumbled most consumedly from Ostend to Grindelwald, at those very decimal coins which the stranger seemed to admire so much, and had wondered why the deuce Belgium, Germany, Holland, and Switzerland could not agree among themselves upon a uniform coinage; it would be so much more convenient to the British tourist. For the British tourist, of course, is NOT a foreigner.

On the door-step of Miss Blake’s Furnished Apartments for Families and Gentlemen, the stranger stopped again. “One more question,” he interposed in that same suave voice, “if I’m not trespassing too much on your time and patience. For what sort of term—by the day, month, year—does one usually take lodgings?”

“Why, by the week, of course,” Philip answered, suppressing a broad smile of absolute surprise at the man’s childish ignorance.

“And how much shall I have to pay?” the Alien went on quietly. “Have you any fixed rule about it?”

“Of course not,” Philip answered, unable any longer to restrain his amusement (everything in England was “of course” to Philip). “You pay according to the sort of accommodation you require, the number of your rooms, and the nature of the neighbourhood.”

“I see,” the Alien replied, imperturbably polite, in spite of Philip’s condescending manner. “And what do I pay per room in this latitude and longitude?”

For twenty seconds, Philip half suspected his new acquaintance of a desire to chaff him: but as at the same time the Alien drew from his pocket a sort of combined compass and chronometer which he gravely consulted for his geographical bearings, Philip came to the conclusion he must be either a seafaring man or an escaped lunatic. So he answered him to the point. “I should think,” he said quietly, “as Miss Blake’s are extremely respectable lodgings, in a first-rate quarter, and with a splendid view, you’ll probably have to pay somewhere about three guineas.”

“Three what?” the stranger interposed, with an inquiring glance at the little heap of coins he still held before him.

Philip misinterpreted his glance. “Perhaps that’s too much for you,” he suggested, looking severe; for if people cannot afford to pay for decent rooms, they have no right to invade an aristocratic suburb, and bespeak the attention of its regular residents.

“Oh, that’s not it,” the Alien put in, reading his tone aright. “The money doesn’t matter to me. As long as I can get a tidy room, with sun and air, I don’t mind what I pay. It’s the guinea I can’t quite remember about for the moment. I looked it up, I know, in a dictionary at home; but I’m afraid I’ve forgotten it. Let me see; it’s twenty-one pounds to the guinea, isn’t it? Then I’m to pay about sixty-three pounds a week for my lodgings.”

This was the right spirit. He said it so simply, so seriously, so innocently, that Philip was quite sure he really meant it. He was prepared, if necessary, to pay sixty odd pounds a week in rent. Now, a man like that is the proper kind of man for a respectable neighbourhood. He’ll keep a good saddle-horse, join the club, and play billiards freely. Philip briefly explained to him the nature of his mistake, pointing out to him that a guinea was an imaginary coin, unrepresented in metal, but reckoned by prescription at twenty-one shillings. The stranger received the slight correction with such perfect nonchalance, that Philip at once conceived a high opinion of his wealth and solvency, and therefore of his respectability and moral character. It was clear that pounds and shillings were all one to him. Philip had been right, no doubt, in his first diagnosis of his queer acquaintance as a man of distinction. For wealth and distinction are practically synonyms in England for one and the same quality, possession of the wherewithal.

As they parted, the stranger spoke again, still more at sea. “And are there any special ceremonies to be gone through on taking up lodgings?” he asked quite gravely. “Any religious rites, I mean to say? Any poojah or so forth? That is,” he went on, as Philip’s smile broadened, “is there any taboo to be removed or appeased before I can take up my residence in the apartments?”

By this time Philip was really convinced he had to do with a madman—perhaps a dangerous lunatic. So he answered rather testily, “No, certainly not; how absurd! you must see that’s ridiculous. You’re in a civilised country, not among Australian savages. All you’ll have to do is to take the rooms and pay for them. I’m sorry I can’t be of any further use to you, but I’m pressed for time to-day. So now, good-morning.”

As for the stranger, he turned up the path through the lodging-house garden with curious misgivings. His heart failed him. It was half-past three by mean solar time for that particular longitude. Then why had this young man said so briskly, “Good morning,” at 3.30 P.M., as if on purpose to deceive him? Was he laying a trap? Was this some wile and guile of the English medicine-men?

II

Next day was (not unnaturally) Sunday. At half-past ten in the morning, according to his wont, Philip Christy was seated in the drawing-room at his sister's house, smooth silk hat in gloved hand, waiting for Frida and her husband, Robert Monteith, to go to church with him. As he sat there, twiddling his thumbs, or beating the devil's tattoo on the red Japanese table, the housemaid entered. "A gentleman to see you, sir," she said, handing Philip a card. The young man glanced at it curiously. A visitor to call at such an early hour!—and on Sunday morning too! How extremely odd! This was really most irregular!

So he looked down at the card with a certain vague sense of inarticulate disapproval. But he noticed at the same time it was finer and clearer and more delicately engraved than any other card he had ever yet come across. It bore in simple unobtrusive letters the unknown name, "Mr. Bertram Ingledew."

Though he had never heard it before, name and engraving both tended to mollify Philip's nascent dislike. "Show the gentleman in, Martha," he said in his most grandiose tone; and the gentleman entered.

Philip started at sight of him. It was his friend the Alien. Philip was quite surprised to see his madman of last night; and what was more disconcerting still, in the self-same grey tweed home-spun suit he had worn last evening. Now, nothing can be more gentlemanly, don't you know, than a grey home-spun, IN its proper place; but its proper place Philip Christy felt was certainly NOT in a respectable suburb on a Sunday morning.

"I beg your pardon," he said frigidly, rising from his seat with his sternest official air—the air he was wont to assume in the anteroom at the office when outsiders called and wished to interview his chief "on important public business." "To what may I owe the honour of this visit?" For he did not care to be hunted up in his sister's house at a moment's notice by a most casual acquaintance, whom he suspected of being an escaped lunatic.

Bertram Ingledew, for his part, however, advanced towards his companion of last night with the frank smile and easy bearing of a cultivated gentleman. He was blissfully unaware of the slight he was putting upon the respectability of Brackenhurst by appearing on Sunday in his grey tweed suit; so he only held out his hand as to an ordinary friend, with the simple words, "You were so extremely kind to me last night, Mr. Christy, that as I happen to know nobody here in England, I ventured to come round and ask your advice in unexpected circumstances that have since arisen."

When Bertram Ingledew looked at him, Philip once more relented. The man's eye was so captivating. To say the truth, there was something taking about the mysterious stranger—a curious air of unconscious superiority—so that, the moment he came near, Philip felt himself fascinated. He only answered, therefore, in as polite a tone as he could easily muster, "Why, how did you get to know my name, or to trace me to my sister's?"

"Oh, Miss Blake told me who you were and where you lived," Bertram replied most innocently: his tone was pure candour; "and when I went round to your lodgings just now, they explained that you were out, but that I should probably find you at Mrs. Monteith's; so of course I came on here."

Philip denied the applicability of that naive "of course" in his inmost soul: but it was no use being angry with Mr. Bertram Ingledew. So much he saw at once; the man was so simple-minded, so transparently natural, one could not be angry with him. One could only smile at him, a superior cynical London-bred smile, for an unsophisticated foreigner. So the Civil Servant asked with a condescending air, "Well, what's your difficulty? I'll see if peradventure I can help you out of it." For he reflected to himself in a flash that as Ingledew had apparently a good round sum in gold and notes in his pocket yesterday, he was not likely to come borrowing money this morning.

“It’s like this, you see,” the Alien answered with charming simplicity, “I haven’t got any luggage.”

“Not got any luggage!” Philip repeated, awestruck, letting his jaw fall short, and stroking his clean-shaven chin with one hand. He was more doubtful than ever now as to the man’s sanity or respectability. If he was not a lunatic, then surely he must be this celebrated Perpignan murderer, whom everybody was talking about, and whom the French police were just then engaged in hunting down for extradition.

“No; I brought none with me on purpose,” Mr. Ingledew replied, as innocently as ever. “I didn’t feel quite sure about the ways, or the customs, or the taboos of England. So I had just this one suit of clothes made, after an English pattern of the present fashion, which I was lucky enough to secure from a collector at home; and I thought I’d buy everything else I wanted when I got to London. I brought nothing at all in the way of luggage with me.”

“Not even brush and comb?” Philip interposed, horrified.

“Oh, yes, naturally, just the few things one always takes in a vade-mecum,” Bertram Ingledew answered, with a gracefully deprecatory wave of the hand, which Philip thought pretty enough, but extremely foreign. “Beyond that, nothing. I felt it would be best, you see, to set oneself up in things of the country in the country itself. One’s surer then of getting exactly what’s worn in the society one mixes in.”

For the first and only time, as he said those words, the stranger struck a chord that was familiar to Philip. “Oh, of course,” the Civil Servant answered, with brisk acquiescence, “if you want to be really up to date in your dress, you must go to first-rate houses in London for everything. Nobody anywhere can cut like a good London tailor.”

Bertram Ingledew bowed his head. It was the acquiescent bow of the utter outsider who gives no opinion at all on the subject under discussion, because he does not possess any. As he probably came, in spite of his disclaimer, from America or the colonies, which are belated places, toiling in vain far in the rear of Bond Street, Philip thought this an exceedingly proper display of bashfulness, especially in a man who had only landed in England yesterday. But Bertram went on half-musingly. “And you had told me,” he said, “I’m sure not meaning to mislead me, there were no formalities or taboos of any kind on entering into lodgings. However, I found, as soon as I’d arranged to take the rooms and pay four guineas a week for them, which was a guinea more than she asked me, Miss Blake would hardly let me come in at all unless I could at once produce my luggage.” He looked comically puzzled. “I thought at first,” he continued, gazing earnestly at Philip, “the good lady was afraid I wouldn’t pay her what I’d agreed, and would go away and leave her in the lurch without a penny,—which was naturally a very painful imputation. But when I offered to let her have three weeks’ rent in advance, I saw that wasn’t all: there was a taboo as well; she couldn’t let me in without luggage, she said, because it would imperil some luck or talisman to which she frequently alluded as the Respectability of her Lodgings. This Respectability seems a very great fetich. I was obliged at last, in order to ensure a night’s lodging of any sort, to appease it by promising I’d go up to London by the first train to-day, and fetch down my luggage.”

“Then you’ve things at Charing Cross, in the cloak-room perhaps?” Philip suggested, somewhat relieved; for he felt sure Bertram Ingledew must have told Miss Blake it was HE who had recommended him to Heathercliff House for furnished apartments.

“Oh, dear, no; nothing,” Bertram responded cheerfully. “Not a sack to my back. I’ve only what I stand up in. And I called this morning just to ask as I passed if you could kindly direct me to an emporium in London where I could set myself up in all that’s necessary.”

“A WHAT?” Philip interposed, catching quick at the unfamiliar word with blank English astonishment, and more than ever convinced, in spite of denial, that the stranger was an American.

“An emporium,” Bertram answered, in the most matter-of-fact voice: “a magazine, don’t you know; a place where they supply things in return for money. I want to go up to London at once this morning and buy what I require there.”

“Oh, A SHOP, you mean,” Philip replied, putting on at once his most respectable British sabbatarian air. “I can tell you of the very best tailor in London, whose cut is perfect; a fine flower of tailors: but NOT to-day. You forget you’re in England, and this is Sunday. On the Continent, it’s different: but you’ll find no decent shops here open to-day in town or country.”

Bertram Ingledeu drew one hand over his high white brow with a strangely puzzled air. “No more I will,” he said slowly, like one who by degrees half recalls with an effort some forgotten fact from dim depths of his memory. “I ought to have remembered, of course. Why, I knew that, long ago. I read it in a book on the habits and manners of the English people. But somehow, one never recollects these taboo days, wherever one may be, till one’s pulled up short by them in the course of one’s travels. Now, what on earth am I to do? A box, it seems, is the Open, Sesame of the situation. Some mystic value is attached to it as a moral amulet. I don’t believe that excellent Miss Blake would consent to take me in for a second night without the guarantee of a portmanteau to respectablise me.”

We all have moments of weakness, even the most irreproachable Philistine among us; and as Bertram said those words in rather a piteous voice, it occurred to Philip Christy that the loan of a portmanteau would be a Christian act which might perhaps simplify matters for the handsome and engaging stranger. Besides, he was sure, after all—mystery or no mystery—Bertram Ingledeu was Somebody. That nameless charm of dignity and distinction impressed him more and more the longer he talked with the Alien. “Well, I think, perhaps, I could help you,” he hazarded after a moment, in a dubious tone; though to be sure, if he lent the portmanteau, it would be like cementing the friendship for good or for evil; which Philip, being a prudent young man, felt to be in some ways a trifle dangerous; for who borrows a portmanteau must needs bring it back again—which opens the door to endless contingencies. “I MIGHT be able—”

At that moment, their colloquy was suddenly interrupted by the entry of a lady who immediately riveted Bertram Ingledeu’s attention. She was tall and dark, a beautiful woman, of that riper and truer beauty in face and form that only declares itself as character develops. Her features were clear cut, rather delicate than regular; her eyes were large and lustrous; her lips not too thin, but rich and tempting; her brow was high, and surmounted by a luscious wealth of glossy black hair which Bertram never remembered to have seen equalled before for its silkiness of texture and its strange blue sheen, like a plate of steel, or the grass of the prairies. Gliding grace distinguished her when she walked. Her motion was equable. As once the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and straightway coveted them, even so Bertram Ingledeu looked on Frida Monteith, and saw at the first glance she was a woman to be desired, a soul high-throned, very calm and beautiful.

She stood there for a moment and faced him, half in doubt, in her flowing Oriental or Mauresque robe (for she dressed, as Philip would have said, “artistically”), waiting to be introduced the while, and taking good heed, as she waited, of the handsome stranger. As for Philip, he hesitated, not quite certain in his own mind on the point of etiquette—say rather of morals—whether one ought or ought not to introduce “the ladies of one’s family” to a casual stranger picked up in the street, who confesses he has come on a visit to England without a letter of introduction or even that irreducible minimum of respectability—a portmanteau. Frida, however, had no such scruples. She saw the young man was good-looking and gentlemanly, and she turned to Philip with the hasty sort of glance that says as plainly as words could say it, “Now, then! introduce me.”

Thus mutely exhorted, though with a visible effort, Philip murmured half inarticulately, in a stifled undertone, “My sister, Mrs. Monteith—Mr. Bertram Ingledeu,” and then trembled inwardly.

It was a surprise to Bertram that the beautiful woman with the soul in her eyes should turn out to be the sister of the very commonplace young man with the boiled-fish expression he had met by the

corner; but he disguised his astonishment, and only interjected, as if it were the most natural remark in the world: "I'm pleased to meet you. What a lovely gown! and how admirably it becomes you!"

Philip opened his eyes aghast. But Frida glanced down at the dress with a glance of approbation. The stranger's frankness, though quaint, was really refreshing.

"I'm so glad you like it," she said, taking the compliment with quiet dignity, as simply as it was intended. "It's all my own taste; I chose the stuff and designed the make of it. And I know who this is, Phil, without your troubling to tell me; it's the gentleman you met in the street last night, and were talking about at dinner."

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