

Fools Knaves And Heroes

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THE MAN THAT CORRUPTED HADLEYBURG

It was many years ago. Hadleyburg was the most honest and upright town

in all the region round about. It had kept that reputation unsmirched

during three generations, and was prouder of it than of any other of its possessions. It was so proud of it, and so anxious to insure its perpetuation, that it began to teach the principles of honest dealing to its babies in the cradle, and made the like teachings the staple of their culture thenceforward through all the years devoted to their education. Also, throughout the formative years temptations were kept out of the way of the young people, so that their honesty could have every chance to harden and solidify, and become a part of their very bone. The neighbouring towns were jealous of this honourable supremacy, and affected to sneer at Hadleyburg's pride in it and call it vanity; but all the same they were obliged to acknowledge that Hadleyburg was in reality an incorruptible town; and if pressed they would also

acknowledge that the mere fact that a young man hailed from Hadleyburg

was all the recommendation he needed when he went forth from his natal

town to seek for responsible employment.

But at last, in the drift of time, Hadleyburg had the ill luck to offend

a passing stranger—possibly without knowing it, certainly without caring, for Hadleyburg was sufficient unto itself, and cared not a rap

for strangers or their opinions. Still, it would have been well to make an exception in this one's case, for he was a bitter man, and revengeful. All through his wanderings during a whole year he kept his

injury in mind, and gave all his leisure moments to trying to invent a

compensating satisfaction for it. He contrived many plans, and all of

them were good, but none of them was quite sweeping enough: the poorest

of them would hurt a great many individuals, but what he wanted was a

plan which would comprehend the entire town, and not let so much as one

person escape unhurt. At last he had a fortunate idea, and when it fell

into his brain it lit up his whole head with an evil joy. He began to

form a plan at once, saying to himself “That is the thing to do—I will

corrupt the town.”

Six months later he went to Hadleyburg, and arrived in a buggy at the

house of the old cashier of the bank about ten at night. He got a sack

out of the buggy, shouldered it, and staggered with it through the

cottage yard, and knocked at the door. A woman’s voice said “Come in,”

and he entered, and set his sack behind the stove in the parlour, saying

politely to the old lady who sat reading the “Missionary Herald” by the

lamp:

“Pray keep your seat, madam, I will not disturb you. There—now it is

pretty well concealed; one would hardly know it was there. Can I see

your husband a moment, madam?”

No, he was gone to Brixton, and might not return before morning.

“Very well, madam, it is no matter. I merely wanted to leave that sack

in his care, to be delivered to the rightful owner when he shall be

found. I am a stranger; he does not know me; I am merely passing through

the town to-night to discharge a matter which has been long in my mind.

My errand is now completed, and I go pleased and a little proud, and

you will never see me again. There is a paper attached to the sack which

will explain everything. Good-night, madam.”

The old lady was afraid of the mysterious big stranger, and was glad to

see him go. But her curiosity was roused, and she went straight to the

sack and brought away the paper. It began as follows:

“TO BE PUBLISHED, or, the right man sought out by private inquiry— either will answer. This sack contains gold coin weighing a hundred and sixty pounds four ounces—” “Mercy on us, and the door not locked!”

Mrs. Richards flew to it all in a tremble and locked it, then pulled down the window-shades and stood frightened, worried, and wondering if

there was anything else she could do toward making herself and the money more safe. She listened awhile for burglars, then surrendered

to

curiosity, and went back to the lamp and finished reading the paper:

“I am a foreigner, and am presently going back to my own country, to

remain there permanently. I am grateful to America for what I have received at her hands during my long stay under her flag; and to one of

her citizens—a citizen of Hadleyburg—I am especially grateful for a

great kindness done me a year or two ago. Two great kindnesses in fact.

I will explain. I was a gambler. I say I WAS. I was a ruined gambler.

I arrived in this village at night, hungry and without a penny. I asked

for help—in the dark; I was ashamed to beg in the light. I begged of the right man. He gave me twenty dollars—that is to say, he gave me

life, as I considered it. He also gave me fortune; for out of that money

I have made myself rich at the gaming-table. And finally, a remark which he made to me has remained with me to this day, and has at last

conquered me; and in conquering has saved the remnant of my morals: I

shall gamble no more. Now I have no idea who that man was, but I want

him found, and I want him to have this money, to give away, throw away,

or keep, as he pleases. It is merely my way of testifying my gratitude

to him. If I could stay, I would find him myself; but no matter, he will

be found. This is an honest town, an incorruptible town, and I know

I can trust it without fear. This man can be identified by the remark which he made to me; I feel persuaded that he will remember it.

“And now my plan is this: If you prefer to conduct the inquiry privately, do so. Tell the contents of this present writing to any one who is likely to be the right man. If he shall answer, 'I am the man; the remark I made was so-and-so,' apply the test—to wit: open the sack, and in it you will find a sealed envelope containing that remark. If the remark mentioned by the candidate tallies with it, give him the money, and ask no further questions, for he is certainly the right man.

“But if you shall prefer a public inquiry, then publish this present writing in the local paper—with these instructions added, to wit: Thirty days from now, let the candidate appear at the town-hall at eight in the evening (Friday), and hand his remark, in a sealed envelope, to the Rev. Mr. Burgess (if he will be kind enough to act); and let Mr.

Burgess there and then destroy the seals of the sack, open it, and see

if the remark is correct: if correct, let the money be delivered, with my sincere gratitude, to my benefactor thus identified.”

Mrs. Richards sat down, gently quivering with excitement, and was soon

lost in thinkings—after this pattern: “What a strange thing it is! ...

And what a fortune for that kind man who set his bread afloat upon the

waters!... If it had only been my husband that did it!—for we are so

poor, so old and poor!...” Then, with a sigh—“But it was not my Edward;

no, it was not he that gave a stranger twenty dollars. It is a pity too;

I see it now....” Then, with a shudder—“But it is GAMBLERS’ money! the

wages of sin; we couldn’t take it; we couldn’t touch it. I don’t like to

be near it; it seems a defilement.” She moved to a farther chair... “I

wish Edward would come, and take it to the bank; a burglar might come at

any moment; it is dreadful to be here all alone with it.”

At eleven Mr. Richards arrived, and while his wife was saying “I am SO

glad you’ve come!” he was saying, “I am so tired—tired clear out; it is

dreadful to be poor, and have to make these dismal journeys at my time

of life. Always at the grind, grind, grind, on a salary—another man’s

slave, and he sitting at home in his slippers, rich and comfortable.”

“I am so sorry for you, Edward, you know that; but be comforted; we have

our livelihood; we have our good name—”

“Yes, Mary, and that is everything. Don’t mind my talk—it’s just a

moment's irritation and doesn't mean anything. Kiss me—there, it's all

gone now, and I am not complaining any more. What have you been getting?

What's in the sack?"

Then his wife told him the great secret. It dazed him for a moment; then

he said:

"It weighs a hundred and sixty pounds? Why, Mary, it's for-ty thousand

dollars—think of it—a whole fortune! Not ten men in this village are

worth that much. Give me the paper."

He skimmed through it and said:

"Isn't it an adventure! Why, it's a romance; it's like the impossible things one reads about in books, and never sees in life." He was well

stirred up now; cheerful, even gleeful. He tapped his old wife on

the

cheek, and said humorously, “Why, we’re rich, Mary, rich; all we’ve

got to do is to bury the money and burn the papers. If the gambler ever

comes to inquire, we’ll merely look coldly upon him and say: ‘What is

this nonsense you are talking? We have never heard of you and your sack

of gold before;’ and then he would look foolish, and—”

“And in the meantime, while you are running on with your jokes, the

money is still here, and it is fast getting along toward burglar-time.”

“True. Very well, what shall we do—make the inquiry private? No, not

that; it would spoil the romance. The public method is better. Think

what a noise it will make! And it will make all the other towns jealous;

for no stranger would trust such a thing to any town but Hadleyburg,

and they know it. It's a great card for us. I must get to the printing-office now, or I shall be too late."

"But stop—stop—don't leave me here alone with it, Edward!"

But he was gone. For only a little while, however. Not far from his own house he met the editor—proprietor of the paper, and gave him the

document, and said "Here is a good thing for you, Cox—put it in."

"It may be too late, Mr. Richards, but I'll see."

At home again, he and his wife sat down to talk the charming mystery

over; they were in no condition for sleep. The first question was, Who

could the citizen have been who gave the stranger the twenty dollars? It

seemed a simple one; both answered it in the same breath—

“Barclay Goodson.”

“Yes,” said Richards, “he could have done it, and it would have been

like him, but there’s not another in the town.”

“Everybody will grant that, Edward—grant it privately, anyway. For six

months, now, the village has been its own proper self once more—honest,

narrow, self-righteous, and stingy.”

“It is what he always called it, to the day of his death—said it right out publicly, too.”

“Yes, and he was hated for it.”

“Oh, of course; but he didn’t care. I reckon he was the best-hated man

among us, except the Reverend Burgess.”

“Well, Burgess deserves it—he will never get another congregation here.

Mean as the town is, it knows how to estimate HIM. Edward, doesn't it

seem odd that the stranger should appoint Burgess to deliver the money?"

"Well, yes—it does. That is—that is—"

"Why so much that-IS-ing? Would YOU select him?"

"Mary, maybe the stranger knows him better than this village does."

"Much THAT would help Burgess!"

The husband seemed perplexed for an answer; the wife kept a steady eye

upon him, and waited. Finally Richards said, with the hesitancy of one

who is making a statement which is likely to encounter doubt,

"Mary, Burgess is not a bad man."

His wife was certainly surprised.

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed.

“He is not a bad man. I know. The whole of his unpopularity had its

foundation in that one thing—the thing that made so much noise.”

“That 'one thing,' indeed! As if that 'one thing' wasn't enough, all by

itself.”

“Plenty. Plenty. Only he wasn't guilty of it.”

“How you talk! Not guilty of it! Everybody knows he WAS guilty.”

“Mary, I give you my word—he was innocent.”

“I can't believe it and I don't. How do you know?”

“It is a confession. I am ashamed, but I will make it. I was the only man who knew he was innocent. I could have saved him, and—and—well,

you know how the town was wrought up—I hadn't the pluck to do it. It

would have turned everybody against me. I felt mean, ever so mean; ut I

didn't dare; I hadn't the manliness to face that."

Mary looked troubled, and for a while was silent. Then she said stammeringly:

"I—I don't think it would have done for you to—to—One mustn't—er—public opinion—one has to be so careful—so—" It was a

difficult road, and she got mired; but after a little she got started again. "It was a great pity, but—Why, we couldn't afford it, Edward—we

couldn't indeed. Oh, I wouldn't have had you do it for anything!"

"It would have lost us the good-will of so many people, Mary; and then—and then—"

"What troubles me now is, what HE thinks of us, Edward."

"He? HE doesn't suspect that I could have saved him."

"Oh," exclaimed the wife, in a tone of relief, "I am glad of that. As long as he doesn't know that you could have saved him, he—he—well that

makes it a great deal better. Why, I might have known he didn't

know, because he is always trying to be friendly with us, as little

encouragement as we give him. More than once people have
twitted me with

it. There's the Wilsons, and the Wilcoxes, and the Harknesses,
they take

a mean pleasure in saying 'YOUR FRIEND Burgess,' because they
know it

pesters me. I wish he wouldn't persist in liking us so; I can't think
why he keeps it up."

"I can explain it. It's another confession. When the thing was new
and

hot, and the town made a plan to ride him on a rail, my conscience
hurt me so that I couldn't stand it, and I went privately and gave
him

notice, and he got out of the town and stayed out till it was safe to
come back."

“Edward! If the town had found it out—”

“DON’T! It scares me yet, to think of it. I repented of it the minute it

was done; and I was even afraid to tell you lest your face might betray

it to somebody. I didn’t sleep any that night, for worrying. But after a

few days I saw that no one was going to suspect me, and after that I got

to feeling glad I did it. And I feel glad yet, Mary—glad through and through.”

“So do I, now, for it would have been a dreadful way to treat him.

Yes, I’m glad; for really you did owe him that, you know. But, Edward,

suppose it should come out yet, some day!”

“It won’t.”

“Why?”

“Because everybody thinks it was Goodson.”

“Of course they would!”

“Certainly. And of course HE didn't care. They persuaded poor old

Sawlsberry to go and charge it on him, and he went blustering over there

and did it. Goodson looked him over, like as if he was hunting for a place on him that he could despise the most; then he says, 'So you are

the Committee of Inquiry, are you?' Sawlsberry said that was about what

he was. 'H'm. Do they require particulars, or do you reckon a kind of a

GENERAL answer will do?' 'If they require particulars, I will come back,

Mr. Goodson; I will take the general answer first.' 'Very well, then, tell them to go to hell—I reckon that's general enough. And I'll give you some advice, Sawlsberry; when you come back for the

particulars,

fetch a basket to carry what is left of yourself home in.””

“Just like Goodson; it’s got all the marks. He had only one vanity; he

thought he could give advice better than any other person.”

“It settled the business, and saved us, Mary. The subject was dropped.”

“Bless you, I’m not doubting THAT.”

Then they took up the gold-sack mystery again, with strong interest.

Soon the conversation began to suffer breaks—interruptions caused by

absorbed thinkings. The breaks grew more and more frequent. At last

Richards lost himself wholly in thought. He sat long, gazing vacantly at

the floor, and by-and-by he began to punctuate his thoughts with little nervous movements of his hands that seemed to indicate

vexation.

Meantime his wife too had relapsed into a thoughtful silence, and her

movements were beginning to show a troubled discomfort. Finally Richards

got up and strode aimlessly about the room, ploughing his hands through

his hair, much as a somnambulist might do who was having a bad dream.

Then he seemed to arrive at a definite purpose; and without a word

he put on his hat and passed quickly out of the house. His wife sat

brooding, with a drawn face, and did not seem to be aware that she was

alone. Now and then she murmured, "Lead us not into t... but—
but—we

are so poor, so poor!... Lead us not into... Ah, who would be hurt
by

it?—and no one would ever know... Lead us...." The voice died
out

in mummings. After a little she glanced up and muttered in a half-frightened, half-glad way—

“He is gone! But, oh dear, he may be too late—too late... Maybe not—maybe there is still time.” She rose and stood thinking, nervously

clasping and unclasping her hands. A slight shudder shook her frame, and

she said, out of a dry throat, “God forgive me—it’s awful to think such

things—but... Lord, how we are made—how strangely we are made!”

She turned the light low, and slipped stealthily over and knelt down by

the sack and felt of its ridgy sides with her hands, and fondled them

lovingly; and there was a gloating light in her poor old eyes. She fell into fits of absence; and came half out of them at times to mutter “If

we had only waited!—oh, if we had only waited a little, and not been in

such a hurry!”

Meantime Cox had gone home from his office and told his wife all about the strange thing that had happened, and they had talked it over

eagerly, and guessed that the late Goodson was the only man in the town

who could have helped a suffering stranger with so noble a sum as twenty

dollars. Then there was a pause, and the two became thoughtful and

silent. And by-and-by nervous and fidgety. At last the wife said, as if

to herself,

“Nobody knows this secret but the Richardses... and us... nobody.”

The husband came out of his thinkings with a slight start, and gazed

wistfully at his wife, whose face was become very pale; then he hesitatingly rose, and glanced furtively at his hat, then at his wife—a

sort of mute inquiry. Mrs. Cox swallowed once or twice, with her hand at

her throat, then in place of speech she nodded her head. In a moment she

was alone, and mumbling to herself.

And now Richards and Cox were hurrying through the deserted streets,

from opposite directions. They met, panting, at the foot of the printing-office stairs; by the night-light there they read each other's face. Cox whispered:

“Nobody knows about this but us?”

The whispered answer was:

“Not a soul—on honour, not a soul!”

“If it isn't too late to—”

The men were starting up-stairs; at this moment they were overtaken by a

boy, and Cox asked,

“Is that you, Johnny?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You needn’t ship the early mail—nor ANY mail; wait till I tell you.”

“It’s already gone, sir.”

“GONE?” It had the sound of an unspeakable disappointment in it.

“Yes, sir. Time-table for Brixton and all the towns beyond changed to-day, sir—had to get the papers in twenty minutes earlier than common. I had to rush; if I had been two minutes later—”

The men turned and walked slowly away, not waiting to hear the rest.

Neither of them spoke during ten minutes; then Cox said, in a vexed

tone,

“What possessed you to be in such a hurry, I can’t make out.”

The answer was humble enough:

“I see it now, but somehow I never thought, you know, until it was too

late. But the next time—”

“Next time be hanged! It won’t come in a thousand years.”

Then the friends separated without a good-night, and dragged themselves

home with the gait of mortally stricken men. At their homes their wives

sprang up with an eager “Well?”—then saw the answer with their eyes and

sank down sorrowing, without waiting for it to come in words. In both

houses a discussion followed of a heated sort—a new thing; there had

been discussions before, but not heated ones, not ungentle ones.

The

discussions to-night were a sort of seeming plagiarisms of each other.

Mrs. Richards said:

“If you had only waited, Edward—if you had only stopped to think; but

no, you must run straight to the printing-office and spread it all over

the world.”

“It SAID publish it.”

“That is nothing; it also said do it privately, if you liked. There, now—is that true, or not?”

“Why, yes—yes, it is true; but when I thought what a stir it would make, and what a compliment it was to Hadleyburg that a stranger should trust it so—”

“Oh, certainly, I know all that; but if you had only stopped to

think,

you would have seen that you COULDN'T find the right man,
because he is

in his grave, and hasn't left chick nor child nor relation behind him;

and as long as the money went to somebody that awfully needed
it, and

nobody would be hurt by it, and—and—"

She broke down, crying. Her husband tried to think of some
comforting

thing to say, and presently came out with this:

"But after all, Mary, it must be for the best—it must be; we know
that.

And we must remember that it was so ordered—"

"Ordered! Oh, everything's ORDERED, when a person has to find
some way

out when he has been stupid. Just the same, it was ORDERED
that the

money should come to us in this special way, and it was you that

must

take it on yourself to go meddling with the designs of Providence—
and

who gave you the right? It was wicked, that is what it was—just
blasphemous presumption, and no more becoming to a meek and
humble

professor of—”

“But, Mary, you know how we have been trained all our lives
long, like

the whole village, till it is absolutely second nature to us to stop
not

a single moment to think when there’s an honest thing to be done
—”

“Oh, I know it, I know it—it’s been one everlasting training and
training and training in honesty—honesty shielded, from the very
cradle, against every possible temptation, and so it’s ARTIFICIAL
honesty, and weak as water when temptation comes, as we have
seen this

night. God knows I never had shade nor shadow of a doubt of my petrified

and indestructible honesty until now—and now, under the very first big

and real temptation, I—Edward, it is my belief that this town's honesty

is as rotten as mine is; as rotten as yours. It is a mean town, a hard, stingy town, and hasn't a virtue in the world but this honesty it is so

celebrated for and so conceited about; and so help me, I do believe that

if ever the day comes that its honesty falls under great temptation, its

grand reputation will go to ruin like a house of cards. There, now, I've

made confession, and I feel better; I am a humbug, and I've been one all

my life, without knowing it. Let no man call me honest again—I will not

have it.”

“I—Well, Mary, I feel a good deal as you do: I certainly do. It seems

strange, too, so strange. I never could have believed it—never.”

A long silence followed; both were sunk in thought. At last the wife

looked up and said:

“I know what you are thinking, Edward.”

Richards had the embarrassed look of a person who is caught.

“I am ashamed to confess it, Mary, but—”

“It’s no matter, Edward, I was thinking the same question myself.”

“I hope so. State it.”

“You were thinking, if a body could only guess out WHAT THE REMARK WAS

that Goodson made to the stranger.”

“It’s perfectly true. I feel guilty and ashamed. And you?”

“I’m past it. Let us make a pallet here; we’ve got to stand watch

till

the bank vault opens in the morning and admits the sack... Oh dear, oh

dear—if we hadn't made the mistake!"

The pallet was made, and Mary said:

"The open sesame—what could it have been? I do wonder what that remark

could have been. But come; we will get to bed now."

"And sleep?"

"No; think."

"Yes; think."

By this time the Coxes too had completed their spat and their reconciliation, and were turning in—to think, to think, and toss, and

fret, and worry over what the remark could possibly have been which

Goodson made to the stranded derelict; that golden remark; that

remark

worth forty thousand dollars, cash.

The reason that the village telegraph-office was open later than usual that night was this: The foreman of Cox's paper was the local

representative of the Associated Press. One might say its honorary representative, for it wasn't four times a year that he could furnish thirty words that would be accepted. But this time it was different. His

despatch stating what he had caught got an instant answer:

"Send the whole thing—all the details—twelve hundred words." A colossal order! The foreman filled the bill; and he was the proudest man in the State. By breakfast-time the next morning the name of Hadleyburg the Incorruptible was on every lip in America, from Montreal

to the Gulf, from the glaciers of Alaska to the orange-groves of Florida; and millions and millions of people were discussing the

stranger and his money-sack, and wondering if the right man would be

found, and hoping some more news about the matter would come soon—right

away.

II Hadleyburg village woke up world-celebrated—astonished—happy—vain.

Vain beyond imagination. Its nineteen principal citizens and their wives

went about shaking hands with each other, and beaming, and smiling,

and congratulating, and saying THIS thing adds a new word to the dictionary—HADLEYBURG, synonym for INCORRUPTIBLE—destined to live in

dictionaries for ever! And the minor and unimportant citizens and their

wives went around acting in much the same way. Everybody ran to the bank

to see the gold-sack; and before noon grieved and envious crowds

began

to flock in from Brixton and all neighbouring towns; and that afternoon

and next day reporters began to arrive from everywhere to verify the

sack and its history and write the whole thing up anew, and make dashing

free-hand pictures of the sack, and of Richards's house, and the bank,

and the Presbyterian church, and the Baptist church, and the public square, and the town-hall where the test would be applied and the money

delivered; and damnable portraits of the Richardses, and Pinkerton

the banker, and Cox, and the foreman, and Reverend Burgess, and

the postmaster—and even of Jack Halliday, who was the loafing,

good-natured, no-account, irreverent fisherman, hunter, boys' friend,

stray-dogs' friend, typical "Sam Lawson" of the town. The little

mean,

smirking, oily Pinkerton showed the sack to all comers, and rubbed his

sleek palms together pleasantly, and enlarged upon the town's fine old

reputation for honesty and upon this wonderful endorsement of it, and

hoped and believed that the example would now spread far and wide

over the American world, and be epoch-making in the matter of moral

regeneration. And so on, and so on.

By the end of a week things had quieted down again; the wild intoxication of pride and joy had sobered to a soft, sweet, silent delight—a sort of deep, nameless, unutterable content. All faces bore a

look of peaceful, holy happiness.

Then a change came. It was a gradual change; so gradual that its

beginnings were hardly noticed; maybe were not noticed at all, except by

Jack Halliday, who always noticed everything; and always made fun of it,

too, no matter what it was. He began to throw out chaffing remarks about

people not looking quite so happy as they did a day or two ago; and next

he claimed that the new aspect was deepening to positive sadness; next,

that it was taking on a sick look; and finally he said that everybody

was become so moody, thoughtful, and absent-minded that he could rob the

meanest man in town of a cent out of the bottom of his breeches pocket

and not disturb his reverie.

At this stage—or at about this stage—a saying like this was dropped

at bedtime—with a sigh, usually—by the head of each of the

nineteen

principal households:

“Ah, what COULD have been the remark that Goodson made?”

And straightway—with a shudder—came this, from the man’s wife:

“Oh, DON’T! What horrible thing are you mulling in your mind?

Put it

away from you, for God’s sake!”

But that question was wrung from those men again the next night—and got

the same retort. But weaker.

And the third night the men uttered the question yet again—with anguish, and absently. This time—and the following night—the wives

fidged feebly, and tried to say something. But didn’t.

And the night after that they found their tongues and

responded—longingly:

“Oh, if we COULD only guess!”

Halliday's comments grew daily more and more sparkingly disagreeable

and disparaging. He went diligently about, laughing at the town, individually and in mass. But his laugh was the only one left in the village: it fell upon a hollow and mournful vacancy and emptiness. Not

even a smile was findable anywhere. Halliday carried a cigar-box around

on a tripod, playing that it was a camera, and halted all passers and aimed the thing and said “Ready!—now look pleasant, please,” but not even this capital joke could surprise the dreary faces into any softening.

So three weeks passed—one week was left. It was Saturday evening after

supper. Instead of the aforesaid Saturday-evening flutter and bustle and

shopping and larking, the streets were empty and desolate.

Richards and

his old wife sat apart in their little parlour—miserable and thinking

This was become their evening habit now: the life-long habit which had

preceded it, of reading, knitting, and contented chat, or receiving or

paying neighbourly calls, was dead and gone and forgotten, ages ago—two

or three weeks ago; nobody talked now, nobody read, nobody visited—the

whole village sat at home, sighing, worrying, silent. Trying to guess out that remark.

The postman left a letter. Richards glanced listlessly at the

superscription and the post-mark—unfamiliar, both—and tossed the

letter on the table and resumed his might-have-beens and his hopeless

dull miseries where he had left them off. Two or three hours later

his wife got wearily up and was going away to bed without a good-night—custom now—but she stopped near the letter and eyed it awhile with a dead interest, then broke it open, and began to skim it over. Richards, sitting there with his chair tilted back against the wall and his chin between his knees, heard something fall. It was his wife. He sprang to her side, but she cried out: “Leave me alone, I am too happy. Read the letter—read it!” He did. He devoured it, his brain reeling. The letter was from a distant State, and it said: “I am a stranger to you, but no matter: I have something to tell. I have just arrived home from Mexico, and learned about that episode. Of course you do not know who made that remark, but I know, and I am the

only person living who does know. It was GOODSON. I knew him well, many

years ago. I passed through your village that very night, and was his

guest till the midnight train came along. I overheard him make that remark to the stranger in the dark—it was in Hale Alley. He and I talked of it the rest of the way home, and while smoking in his house.

He mentioned many of your villagers in the course of his talk—most of

them in a very uncomplimentary way, but two or three favourably: among

these latter yourself. I say 'favourably'—nothing stronger. I remember

his saying he did not actually LIKE any person in the town—not one; but

that you—I THINK he said you—am almost sure—had done him a very great

service once, possibly without knowing the full value of it, and he

wished he had a fortune, he would leave it to you when he died,
and a

curse apiece for the rest of the citizens. Now, then, if it was you
that

did him that service, you are his legitimate heir, and entitled to the
sack of gold. I know that I can trust to your honour and honesty,
for in

a citizen of Hadleyburg these virtues are an unfailing inheritance,
and

so I am going to reveal to you the remark, well satisfied that if you
are not the right man you will seek and find the right one and see
that

poor Goodson's debt of gratitude for the service referred to is paid.

This is the remark 'YOU ARE FAR FROM BEING A BAD
MAN: GO, AND REFORM.'

“HOWARD L. STEPHENSON.”

“Oh, Edward, the money is ours, and I am so grateful, OH, so
grateful,—kiss me, dear, it's for ever since we kissed—and we

needed

it so—the money—and now you are free of Pinkerton and his bank, and

nobody's slave any more; it seems to me I could fly for joy.”

It was a happy half-hour that the couple spent there on the settee

caressing each other; it was the old days come again—days that had

begun with their courtship and lasted without a break till the stranger

brought the deadly money. By-and-by the wife said:

“Oh, Edward, how lucky it was you did him that grand service, poor

Goodson! I never liked him, but I love him now. And it was fine and

beautiful of you never to mention it or brag about it.” Then, with a

touch of reproach, “But you ought to have told ME, Edward, you ought to

have told your wife, you know.”

“Well, I—er—well, Mary, you see—”

“Now stop hemming and hawing, and tell me about it, Edward. I always

loved you, and now I’m proud of you. Everybody believes there was

only one good generous soul in this village, and now it turns out that

you—Edward, why don’t you tell me?”

“Well—er—er—Why, Mary, I can’t!”

“You CAN’T? WHY can’t you?”

“You see, he—well, he—he made me promise I wouldn’t.”

The wife looked him over, and said, very slowly:

“Made—you—promise? Edward, what do you tell me that for?”

“Mary, do you think I would lie?”

She was troubled and silent for a moment, then she laid her hand within

his and said:

“No... no. We have wandered far enough from our bearings—God spare us

that! In all your life you have never uttered a lie. But now—now that

the foundations of things seem to be crumbling from under us, we —we—”

She lost her voice for a moment, then said, brokenly, “Lead us not into

temptation... I think you made the promise, Edward. Let it rest so. Let

us keep away from that ground. Now—that is all gone by; let us be happy

again; it is no time for clouds.”

Edward found it something of an effort to comply, for his mind kept

wandering—trying to remember what the service was that he had done

Goodson.

The couple lay awake the most of the night, Mary happy and

busy, Edward

busy, but not so happy. Mary was planning what she would do with the

money. Edward was trying to recall that service. At first his conscience

was sore on account of the lie he had told Mary—if it was a lie. After

much reflection—suppose it WAS a lie? What then? Was it such a great

matter? Aren't we always ACTING lies? Then why not tell them? Look at

Mary—look what she had done. While he was hurrying off on his honest

errand, what was she doing? Lamenting because the papers hadn't been

destroyed and the money kept. Is theft better than lying?

THAT point lost its sting—the lie dropped into the background and left

comfort behind it. The next point came to the front: HAD he

rendered

that service? Well, here was Goodson's own evidence as reported in

Stephenson's letter; there could be no better evidence than that—it was even PROOF that he had rendered it. Of course. So that point was

settled... No, not quite. He recalled with a wince that this unknown Mr.

Stephenson was just a trifle unsure as to whether the performer of it

was Richards or some other—and, oh dear, he had put Richards on his

honour! He must himself decide whither that money must go—and Mr.

Stephenson was not doubting that if he was the wrong man he would go

honourably and find the right one. Oh, it was odious to put a man in

such a situation—ah, why couldn't Stephenson have left out that

doubt?

What did he want to intrude that for?

Further reflection. How did it happen that RICHARDS'S name remained in

Stephenson's mind as indicating the right man, and not some other man's

name? That looked good. Yes, that looked very good. In fact it went on

looking better and better, straight along—until by-and-by it grew into

positive PROOF. And then Richards put the matter at once out of his

mind, for he had a private instinct that a proof once established is better left so.

He was feeling reasonably comfortable now, but there was still one other

detail that kept pushing itself on his notice: of course he had done that service—that was settled; but what WAS that service? He

must

recall it—he would not go to sleep till he had recalled it; it would make his peace of mind perfect. And so he thought and thought.

He thought of a dozen things—possible services, even probable services—but none of them seemed adequate, none of them seemed large

enough, none of them seemed worth the money—worth the fortune Goodson

had wished he could leave in his will. And besides, he couldn't remember

having done them, anyway. Now, then—now, then—what KIND of a service

would it be that would make a man so inordinately grateful? Ah—the

saving of his soul! That must be it. Yes, he could remember, now, how he

once set himself the task of converting Goodson, and laboured at it as

much as—he was going to say three months; but upon closer examination

it shrunk to a month, then to a week, then to a day, then to nothing.

Yes, he remembered now, and with unwelcome vividness, that Goodson had

told him to go to thunder and mind his own business—HE wasn't hankering

to follow Hadleyburg to heaven!

So that solution was a failure—he hadn't saved Goodson's soul. Richards

was discouraged. Then after a little came another idea: had he saved

Goodson's property? No, that wouldn't do—he hadn't any. His life? That

is it! Of course. Why, he might have thought of it before. This time he

was on the right track, sure. His imagination-mill was hard at work in a

minute, now.

Thereafter, during a stretch of two exhausting hours, he was busy saving

Goodson's life. He saved it in all kinds of difficult and perilous ways.

In every case he got it saved satisfactorily up to a certain point; then, just as he was beginning to get well persuaded that it had really

happened, a troublesome detail would turn up which made the whole thing

impossible. As in the matter of drowning, for instance. In that case he

had swum out and tugged Goodson ashore in an unconscious state with

a great crowd looking on and applauding, but when he had got it all thought out and was just beginning to remember all about it, a whole

swarm of disqualifying details arrived on the ground: the town would

have known of the circumstance, Mary would have known of it, it

would glare like a limelight in his own memory instead of being an inconspicuous service which he had possibly rendered “without knowing

its full value.” And at this point he remembered that he couldn’t swim

anyway.

Ah—THERE was a point which he had been overlooking from the start: it

had to be a service which he had rendered “possibly without knowing

the full value of it.” Why, really, that ought to be an easy hunt—much

easier than those others. And sure enough, by-and-by he found it.

Goodson, years and years ago, came near marrying a very sweet and pretty

girl, named Nancy Hewitt, but in some way or other the match had been

broken off; the girl died, Goodson remained a bachelor, and by-and-by

became a soured one and a frank despiser of the human species.

Soon

after the girl's death the village found out, or thought it had found out, that she carried a spoonful of negro blood in her veins.

Richards

worked at these details a good while, and in the end he thought he remembered things concerning them which must have gotten mislaid in his

memory through long neglect. He seemed to dimly remember that it was

HE that found out about the negro blood; that it was he that told the

village; that the village told Goodson where they got it; that he thus saved Goodson from marrying the tainted girl; that he had done him this

great service "without knowing the full value of it," in fact without knowing that he WAS doing it; but that Goodson knew the value of it, and

what a narrow escape he had had, and so went to his grave grateful to

his benefactor and wishing he had a fortune to leave him. It was all clear and simple, now, and the more he went over it the more luminous

and certain it grew; and at last, when he nestled to sleep, satisfied and happy, he remembered the whole thing just as if it had been yesterday. In fact, he dimly remembered Goodson's TELLING him his

gratitude once. Meantime Mary had spent six thousand dollars on a new

house for herself and a pair of slippers for her pastor, and then had fallen peacefully to rest.

That same Saturday evening the postman had delivered a letter to each

of the other principal citizens—nineteen letters in all. No two of the

envelopes were alike, and no two of the superscriptions were in

the same

hand, but the letters inside were just like each other in every detail but one. They were exact copies of the letter received by

Richards—handwriting and all—and were all signed by Stephenson, but in

place of Richards's name each receiver's own name appeared.

All night long eighteen principal citizens did what their caste-brother

Richards was doing at the same time—they put in their energies trying

to remember what notable service it was that they had unconsciously done

Barclay Goodson. In no case was it a holiday job; still they succeeded.

And while they were at this work, which was difficult, their wives put

in the night spending the money, which was easy. During that one night

the nineteen wives spent an average of seven thousand dollars each out

of the forty thousand in the sack—a hundred and thirty-three thousand

altogether.

Next day there was a surprise for Jack Halliday. He noticed that the faces of the nineteen chief citizens and their wives bore that expression of peaceful and holy happiness again. He could not understand

it, neither was he able to invent any remarks about it that could damage

it or disturb it. And so it was his turn to be dissatisfied with life.

His private guesses at the reasons for the happiness failed in all instances, upon examination. When he met Mrs. Wilcox and noticed

the placid ecstasy in her face, he said to himself, “Her cat has had kittens”—and went and asked the cook; it was not so, the cook had

detected the happiness, but did not know the cause. When Halliday

found the duplicate ecstasy in the face of “Shadbelly” Billson (village

nickname), he was sure some neighbour of Billson’s had broken his leg,

but inquiry showed that this had not happened. The subdued ecstasy in

Gregory Yates’s face could mean but one thing—he was a mother-in-law

short; it was another mistake. “And Pinkerton—Pinkerton—he has collected ten cents that he thought he was going to lose.” And so on,

and so on. In some cases the guesses had to remain in doubt, in the

others they proved distinct errors. In the end Halliday said to

himself, “Anyway it roots up that there’s nineteen Hadleyburg families

temporarily in heaven: I don’t know how it happened; I only know

Providence is off duty to-day.”

An architect and builder from the next State had lately ventured to set

up a small business in this unpromising village, and his sign had now

been hanging out a week. Not a customer yet; he was a discouraged man,

and sorry he had come. But his weather changed suddenly now. First one

and then another chief citizen's wife said to him privately:

“Come to my house Monday week—but say nothing about it for the present.

We think of building.”

He got eleven invitations that day. That night he wrote his daughter

and broke off her match with her student. He said she could marry a mile

higher than that.

Pinkerton the banker and two or three other well-to-do men planned

country-seats—but waited. That kind don't count their chickens until

they are hatched.

The Wilsons devised a grand new thing—a fancy-dress ball. They made no

actual promises, but told all their acquaintanceship in confidence that

they were thinking the matter over and thought they should give it —“and

if we do, you will be invited, of course.” People were surprised, and

said, one to another, “Why, they are crazy, those poor Wilsons, they

can't afford it.” Several among the nineteen said privately to their

husbands, “It is a good idea, we will keep still till their cheap thing

is over, then WE will give one that will make it sick.”

The days drifted along, and the bill of future squanderings rose higher

and higher, wilder and wilder, more and more foolish and reckless. It

began to look as if every member of the nineteen would not only spend

his whole forty thousand dollars before receiving-day, but be actually

in debt by the time he got the money. In some cases light-headed people

did not stop with planning to spend, they really spent—on credit. They

bought land, mortgages, farms, speculative stocks, fine clothes, horses,

and various other things, paid down the bonus, and made themselves

liable for the rest—at ten days. Presently the sober second thought came, and Halliday noticed that a ghastly anxiety was beginning to show

up in a good many faces. Again he was puzzled, and didn't know what

to make of it. "The Wilcox kittens aren't dead, for they weren't born;

nobody's broken a leg; there's no shrinkage in mother-in-laws; NOTHING

has happened—it is an insolvable mystery."

There was another puzzled man, too—the Rev. Mr. Burgess. For days,

wherever he went, people seemed to follow him or to be watching out for

him; and if he ever found himself in a retired spot, a member of the nineteen would be sure to appear, thrust an envelope privately into his hand, whisper "To be opened at the town-hall Friday evening" then

vanish away like a guilty thing. He was expecting that there might be

one claimant for the sack—doubtful, however, Goodson being dead—but it

never occurred to him that all this crowd might be claimants. When the

great Friday came at last, he found that he had nineteen envelopes.

III The town-hall had never looked finer. The platform at the end of it was

backed by a showy draping of flags; at intervals along the walls

were festoons of flags; the gallery fronts were clothed in flags; the

supporting columns were swathed in flags; all this was to impress the

stranger, for he would be there in considerable force, and in a large

degree he would be connected with the press. The house was full.

The

412 fixed seats were occupied; also the 68 extra chairs which had been

packed into the aisles; the steps of the platform were occupied;

some distinguished strangers were given seats on the platform; at the

horseshoe of tables which fenced the front and sides of the

platform sat

a strong force of special correspondents who had come from everywhere.

It was the best-dressed house the town had ever produced. There were

some tolerably expensive toilets there, and in several cases the

ladies who wore them had the look of being unfamiliar with that kind of

clothes. At least the town thought they had that look, but the notion

could have arisen from the town's knowledge of the fact that these ladies had never inhabited such clothes before.

The gold-sack stood on a little table at the front of the platform where

all the house could see it. The bulk of the house gazed at it with a burning interest, a mouth-watering interest, a wistful and pathetic interest; a minority of nineteen couples gazed at it tenderly, lovingly,

proprietary, and the male half of this minority kept saying over to

themselves the moving little impromptu speeches of thankfulness for the

audience's applause and congratulations which they were presently going

to get up and deliver. Every now and then one of these got a piece of

paper out of his vest pocket and privately glanced at it to refresh his

memory.

Of course there was a buzz of conversation going on—there always is;

but at last, when the Rev. Mr. Burgess rose and laid his hand on the

sack, he could hear his microbes gnaw, the place was so still. He

related the curious history of the sack, then went on to speak in

warm terms of Hadleyburg's old and well-earned reputation for spotless

honesty, and of the town's just pride in this reputation. He said that

this reputation was a treasure of priceless value; that under Providence

its value had now become inestimably enhanced, for the recent episode

had spread this fame far and wide, and thus had focussed the eyes of the

American world upon this village, and made its name for all time, as

he hoped and believed, a synonym for commercial incorruptibility.

(Applause.) "And who is to be the guardian of this noble fame—the

community as a whole? No! The responsibility is individual, not

communal. From this day forth each and every one of you is in his own

person its special guardian, and individually responsible that no harm

shall come to it. Do you—does each of you—accept this great

trust?

(Tumultuous assent.) Then all is well. Transmit it to your children and

to your children's children. To-day your purity is beyond reproach—see

to it that it shall remain so. To-day there is not a person in your community who could be beguiled to touch a penny not his own—see to

it that you abide in this grace. (“We will! we will!”) This is not the place to make comparisons between ourselves and other communities—some

of them ungracious towards us; they have their ways, we have ours; let

us be content. (Applause.) I am done. Under my hand, my friends, rests

a stranger's eloquent recognition of what we are; through him the world

will always henceforth know what we are. We do not know who he is, but

in your name I utter your gratitude, and ask you to raise your voices in

indorsement.”

The house rose in a body and made the walls quake with the thunders of

its thankfulness for the space of a long minute. Then it sat down,

and Mr. Burgess took an envelope out of his pocket. The house held its

breath while he slit the envelope open and took from it a slip of paper.

He read its contents—slowly and impressively—the audience listening

with tranced attention to this magic document, each of whose words stood

for an ingot of gold:

“The remark which I made to the distressed stranger was this:

“You are

very far from being a bad man; go, and reform.” Then he continued:—‘We

shall know in a moment now whether the remark here quoted corresponds

with the one concealed in the sack; and if that shall prove to be so—and it undoubtedly will—this sack of gold belongs to a fellow-citizen who will henceforth stand before the nation as the symbol

of the special virtue which has made our town famous throughout the

land—Mr. Billson!””

The house had gotten itself all ready to burst into the proper tornado

of applause; but instead of doing it, it seemed stricken with a paralysis; there was a deep hush for a moment or two, then a wave of

whispered murmurs swept the place—of about this tenor: “BILLSON!

oh, come, this is TOO thin! Twenty dollars to a stranger—or ANYBODY—BILLSON! Tell it to the marines!” And now at this

point the

house caught its breath all of a sudden in a new access of astonishment,

for it discovered that whereas in one part of the hall Deacon Billson

was standing up with his head weekly bowed, in another part of it Lawyer

Wilson was doing the same. There was a wondering silence now for a

while. Everybody was puzzled, and nineteen couples were surprised and

indignant.

Billson and Wilson turned and stared at each other. Billson asked, bitingly:

“Why do YOU rise, Mr. Wilson?”

“Because I have a right to. Perhaps you will be good enough to explain

to the house why YOU rise.”

“With great pleasure. Because I wrote that paper.”

“It is an impudent falsity! I wrote it myself.”

It was Burgess’s turn to be paralysed. He stood looking vacantly at

first one of the men and then the other, and did not seem to know what

to do. The house was stupefied. Lawyer Wilson spoke up now, and said:

“I ask the Chair to read the name signed to that paper.”

That brought the Chair to itself, and it read out the name:

“John Wharton BILLSON.”

“There!” shouted Billson, “what have you got to say for yourself now? And what kind of apology are you going to make to me and to this

insulted house for the imposture which you have attempted to play here?”

“No apologies are due, sir; and as for the rest of it, I publicly charge

you with pilfering my note from Mr. Burgess and substituting a copy of

it signed with your own name. There is no other way by which you could

have gotten hold of the test-remark; I alone, of living men, possessed

the secret of its wording.”

There was likely to be a scandalous state of things if this went on; everybody noticed with distress that the shorthand scribes were

scribbling like mad; many people were crying “Chair, chair! Order! order!” Burgess rapped with his gavel, and said:

“Let us not forget the proprieties due. There has evidently been a mistake somewhere, but surely that is all. If Mr. Wilson gave me an

envelope—and I remember now that he did—I still have it.”

He took one out of his pocket, opened it, glanced at it, looked

surprised and worried, and stood silent a few moments. Then he waved his

hand in a wandering and mechanical way, and made an effort or two to say

something, then gave it up, despondently. Several voices cried out:

“Read it! read it! What is it?”

So he began, in a dazed and sleep-walker fashion:

“The remark which I made to the unhappy stranger was this:

“You are

far from being a bad man. (The house gazed at him marvelling.) Go, and

reform.”” (Murmurs: “Amazing! what can this mean?”) “This one,” said

the Chair, “is signed Thurlow G. Wilson.”

“There!” cried Wilson, “I reckon that settles it! I knew perfectly well

my note was purloined.”

“Purloined!” retorted Billson. “I’ll let you know that neither you

nor

any man of your kidney must venture to—”

The Chair: “Order, gentlemen, order! Take your seats, both of you, please.”

They obeyed, shaking their heads and grumbling angrily. The house was profoundly puzzled; it did not know what to do with this curious

emergency. Presently Thompson got up. Thompson was the hatter. He would

have liked to be a Nineteener; but such was not for him; his stock of

hats was not considerable enough for the position. He said:

“Mr. Chairman, if I may be permitted to make a suggestion, can both of

these gentlemen be right? I put it to you, sir, can both have happened

to say the very same words to the stranger? It seems to me—”

The tanner got up and interrupted him. The tanner was a disgruntled man;

he believed himself entitled to be a Nineteener, but he couldn't get recognition. It made him a little unpleasant in his ways and speech.

Said he:

“Sho, THAT’S not the point! THAT could happen—twice in a hundred

years—but not the other thing. NEITHER of them gave the twenty

dollars!” (A ripple of applause.)

Billson. “I did!”

Wilson. “I did!”

Then each accused the other of pilfering.

The Chair. “Order! Sit down, if you please—both of you. Neither of the

notes has been out of my possession at any moment.”

A Voice. “Good—that settles THAT!”

The Tanner. "Mr. Chairman, one thing is now plain: one of these men

has been eavesdropping under the other one's bed, and filching family

secrets. If it is not unparliamentary to suggest it, I will remark

that both are equal to it. (The Chair. "Order! order!") I withdraw the

remark, sir, and will confine myself to suggesting that IF one of them

has overheard the other reveal the test-remark to his wife, we shall catch him now."

A Voice. "How?"

The Tanner. "Easily. The two have not quoted the remark in exactly

the same words. You would have noticed that, if there hadn't been a

considerable stretch of time and an exciting quarrel inserted between

the two readings.”

A Voice. “Name the difference.”

The Tanner. “The word VERY is in Billson’s note, and not in the other.”

Many Voices. “That’s so—he’s right!”

The Tanner. “And so, if the Chair will examine the test-remark in the sack, we shall know which of these two frauds—(The Chair. “Order!”)—which of these two adventurers—(The Chair. “Order! order!”)—which of these two gentlemen—(laughter and applause)—is

entitled to wear the belt as being the first dishonest blatherskite ever

bred in this town—which he has dishonoured, and which will be a sultry

place for him from now out!” (Vigorous applause.)

Many Voices. “Open it!—open the sack!”

Mr. Burgess made a slit in the sack, slid his hand in, and brought

out

an envelope. In it were a couple of folded notes. He said:

“One of these is marked, 'Not to be examined until all written communications which have been addressed to the Chair—if any—shall

have been read.' The other is marked 'THE TEST.' Allow me. It is worded—to wit:

“I do not require that the first half of the remark which was made to me by my benefactor shall be quoted with exactness, for it was not

striking, and could be forgotten; but its closing fifteen words are quite striking, and I think easily rememberable; unless THESE shall be

accurately reproduced, let the applicant be regarded as an impostor. My

benefactor began by saying he seldom gave advice to anyone, but that it

always bore the hallmark of high value when he did give it. Then he said

this—and it has never faded from my memory: 'YOU ARE FAR FROM BEING A

BAD MAN—”

Fifty Voices. “That settles it—the money’s Wilson’s! Wilson! Wilson!

Speech! Speech!”

People jumped up and crowded around Wilson, wringing his hand and

congratulating fervently—meantime the Chair was hammering with the

gavel and shouting:

“Order, gentlemen! Order! Order! Let me finish reading, please.” When

quiet was restored, the reading was resumed—as follows:

“GO, AND REFORM—OR, MARK MY WORDS—SOME DAY, FOR YOUR SINS YOU WILL

DIE AND GO TO HELL OR HADLEYBURG—TRY AND MAKE IT THE FORMER.””

A ghastly silence followed. First an angry cloud began to settle darkly

upon the faces of the citizenship; after a pause the cloud began to

rise, and a tickled expression tried to take its place; tried so hard

that it was only kept under with great and painful difficulty; the

reporters, the Brixtonites, and other strangers bent their heads down

and shielded their faces with their hands, and managed to hold in by

main strength and heroic courtesy. At this most inopportune time burst

upon the stillness the roar of a solitary voice—Jack Halliday’s:

“THAT’S got the hall-mark on it!”

Then the house let go, strangers and all. Even Mr. Burgess’s gravity

broke down presently, then the audience considered itself officially

absolved from all restraint, and it made the most of its privilege.

It was a good long laugh, and a tempestuously wholehearted one, but it

ceased at last—long enough for Mr. Burgess to try to resume, and for

the people to get their eyes partially wiped; then it broke out again,

and afterward yet again; then at last Burgess was able to get out these

serious words:

“It is useless to try to disguise the fact—we find ourselves in the presence of a matter of grave import. It involves the honour of your

town—it strikes at the town’s good name. The difference of a single

word between the test-remarks offered by Mr. Wilson and Mr. Billson

was itself a serious thing, since it indicated that one or the other of

these gentlemen had committed a theft—”

The two men were sitting limp, nerveless, crushed; but at these words

both were electrified into movement, and started to get up.

“Sit down!” said the Chair, sharply, and they obeyed. “That, as I have

said, was a serious thing. And it was—but for only one of them. But the

matter has become graver; for the honour of BOTH is now in formidable

peril. Shall I go even further, and say in inextricable peril? BOTH left

out the crucial fifteen words.” He paused. During several moments he

allowed the pervading stillness to gather and deepen its impressive effects, then added: “There would seem to be but one way whereby this

could happen. I ask these gentlemen—Was there COLLUSION?—AGREEMENT?”

A low murmur sifted through the house; its import was, “He’s got them

both.”

Billson was not used to emergencies; he sat in a helpless collapse. But

Wilson was a lawyer. He struggled to his feet, pale and worried, and

said:

“I ask the indulgence of the house while I explain this most painful matter. I am sorry to say what I am about to say, since it must inflict

irreparable injury upon Mr. Billson, whom I have always esteemed and

respected until now, and in whose invulnerability to temptation I entirely believed—as did you all. But for the preservation of my own

honour I must speak—and with frankness. I confess with shame—and I now

beseech your pardon for it—that I said to the ruined stranger all of the words contained in the test-remark, including the disparaging fifteen. (Sensation.) When the late publication was made I recalled them, and I resolved to claim the sack of coin, for by every right I was

entitled to it. Now I will ask you to consider this point, and weigh it

well; that stranger's gratitude to me that night knew no bounds; he said

himself that he could find no words for it that were adequate, and that

if he should ever be able he would repay me a thousandfold. Now, then,

I ask you this; could I expect—could I believe—could I even remotely

imagine—that, feeling as he did, he would do so ungrateful a thing as

to add those quite unnecessary fifteen words to his test?—set a trap

for me?—expose me as a slanderer of my own town before my own people

assembled in a public hall? It was preposterous; it was impossible. His

test would contain only the kindly opening clause of my remark. Of that

I had no shadow of doubt. You would have thought as I did. You would

not have expected a base betrayal from one whom you had befriended

and against whom you had committed no offence. And so with perfect

confidence, perfect trust, I wrote on a piece of paper the opening words—ending with “Go, and reform,”—and signed it. When I was about

to put it in an envelope I was called into my back office, and without

thinking I left the paper lying open on my desk.” He stopped, turned his

head slowly toward Billson, waited a moment, then added: "I ask you to

note this; when I returned, a little latter, Mr. Billson was retiring by

my street door." (Sensation.)

In a moment Billson was on his feet and shouting:

"It's a lie! It's an infamous lie!"

The Chair. "Be seated, sir! Mr. Wilson has the floor."

Billson's friends pulled him into his seat and quieted him, and Wilson

went on:

"Those are the simple facts. My note was now lying in a different place

on the table from where I had left it. I noticed that, but attached no importance to it, thinking a draught had blown it there. That Mr.

Billson would read a private paper was a thing which could not occur to

me; he was an honourable man, and he would be above that. If you will

allow me to say it, I think his extra word 'VERY' stands explained: it

is attributable to a defect of memory. I was the only man in the world

who could furnish here any detail of the test-mark—by HONOURABLE means.

I have finished.”

There is nothing in the world like a persuasive speech to fuddle the mental apparatus and upset the convictions and debauch the emotions of

an audience not practised in the tricks and delusions of oratory. Wilson

sat down victorious. The house submerged him in tides of approving

applause; friends swarmed to him and shook him by the hand and congratulated him, and Billson was shouted down and not allowed to say a

word. The Chair hammered and hammered with its gavel, and kept shouting:

“But let us proceed, gentlemen, let us proceed!”

At last there was a measurable degree of quiet, and the hatter said:

“But what is there to proceed with, sir, but to deliver the money?”

Voices. “That’s it! That’s it! Come forward, Wilson!”

The Hatter. “I move three cheers for Mr. Wilson, Symbol of the special

virtue which—”

The cheers burst forth before he could finish; and in the midst of them—and in the midst of the clamour of the gavel also—some enthusiasts mounted Wilson on a big friend’s shoulder and were going to

fetch him in triumph to the platform. The Chair’s voice now rose above

the noise:

“Order! To your places! You forget that there is still a document

to

be read.” When quiet had been restored he took up the document, and was

going to read it, but laid it down again saying “I forgot; this is not

to be read until all written communications received by me have

first been read.” He took an envelope out of his pocket, removed its

enclosure, glanced at it—seemed astonished—held it out and gazed at

it—stared at it.

Twenty or thirty voices cried out:

“What is it? Read it! read it!”

And he did—slowly, and wondering:

“The remark which I made to the stranger—(Voices. “Hello! how’s

this?”)—was this: “You are far from being a bad man. (Voices.

“Great

Scott!”) Go, and reform.” (Voice. “Oh, saw my leg off!”) Signed
by Mr.

Pinkerton the banker.”

The pandemonium of delight which turned itself loose now was of
a sort

to make the judicious weep. Those whose withers were unwrung
laughed

till the tears ran down; the reporters, in throes of laughter, set
down

disordered pot-hooks which would never in the world be
decipherable; and

a sleeping dog jumped up scared out of its wits, and barked itself
crazy

at the turmoil. All manner of cries were scattered through the din:

“We’re getting rich—TWO Symbols of Incorruptibility!—without
counting

Billson!” “THREE!—count Shadbelly in—we can’t have too
many!” “All

right—Billson’s elected!” “Alas, poor Wilson! victim of TWO

thieves!”

A Powerful Voice. “Silence! The Chair’s fished up something more out of

its pocket.”

Voices. “Hurrah! Is it something fresh? Read it! read! read!”

The Chair (reading). “The remark which I made,’ etc. ‘You are far from

being a bad man. Go,’ etc. Signed, ‘Gregory Yates.’”

Tornado of Voices. “Four Symbols!” “Rah for Yates!” “Fish again!”

The house was in a roaring humour now, and ready to get all the fun out

of the occasion that might be in it. Several Nineteeners, looking pale

and distressed, got up and began to work their way towards the aisles,

but a score of shouts went up:

“The doors, the doors—close the doors; no Incorruptible shall

leave

this place! Sit down, everybody!” The mandate was obeyed.

“Fish again! Read! read!”

The Chair fished again, and once more the familiar words began to fall

from its lips—”You are far from being a bad man—”

“Name! name! What’s his name?”

“L. Ingoldsby Sargent.”

“Five elected! Pile up the Symbols! Go on, go on!”

“You are far from being a bad—”

“Name! name!”

“Nicholas Whitworth.”

“Hooray! hooray! it’s a symbolical day!”

Somebody wailed in, and began to sing this rhyme (leaving out “it’s”) to

the lovely “Mikado” tune of “When a man’s afraid of a beautiful

maid;” the audience joined in, with joy; then, just in time, somebody

contributed another line—

“And don’t you this forget—” The house roared it out. A third line was at once furnished— “Corruptibles far from Hadleyburg are—” The house roared that one too. As the last note died, Jack Halliday’s

voice rose high and clear, freighted with a final line—

“But the Symbols are here, you bet!”

That was sung, with booming enthusiasm. Then the happy house started

in at the beginning and sang the four lines through twice, with immense

swing and dash, and finished up with a crashing three-times-three and a

tiger for “Hadleyburg the Incorruptible and all Symbols of it which we

shall find worthy to receive the hall-mark to-night.”

Then the shoutings at the Chair began again, all over the place:

“Go on! go on! Read! read some more! Read all you’ve got!”

“That’s it—go on! We are winning eternal celebrity!”

A dozen men got up now and began to protest. They said that this farce

was the work of some abandoned joker, and was an insult to the whole

community. Without a doubt these signatures were all forgeries—

“Sit down! sit down! Shut up! You are confessing. We’ll find your names

in the lot.”

“Mr. Chairman, how many of those envelopes have you got?”

The Chair counted.

“Together with those that have been already examined, there are nineteen.”

A storm of derisive applause broke out.

“Perhaps they all contain the secret. I move that you open them all and

read every signature that is attached to a note of that sort—and read

also the first eight words of the note.”

“Second the motion!”

It was put and carried—uproariously. Then poor old Richards got up,

and his wife rose and stood at his side. Her head was bent down, so that

none might see that she was crying. Her husband gave her his arm, and so

supporting her, he began to speak in a quavering voice:

“My friends, you have known us two—Mary and me—all our lives, and I

think you have liked us and respected us—”

The Chair interrupted him:

“Allow me. It is quite true—that which you are saying, Mr. Richards;

this town DOES know you two; it DOES like you; it DOES

respect you;

more—it honours you and LOVES you—”

Halliday’s voice rang out:

“That’s the hall-marked truth, too! If the Chair is right, let the house

speak up and say it. Rise! Now, then—hip! hip! hip!—all together!”

The house rose in mass, faced toward the old couple eagerly, filled the

air with a snow-storm of waving handkerchiefs, and delivered the cheers

with all its affectionate heart.

The Chair then continued:

“What I was going to say is this: We know your good heart, Mr. Richards,

but this is not a time for the exercise of charity toward offenders.

(Shouts of “Right! right!”) I see your generous purpose in your face,

but I cannot allow you to plead for these men—”

“But I was going to—”

“Please take your seat, Mr. Richards. We must examine the rest of these

notes—simple fairness to the men who have already been exposed requires

this. As soon as that has been done—I give you my word for this—you

shall be heard.”

Many voices. “Right!—the Chair is right—no interruption can be permitted at this stage! Go on!—the names! the names!—according to the terms of the motion!”

The old couple sat reluctantly down, and the husband whispered to the

wife, “It is pitifully hard to have to wait; the shame will be greater than ever when they find we were only going to plead for OURSELVES.”

Straightway the jollity broke loose again with the reading of the names.

“‘You are far from being a bad man—’ Signature, 'Robert J. Titmarsh.’”

“‘You are far from being a bad man—’ Signature, 'Eliphalet Weeks.’”

“‘You are far from being a bad man—’ Signature, 'Oscar B. Wilder.’”

At this point the house lit upon the idea of taking the eight words out

of the Chairman’s hands. He was not unthankful for that. Thenceforward

he held up each note in its turn and waited. The house droned out the

eight words in a massed and measured and musical deep volume of sound

(with a daringly close resemblance to a well-known church chant) —“You

are f-a-r from being a b-a-a-a-d man.” Then the Chair said, “Signature,

'Archibald Wilcox.'" And so on, and so on, name after name, and everybody had an increasingly and gloriously good time except the wretched Nineteen. Now and then, when a particularly shining name was

called, the house made the Chair wait while it chanted the whole of the

test-remark from the beginning to the closing words, "And go to hell

or Hadleyburg—try and make it the for-or-m-e-r!" and in these special

cases they added a grand and agonised and imposing "A-a-a-a-MEN!"

The list dwindled, dwindled, dwindled, poor old Richards keeping tally

of the count, wincing when a name resembling his own was pronounced, and

waiting in miserable suspense for the time to come when it would be his

humiliating privilege to rise with Mary and finish his plea, which

he

was intending to word thus: "... for until now we have never done any

wrong thing, but have gone our humble way unreproached. We are very

poor, we are old, and, have no chick nor child to help us; we were

sorely tempted, and we fell. It was my purpose when I got up before

to make confession and beg that my name might not be read out in this

public place, for it seemed to us that we could not bear it; but I was

prevented. It was just; it was our place to suffer with the rest. It has

been hard for us. It is the first time we have ever heard our name fall

from any one's lips—sullied. Be merciful—for the sake or the better

days; make our shame as light to bear as in your charity you can."

At

this point in his reverie Mary nudged him, perceiving that his mind was

absent. The house was chanting, “You are f-a-r,” etc.

“Be ready,” Mary whispered. “Your name comes now; he has read eighteen.”

The chant ended.

“Next! next! next!” came volleying from all over the house.

Burgess put his hand into his pocket. The old couple, trembling, began

to rise. Burgess fumbled a moment, then said:

“I find I have read them all.”

Faint with joy and surprise, the couple sank into their seats, and Mary

whispered:

“Oh, bless God, we are saved!—he has lost ours—I wouldn’t give this

for a hundred of those sacks!”

The house burst out with its “Mikado” travesty, and sang it three times

with ever-increasing enthusiasm, rising to its feet when it reached for

the third time the closing line—

“But the Symbols are here, you bet!”

and finishing up with cheers and a tiger for “Hadleyburg purity and our

eighteen immortal representatives of it.”

Then Wingate, the saddler, got up and proposed cheers “for the cleanest

man in town, the one solitary important citizen in it who didn’t try to

steal that money—Edward Richards.”

They were given with great and moving heartiness; then somebody proposed

that “Richards be elected sole Guardian and Symbol of the now

Sacred

Hadleyburg Tradition, with power and right to stand up and look the

whole sarcastic world in the face.”

Passed, by acclamation; then they sang the “Mikado” again, and ended it

with—

“And there’s ONE Symbol left, you bet!”

There was a pause; then—

A Voice. “Now, then, who’s to get the sack?”

The Tanner (with bitter sarcasm). “That’s easy. The money has to be

divided among the eighteen Incorruptibles. They gave the suffering stranger twenty dollars apiece—and that remark—each in his turn—it

took twenty-two minutes for the procession to move past. Staked the

stranger—total contribution, \$360. All they want is just the loan back—and interest—forty thousand dollars altogether.”

Many Voices (derisively.) “That’s it! Divvy! divvy! Be kind to the poor—don’t keep them waiting!”

The Chair. “Order! I now offer the stranger’s remaining document. It

says: ‘If no claimant shall appear (grand chorus of groans), I desire that you open the sack and count out the money to the principal citizens

of your town, they to take it in trust (Cries of “Oh! Oh! Oh!”), and

use it in such ways as to them shall seem best for the propagation and

preservation of your community’s noble reputation for incorruptible

honesty (more cries)—a reputation to which their names and their efforts will add a new and far-reaching lustre.” (Enthusiastic

outburst

of sarcastic applause.) That seems to be all. No—here is a postscript:

“P.S.—CITIZENS OF HADLEYBURG: There IS no test-remark—nobody made

one. (Great sensation.) There wasn't any pauper stranger, nor any twenty-dollar contribution, nor any accompanying benediction and compliment—these are all inventions. (General buzz and hum of astonishment and delight.) Allow me to tell my story—it will take but a

word or two. I passed through your town at a certain time, and received

a deep offence which I had not earned. Any other man would have been

content to kill one or two of you and call it square, but to me that would have been a trivial revenge, and inadequate; for the dead do not

SUFFER. Besides I could not kill you all—and, anyway, made as I

am,

even that would not have satisfied me. I wanted to damage every man in

the place, and every woman—and not in their bodies or in their estate,

but in their vanity—the place where feeble and foolish people are most

vulnerable. So I disguised myself and came back and studied you. You

were easy game. You had an old and lofty reputation for honesty, and

naturally you were proud of it—it was your treasure of treasures, the

very apple of your eye. As soon as I found out that you carefully and

vigilantly kept yourselves and your children OUT OF TEMPTATION, I knew

how to proceed. Why, you simple creatures, the weakest of all weak

things is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire. I laid a plan, and gathered a list of names. My project was to corrupt Hadleyburg the

Incorruptible. My idea was to make liars and thieves of nearly half a

hundred smirchless men and women who had never in their lives uttered a

lie or stolen a penny. I was afraid of Goodson. He was neither born

nor reared in Hadleyburg. I was afraid that if I started to operate

my scheme by getting my letter laid before you, you would say to

yourselves, 'Goodson is the only man among us who would give away twenty

dollars to a poor devil'—and then you might not bite at my bait. But

heaven took Goodson; then I knew I was safe, and I set my trap and

baited it. It may be that I shall not catch all the men to whom I mailed

the pretended test-secret, but I shall catch the most of them, if I know

Hadleyburg nature. (Voices. “Right—he got every last one of them.”) I

believe they will even steal ostensible GAMBLE-money, rather than miss,

poor, tempted, and mistrained fellows. I am hoping to eternally and

everlastingly squelch your vanity and give Hadleyburg a new renown—one

that will STICK—and spread far. If I have succeeded, open the sack and

summon the Committee on Propagation and Preservation of the Hadleyburg

Reputation.””

A Cyclone of Voices. “Open it! Open it! The Eighteen to the front!

Committee on Propagation of the Tradition! Forward—the Incorruptibles!”

The Chair ripped the sack wide, and gathered up a handful of bright,

broad, yellow coins, shook them together, then examined them.

“Friends, they are only gilded disks of lead!”

There was a crashing outbreak of delight over this news, and when the

noise had subsided, the tanner called out:

“By right of apparent seniority in this business, Mr. Wilson is Chairman

of the Committee on Propagation of the Tradition. I suggest that he step

forward on behalf of his pals, and receive in trust the money.”

A Hundred Voices. “Wilson! Wilson! Wilson! Speech! Speech!”

Wilson (in a voice trembling with anger). “You will allow me to say, and

without apologies for my language, DAMN the money!”

A Voice. “Oh, and him a Baptist!”

A Voice. “Seventeen Symbols left! Step up, gentlemen, and assume your

trust!”

There was a pause—no response.

The Saddler. “Mr. Chairman, we’ve got ONE clean man left, anyway, out of

the late aristocracy; and he needs money, and deserves it. I move that

you appoint Jack Halliday to get up there and auction off that sack of

gilt twenty-dollar pieces, and give the result to the right man—the man

whom Hadleyburg delights to honour—Edward Richards.”

This was received with great enthusiasm, the dog taking a hand again;

the saddler started the bids at a dollar, the Brixton folk and Barnum’s

representative fought hard for it, the people cheered every jump that

the bids made, the excitement climbed moment by moment higher and

higher, the bidders got on their mettle and grew steadily more and more

daring, more and more determined, the jumps went from a dollar up to

five, then to ten, then to twenty, then fifty, then to a hundred, then —

At the beginning of the auction Richards whispered in distress to

his wife: “Oh, Mary, can we allow it? It—it—you see, it is an

honour—reward, a testimonial to purity of character, and—and—can

we allow it? Hadn't I better get up and—Oh, Mary, what ought we

to do?—what do you think we—” (Halliday's voice. “Fifteen I'm

bid!—fifteen for the sack!—twenty!—ah, thanks!—thirty—thanks again!

Thirty, thirty, thirty!—do I hear forty?—forty it is! Keep the

ball rolling, gentlemen, keep it rolling!—fifty!—thanks, noble

Roman!—going at fifty, fifty, fifty!—seventy!—ninety!—splendid!—a

hundred!—pile it up, pile it up!—hundred and twenty—forty!—just

in time!—hundred and fifty!—Two hundred Do I hear two

h—thanks!—two hundred and fifty!—”)

“It is another temptation, Edward—I’m all in a tremble—but, oh, we’ve

escaped one temptation, and that ought to warn us, to—(“Six did I

hear?—thanks!—six fifty, six f—SEVEN hundred!”) And yet, Edward,

when you think—nobody susp—(“Eight hundred dollars!—hurrah!—make it

nine!—Mr. Parsons, did I hear you say—thanks!—nine!—this noble

sack of virgin lead going at only nine hundred dollars, gilding and

all—come! do I hear—a thousand!—gratefully yours!—did some

one say

eleven?—a sack which is going to be the most celebrated in the whole

Uni—”) Oh, Edward (beginning to sob), we are so poor!—but—
but—do as

you think best—do as you think best.”

Edward fell—that is, he sat still; sat with a conscience which was not

satisfied, but which was overpowered by circumstances.

Meantime a stranger, who looked like an amateur detective gotten up as

an impossible English earl, had been watching the evening's proceedings

with manifest interest, and with a contented expression in his face; and

he had been privately commenting to himself. He was now soliloquising

somewhat like this: 'None of the Eighteen are bidding; that is not

satisfactory; I must change that—the dramatic unities require it; they

must buy the sack they tried to steal; they must pay a heavy price, too—some of them are rich. And another thing, when I make a mistake in

Hadleyburg nature the man that puts that error upon me is entitled to

a high honorarium, and some one must pay. This poor old Richards has

brought my judgment to shame; he is an honest man:—I don't understand

it, but I acknowledge it. Yes, he saw my deuces—AND with a straight

flush, and by rights the pot is his. And it shall be a jack-pot, too, if I can manage it. He disappointed me, but let that pass.'

He was watching the bidding. At a thousand, the market broke: the prices

tumbled swiftly. He waited—and still watched. One competitor dropped

out; then another, and another. He put in a bid or two now. When the

bids had sunk to ten dollars, he added a five; some one raised him a three; he waited a moment, then flung in a fifty-dollar jump, and the

sack was his—at \$1,282. The house broke out in cheers—then stopped;

for he was on his feet, and had lifted his hand. He began to speak.

“I desire to say a word, and ask a favour. I am a speculator in rarities, and I have dealings with persons interested in numismatics all

over the world. I can make a profit on this purchase, just as it stands;

but there is a way, if I can get your approval, whereby I can make every

one of these leaden twenty-dollar pieces worth its face in gold, and perhaps more. Grant me that approval, and I will give part of my gains

to your Mr. Richards, whose invulnerable probity you have so justly

and so cordially recognised tonight; his share shall be ten thousand dollars, and I will hand him the money to-morrow. (Great applause from

the house. But the “invulnerable probity” made the Richardses blush

prettily; however, it went for modesty, and did no harm.) If you will

pass my proposition by a good majority—I would like a two-thirds

vote—I will regard that as the town’s consent, and that is all I ask.

Rarities are always helped by any device which will rouse curiosity and

compel remark. Now if I may have your permission to stamp upon the faces

of each of these ostensible coins the names of the eighteen gentlemen

who—”

Nine-tenths of the audience were on their feet in a moment—dog
and

all—and the proposition was carried with a whirlwind of
approving

applause and laughter.

They sat down, and all the Symbols except “Dr.” Clay Harkness
got up,

violently protesting against the proposed outrage, and threatening
to—

“I beg you not to threaten me,” said the stranger calmly. “I know
my

legal rights, and am not accustomed to being frightened at bluster.”

(Applause.) He sat down. “Dr.” Harkness saw an opportunity
here. He was

one of the two very rich men of the place, and Pinkerton was the
other.

Harkness was proprietor of a mint; that is to say, a popular patent
medicine. He was running for the Legislature on one ticket, and

Pinkerton on the other. It was a close race and a hot one, and getting

hotter every day. Both had strong appetites for money; each had bought

a great tract of land, with a purpose; there was going to be a new railway, and each wanted to be in the Legislature and help locate the

route to his own advantage; a single vote might make the decision, and

with it two or three fortunes. The stake was large, and Harkness was a

daring speculator. He was sitting close to the stranger. He leaned over

while one or another of the other Symbols was entertaining the house

with protests and appeals, and asked, in a whisper,

“What is your price for the sack?”

“Forty thousand dollars.”

“I’ll give you twenty.”

“No.”

“Twenty-five.”

“No.”

“Say thirty.”

“The price is forty thousand dollars; not a penny less.”

“All right, I’ll give it. I will come to the hotel at ten in the morning. I don’t want it known; will see you privately.”

“Very good.” Then the stranger got up and said to the house:

“I find it late. The speeches of these gentlemen are not without merit,

not without interest, not without grace; yet if I may be excused I will

take my leave. I thank you for the great favour which you have shown me

in granting my petition. I ask the Chair to keep the sack for me until

to-morrow, and to hand these three five-hundred-dollar notes to Mr.

Richards.” They were passed up to the Chair.

“At nine I will call for the sack, and at eleven will deliver the rest of the ten thousand to Mr. Richards in person at his home. Good-night.”

Then he slipped out, and left the audience making a vast noise, which

was composed of a mixture of cheers, the “Mikado” song, dog-disapproval,

and the chant, “You are f-a-r from being a b-a-a-d man—a-a-a a-men!”

IV At home the Richardses had to endure congratulations and compliments

until midnight. Then they were left to themselves. They looked a little

sad, and they sat silent and thinking. Finally Mary sighed and said:

“Do you think we are to blame, Edward—MUCH to blame?” and her eyes

wandered to the accusing triplet of big bank-notes lying on the table,

where the congratulators had been gloating over them and reverently

fingering them. Edward did not answer at once; then he brought out a

sigh and said, hesitatingly:

“We—we couldn’t help it, Mary. It—well it was ordered. ALL things are.”

Mary glanced up and looked at him steadily, but he didn’t return the

look. Presently she said:

“I thought congratulations and praises always tasted good. But—it seems

to me, now—Edward?”

“Well?”

“Are you going to stay in the bank?”

“N—no.”

“Resign?”

“In the morning—by note.”

“It does seem best.”

Richards bowed his head in his hands and muttered:

“Before I was not afraid to let oceans of people’s money pour through my

hands, but—Mary, I am so tired, so tired—”

“We will go to bed.”

At nine in the morning the stranger called for the sack and took it to

the hotel in a cab. At ten Harkness had a talk with him privately. The

stranger asked for and got five cheques on a metropolitan bank—drawn to

“Bearer,”—four for \$1,500 each, and one for \$34,000. He put one of the

former in his pocket-book, and the remainder, representing \$38,500, he

put in an envelope, and with these he added a note which he wrote after Harkness was gone. At eleven he called at the Richards' house and knocked. Mrs. Richards peeped through the shutters, then went and

received the envelope, and the stranger disappeared without a word. She

came back flushed and a little unsteady on her legs, and gasped out:

"I am sure I recognised him! Last night it seemed to me that maybe I had

seen him somewhere before."

"He is the man that brought the sack here?"

"I am almost sure of it."

"Then he is the ostensible Stephenson too, and sold every important

citizen in this town with his bogus secret. Now if he has sent cheques

instead of money, we are sold too, after we thought we had escaped. I

was beginning to feel fairly comfortable once more, after my night's

rest, but the look of that envelope makes me sick. It isn't fat enough;

\$8,500 in even the largest bank-notes makes more bulk than that."

"Edward, why do you object to cheques?"

"Cheques signed by Stephenson! I am resigned to take the \$8,500 if

it could come in bank-notes—for it does seem that it was so ordered,

Mary—but I have never had much courage, and I have not the pluck to try

to market a cheque signed with that disastrous name. It would be a trap.

That man tried to catch me; we escaped somehow or other; and now he is

trying a new way. If it is cheques—"

“Oh, Edward, it is TOO bad!” And she held up the cheques and began to

cry.

“Put them in the fire! quick! we mustn’t be tempted. It is a trick to make the world laugh at US, along with the rest, and—Give them to ME,

since you can’t do it!” He snatched them and tried to hold his grip till

he could get to the stove; but he was human, he was a cashier, and he

stopped a moment to make sure of the signature. Then he came near to

fainting.

“Fan me, Mary, fan me! They are the same as gold!”

“Oh, how lovely, Edward! Why?”

“Signed by Harkness. What can the mystery of that be, Mary?”

“Edward, do you think—”

“Look here—look at this! Fifteen—fifteen—fifteen—thirty-four.

Thirty-eight thousand five hundred! Mary, the sack isn't worth twelve

dollars, and Harkness—apparently—has paid about par for it.”

“And does it all come to us, do you think—instead of the ten thousand?”

“Why, it looks like it. And the cheques are made to 'Bearer,' too.”

“Is that good, Edward? What is it for?”

“A hint to collect them at some distant bank, I reckon. Perhaps Harkness

doesn't want the matter known. What is that—a note?”

“Yes. It was with the cheques.”

It was in the “Stephenson” handwriting, but there was no signature. It

said:

“I am a disappointed man. Your honesty is beyond the reach of temptation. I had a different idea about it, but I wronged you in

that,

and I beg pardon, and do it sincerely. I honour you—and that is sincere

too. This town is not worthy to kiss the hem of your garment.

Dear sir,

I made a square bet with myself that there were nineteen debauchable men

in your self-righteous community. I have lost. Take the whole pot, you

are entitled to it.”

Richards drew a deep sigh, and said:

“It seems written with fire—it burns so. Mary—I am miserable again.”

“I, too. Ah, dear, I wish—”

“To think, Mary—he BELIEVES in me.”

“Oh, don’t, Edward—I can’t bear it.”

“If those beautiful words were deserved, Mary—and God knows I believed

I deserved them once—I think I could give the forty thousand dollars

for them. And I would put that paper away, as representing more than

gold and jewels, and keep it always. But now—We could not live in the

shadow of its accusing presence, Mary.”

He put it in the fire.

A messenger arrived and delivered an envelope. Richards took from it a

note and read it; it was from Burgess:

“You saved me, in a difficult time. I saved you last night. It was at cost of a lie, but I made the sacrifice freely, and out of a grateful heart. None in this village knows so well as I know how brave and good

and noble you are. At bottom you cannot respect me, knowing as you do of

that matter of which I am accused, and by the general voice

condemned;

but I beg that you will at least believe that I am a grateful man; it will help me to bear my burden. (Signed) 'BURGESS.'”

“Saved, once more. And on such terms!” He put the note in the lire.

“I—I wish I were dead, Mary, I wish I were out of it all!”

“Oh, these are bitter, bitter days, Edward. The stabs, through their very generosity, are so deep—and they come so fast!”

Three days before the election each of two thousand voters suddenly

found himself in possession of a prized memento—one of the renowned

bogus double-eagles. Around one of its faces was stamped these words:

“THE REMARK I MADE TO THE POOR STRANGER WAS —” Around the other face

was stamped these: “GO, AND REFORM. (SIGNED) PINKERTON.” Thus the entire

remaining refuse of the renowned joke was emptied upon a single head,

and with calamitous effect. It revived the recent vast laugh and concentrated it upon Pinkerton; and Harkness's election was a walk-over.

Within twenty-four hours after the Richardses had received their cheques

their consciences were quieting down, discouraged; the old couple were

learning to reconcile themselves to the sin which they had committed.

But they were to learn, now, that a sin takes on new and real terrors

when there seems a chance that it is going to be found out. This gives

it a fresh and most substantial and important aspect. At church the morning sermon was of the usual pattern; it was the same old things said

in the same old way; they had heard them a thousand times and

found them

innocuous, next to meaningless, and easy to sleep under; but now it was different: the sermon seemed to bristle with accusations; it seemed

aimed straight and specially at people who were concealing deadly sins.

After church they got away from the mob of congratulators as soon as

they could, and hurried homeward, chilled to the bone at they did not

know what—vague, shadowy, indefinite fears. And by chance they caught

a glimpse of Mr. Burgess as he turned a corner. He paid no attention to

their nod of recognition! He hadn't seen it; but they did not know that.

What could his conduct mean? It might mean—it might—mean—oh, a dozen

dreadful things. Was it possible that he knew that Richards could

have

cleared him of guilt in that bygone time, and had been silently waiting

for a chance to even up accounts? At home, in their distress they got to

imagining that their servant might have been in the next room listening

when Richards revealed the secret to his wife that he knew of Burgess's

innocence; next Richards began to imagine that he had heard the swish

of a gown in there at that time; next, he was sure he HAD heard it. They

would call Sarah in, on a pretext, and watch her face; if she had been

betraying them to Mr. Burgess, it would show in her manner. They asked

her some questions—questions which were so random and incoherent and

seemingly purposeless that the girl felt sure that the old people's minds had been affected by their sudden good fortune; the sharp and watchful gaze which they bent upon her frightened her, and that

completed the business. She blushed, she became nervous and confused,

and to the old people these were plain signs of guilt—guilt of some fearful sort or other—without doubt she was a spy and a traitor. When

they were alone again they began to piece many unrelated things together

and get horrible results out of the combination. When things had got

about to the worst Richards was delivered of a sudden gasp and his wife

asked:

“Oh, what is it?—what is it?”

“The note—Burgess's note! Its language was sarcastic, I see it

now.” He

quoted: “‘At bottom you cannot respect me, KNOWING, as you do, of THAT

MATTER OF which I am accused’—oh, it is perfectly plain, now, God help

me! He knows that I know! You see the ingenuity of the phrasing. It was

a trap—and like a fool, I walked into it. And Mary—!”

“Oh, it is dreadful—I know what you are going to say—he didn’t return

your transcript of the pretended test-remark.”

“No—kept it to destroy us with. Mary, he has exposed us to some

already. I know it—I know it well. I saw it in a dozen faces after

church. Ah, he wouldn’t answer our nod of recognition—he knew what he

had been doing!”

In the night the doctor was called. The news went around in the

morning

that the old couple were rather seriously ill—prostrated by the exhausting excitement growing out of their great windfall, the congratulations, and the late hours, the doctor said. The town was sincerely distressed; for these old people were about all it had left to be proud of, now.

Two days later the news was worse. The old couple were delirious,

and were doing strange things. By witness of the nurses, Richards had

exhibited cheques—for \$8,500? No—for an amazing sum—\$38,500! What

could be the explanation of this gigantic piece of luck?

The following day the nurses had more news—and wonderful. They had

concluded to hide the cheques, lest harm come to them; but when they

searched they were gone from under the patient's pillow—
vanished away.

The patient said:

“Let the pillow alone; what do you want?”

“We thought it best that the cheques—”

“You will never see them again—they are destroyed. They came
from

Satan. I saw the hell-brand on them, and I knew they were sent to
betray

me to sin.” Then he fell to gabbling strange and dreadful things
which

were not clearly understandable, and which the doctor admonished
them to

keep to themselves.

Richards was right; the cheques were never seen again.

A nurse must have talked in her sleep, for within two days the
forbidden

gabbings were the property of the town; and they were of a

surprising

sort. They seemed to indicate that Richards had been a claimant for the sack himself, and that Burgess had concealed that fact and then maliciously betrayed it.

Burgess was taxed with this and stoutly denied it. And he said it was

not fair to attach weight to the chatter of a sick old man who was out

of his mind. Still, suspicion was in the air, and there was much talk.

After a day or two it was reported that Mrs. Richards's delirious deliveries were getting to be duplicates of her husband's. Suspicion flamed up into conviction, now, and the town's pride in the purity of

its one undiscredited important citizen began to dim down and flicker

toward extinction.

Six days passed, then came more news. The old couple were dying.

Richards's mind cleared in his latest hour, and he sent for Burgess.

Burgess said:

“Let the room be cleared. I think he wishes to say something in privacy.”

“No!” said Richards; “I want witnesses. I want you all to hear my confession, so that I may die a man, and not a dog. I was clean—artificially—like the rest; and like the rest I fell when temptation came. I signed a lie, and claimed the miserable sack. Mr. Burgess remembered that I had done him a service, and in gratitude (and ignorance) he suppressed my claim and saved me. You know the thing that was charged against Burgess years ago. My testimony, and mine alone, could have cleared him, and I was a coward and left him to suffer disgrace—”

“No—no—Mr. Richards, you—”

“My servant betrayed my secret to him—”

“No one has betrayed anything to me—” “—And then he did a natural and

justifiable thing; he repented of the saving kindness which he had done

me, and he EXPOSED me—as I deserved—”

“Never!—I make oath—”

“Out of my heart I forgive him.”

Burgess’s impassioned protestations fell upon deaf ears; the dying man

passed away without knowing that once more he had done poor Burgess a

wrong. The old wife died that night.

The last of the sacred Nineteen had fallen a prey to the fiendish sack;

the town was stripped of the last rag of its ancient glory. Its mourning

was not showy, but it was deep.

By act of the Legislature—upon prayer and petition—Hadleyburg was

allowed to change its name to (never mind what—I will not give it away), and leave one word out of the motto that for many generations had graced the town's official seal.

It is an honest town once more, and the man will have to rise early that catches it napping again.

Title: The Election For Beadle

Author: Charles Dickens [More Titles by Dickens]

A great event has recently occurred in our parish. A contest of paramount interest has just terminated; a parochial convulsion has taken place. It has been succeeded by a glorious triumph, which the country—or at least the parish—it is all the same—will long remember. We have had an election; an election for beadle. The supporters of the old beadle system have been defeated in their stronghold, and the advocates of the great new beadle principles have achieved a proud victory.

Our parish, which, like all other parishes, is a little world of its

own, has long been divided into two parties, whose contentions, slumbering for a while, have never failed to burst forth with unabated vigour, on any occasion on which they could by possibility be renewed. Watching-rates, lighting-rates, paving-rates, sewer's-rates, church-rates, poor's-rates—all sorts of rates, have been in their turns the subjects of a grand struggle; and as to questions of patronage, the asperity and determination with which they have been contested is scarcely credible.

The leader of the official party—the steady advocate of the churchwardens, and the unflinching supporter of the overseers—is an old gentleman who lives in our row. He owns some half a dozen houses in it, and always walks on the opposite side of the way, so that he may be able to take in a view of the whole of his property at once. He is a tall, thin, bony man, with an interrogative nose, and little restless perking eyes, which appear to have been given him for the sole purpose of peeping into other people's affairs with. He is deeply impressed with the importance of our parish business, and prides himself, not a little, on his style of addressing the parishioners in vestry assembled. His views are rather confined than extensive; his principles more narrow than liberal. He has been heard to declaim very loudly in favour of the liberty of the press, and advocates the repeal of the stamp duty on newspapers, because the daily journals who now have a monopoly of the public, never give verbatim reports of vestry meetings. He would not appear egotistical for the world, but at the same time he must say, that there are SPEECHES—that celebrated speech of his own,

on the emoluments of the sexton, and the duties of the office, for instance—which might be communicated to the public, greatly to their improvement and advantage.

His great opponent in public life is Captain Purday, the old naval officer on half-pay, to whom we have already introduced our readers. The captain being a determined opponent of the constituted authorities, whoever they may chance to be, and our other friend being their steady supporter, with an equal disregard of their individual merits, it will readily be supposed, that occasions for their coming into direct collision are neither few nor far between. They divided the vestry fourteen times on a motion for heating the church with warm water instead of coals: and made speeches about liberty and expenditure, and prodigality and hot water, which threw the whole parish into a state of excitement. Then the captain, when he was on the visiting committee, and his opponent overseer, brought forward certain distinct and specific charges relative to the management of the workhouse, boldly expressed his total want of confidence in the existing authorities, and moved for 'a copy of the recipe by which the paupers' soup was prepared, together with any documents relating thereto.' This the overseer steadily resisted; he fortified himself by precedent, appealed to the established usage, and declined to produce the papers, on the ground of the injury that would be done to the public service, if documents of a strictly private nature, passing between the master of the workhouse and the cook, were to be thus dragged to light on the motion of any individual member of the

vestry. The motion was lost by a majority of two; and then the captain, who never allows himself to be defeated, moved for a committee of inquiry into the whole subject. The affair grew serious: the question was discussed at meeting after meeting, and vestry after vestry; speeches were made, attacks repudiated, personal defiances exchanged, explanations received, and the greatest excitement prevailed, until at last, just as the question was going to be finally decided, the vestry found that somehow or other, they had become entangled in a point of form, from which it was impossible to escape with propriety. So, the motion was dropped, and everybody looked extremely important, and seemed quite satisfied with the meritorious nature of the whole proceeding.

This was the state of affairs in our parish a week or two since, when Simmons, the beadle, suddenly died. The lamented deceased had over-exerted himself, a day or two previously, in conveying an aged female, highly intoxicated, to the strong room of the work-house. The excitement thus occasioned, added to a severe cold, which this indefatigable officer had caught in his capacity of director of the parish engine, by inadvertently playing over himself instead of a fire, proved too much for a constitution already enfeebled by age; and the intelligence was conveyed to the Board one evening that Simmons had died, and left his respects.

The breath was scarcely out of the body of the deceased functionary, when the field was filled with competitors for the vacant office, each of whom rested his claims to public support,

entirely on the number and extent of his family, as if the office of beadle were originally instituted as an encouragement for the propagation of the human species. 'Bung for Beadle. Five small children!'—'Hopkins for Beadle. Seven small children!!'—'Timkins for Beadle. Nine small children!!!' Such were the placards in large black letters on a white ground, which were plentifully pasted on the walls, and posted in the windows of the principal shops. Timkins's success was considered certain: several mothers of families half promised their votes, and the nine small children would have run over the course, but for the production of another placard, announcing the appearance of a still more meritorious candidate. 'Spruggins for Beadle. Ten small children (two of them twins), and a wife!!!' There was no resisting this; ten small children would have been almost irresistible in themselves, without the twins, but the touching parenthesis about that interesting production of nature, and the still more touching allusion to Mrs. Spruggins, must ensure success. Spruggins was the favourite at once, and the appearance of his lady, as she went about to solicit votes (which encouraged confident hopes of a still further addition to the house of Spruggins at no remote period), increased the general prepossession in his favour. The other candidates, Bung alone excepted, resigned in despair. The day of election was fixed; and the canvass proceeded with briskness and perseverance on both sides.

The members of the vestry could not be supposed to escape the contagious excitement inseparable from the occasion. The majority

of the lady inhabitants of the parish declared at once for Spruggins; and the quondam overseer took the same side, on the ground that men with large families always had been elected to the office, and that although he must admit, that, in other respects, Spruggins was the least qualified candidate of the two, still it was an old practice, and he saw no reason why an old practice should be departed from. This was enough for the captain. He immediately sided with Bung, canvassed for him personally in all directions, wrote squibs on Spruggins, and got his butcher to skewer them up on conspicuous joints in his shop-front; frightened his neighbour, the old lady, into a palpitation of the heart, by his awful denunciations of Spruggins's party; and bounced in and out, and up and down, and backwards and forwards, until all the sober inhabitants of the parish thought it inevitable that he must die of a brain fever, long before the election began.

The day of election arrived. It was no longer an individual struggle, but a party contest between the ins and outs. The question was, whether the withering influence of the overseers, the domination of the churchwardens, and the blighting despotism of the vestry-clerk, should be allowed to render the election of beadle a form—a nullity: whether they should impose a vestry-elected beadle on the parish, to do their bidding and forward their views, or whether the parishioners, fearlessly asserting their undoubted rights, should elect an independent beadle of their own.

The nomination was fixed to take place in the vestry, but so great

was the throng of anxious spectators, that it was found necessary to adjourn to the church, where the ceremony commenced with due solemnity. The appearance of the churchwardens and overseers, and the ex-churchwardens and ex-overseers, with Spruggins in the rear, excited general attention. Spruggins was a little thin man, in rusty black, with a long pale face, and a countenance expressive of care and fatigue, which might either be attributed to the extent of his family or the anxiety of his feelings. His opponent appeared in a cast-off coat of the captain's—a blue coat with bright buttons; white trousers, and that description of shoes familiarly known by the appellation of 'high-lows.' There was a serenity in the open countenance of Bung—a kind of moral dignity in his confident air—an 'I wish you may get it' sort of expression in his eye—which infused animation into his supporters, and evidently dispirited his opponents.

The ex-churchwarden rose to propose Thomas Spruggins for beadle. He had known him long. He had had his eye upon him closely for years; he had watched him with twofold vigilance for months. (A parishioner here suggested that this might be termed 'taking a double sight,' but the observation was drowned in loud cries of 'Order!') He would repeat that he had had his eye upon him for years, and this he would say, that a more well-conducted, a more well-behaved, a more sober, a more quiet man, with a more well-regulated mind, he had never met with. A man with a larger family he had never known (cheers). The parish required a man who could be depended on ('Hear!' from the Spruggins side,

answered by ironical cheers from the Bung party). Such a man he now proposed ('No,' 'Yes'). He would not allude to individuals (the ex- churchwarden continued, in the celebrated negative style adopted by great speakers). He would not advert to a gentleman who had once held a high rank in the service of his majesty; he would not say, that that gentleman was no gentleman; he would not assert, that that man was no man; he would not say, that he was a turbulent parishioner; he would not say, that he had grossly misbehaved himself, not only on this, but on all former occasions; he would not say, that he was one of those discontented and treasonable spirits, who carried confusion and disorder wherever they went; he would not say, that he harboured in his heart envy, and hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness. No! He wished to have everything comfortable and pleasant, and therefore, he would say— nothing about him (cheers).

The captain replied in a similar parliamentary style. He would not say, he was astonished at the speech they had just heard; he would not say, he was disgusted (cheers). He would not retort the epithets which had been hurled against him (renewed cheering); he would not allude to men once in office, but now happily out of it, who had mismanaged the workhouse, ground the paupers, diluted the beer, slack-baked the bread, boned the meat, heightened the work, and lowered the soup (tremendous cheers). He would not ask what such men deserved (a voice, 'Nothing a-day, and find themselves!'). He would not say, that one burst of general indignation should drive them from the parish they polluted with

their presence ('Give it him!'). He would not allude to the unfortunate man who had been proposed—he would not say, as the vestry's tool, but as Beadle. He would not advert to that individual's family; he would not say, that nine children, twins, and a wife, were very bad examples for pauper imitation (loud cheers). He would not advert in detail to the qualifications of Bung. The man stood before him, and he would not say in his presence, what he might be disposed to say of him, if he were absent. (Here Mr. Bung telegraphed to a friend near him, under cover of his hat, by contracting his left eye, and applying his right thumb to the tip of his nose). It had been objected to Bung that he had only five children ('Hear, hear!' from the opposition). Well; he had yet to learn that the legislature had affixed any precise amount of infantine qualification to the office of beadle; but taking it for granted that an extensive family were a great requisite, he entreated them to look to facts, and compare data, about which there could be no mistake. Bung was 35 years of age. Spruggins—of whom he wished to speak with all possible respect—was 50. Was it not more than possible—was it not very probable—that by the time Bung attained the latter age, he might see around him a family, even exceeding in number and extent, that to which Spruggins at present laid claim (deafening cheers and waving of handkerchiefs)? The captain concluded, amidst loud applause, by calling upon the parishioners to sound the tocsin, rush to the poll, free themselves from dictation, or be slaves for ever.

On the following day the polling began, and we never have had

such a bustle in our parish since we got up our famous anti-slavery petition, which was such an important one, that the House of Commons ordered it to be printed, on the motion of the member for the district. The captain engaged two hackney-coaches and a cab for Bung's people—the cab for the drunken voters, and the two coaches for the old ladies, the greater portion of whom, owing to the captain's impetuosity, were driven up to the poll and home again, before they recovered from their flurry sufficiently to know, with any degree of clearness, what they had been doing. The opposite party wholly neglected these precautions, and the consequence was, that a great many ladies who were walking leisurely up to the church—for it was a very hot day—to vote for Spruggins, were artfully decoyed into the coaches, and voted for Bung. The captain's arguments, too, had produced considerable effect: the attempted influence of the vestry produced a greater. A threat of exclusive dealing was clearly established against the vestry-clerk—a case of heartless and profligate atrocity. It appeared that the delinquent had been in the habit of purchasing six penn'orth of muffins, weekly, from an old woman who rents a small house in the parish, and resides among the original settlers; on her last weekly visit, a message was conveyed to her through the medium of the cook, couched in mysterious terms, but indicating with sufficient clearness, that the vestry-clerk's appetite for muffins, in future, depended entirely on her vote on the beadleship. This was sufficient: the stream had been turning previously, and the impulse thus administered directed its final

course. The Bung party ordered one shilling's-worth of muffins weekly for the remainder of the old woman's natural life; the parishioners were loud in their exclamations; and the fate of Spruggins was sealed.

It was in vain that the twins were exhibited in dresses of the same pattern, and night-caps, to match, at the church door: the boy in Mrs. Spruggins's right arm, and the girl in her left—even Mrs. Spruggins herself failed to be an object of sympathy any longer. The majority attained by Bung on the gross poll was four hundred and twenty-eight, and the cause of the parishioners triumphed.

[The end]

Charles Dickens's short story: Election For Beadle

Title: The Village That Voted The Earth Was Flat

Author: Rudyard Kipling [More Titles by Kipling]

(1913)

Our drive till then had been quite a success. The other men in the car were my friend Woodhouse, young Ollyett, a distant connection of his, and Pallant, the M.P. Woodhouse's business was the treatment and cure of sick journals. He knew by instinct the precise moment in a newspaper's life when the impetus of past good management is exhausted and it fetches up on the dead-centre

between slow and expensive collapse and the new start which can be given by gold injections—and genius. He was wisely ignorant of journalism; but when he stooped on a carcass there was sure to be meat. He had that week added a half-dead, halfpenny evening paper to his collection, which consisted of a prosperous London daily, one provincial ditto, and a limp-bodied weekly of commercial leanings. He had also, that very hour, planted me with a large block of the evening paper's common shares, and was explaining the whole art of editorship to Ollyett, a young man three years from Oxford, with coir-matting-coloured hair and a face harshly modelled by harsh experiences, who, I understood, was assisting in the new venture. Pallant, the long, wrinkled M.P., whose voice is more like a crane's than a peacock's, took no shares, but gave us all advice.

'You'll find it rather a knacker's yard,' Woodhouse was saying. 'Yes, I know they call me The Knacker; but it will pay inside a year. All my papers do. I've only one motto: Back your luck and back your staff. It'll come out all right.'

Then the car stopped, and a policeman asked our names and addresses for exceeding the speed-limit. We pointed out that the road ran absolutely straight for half a mile ahead without even a side-lane. 'That's just what we depend on,' said the policeman unpleasantly.

'The usual swindle,' said Woodhouse under his breath. 'What's the

name of this place?’

‘Huckley,’ said the policeman. ‘H-u-c-k-l-e-y,’ and wrote something in his note-book at which young Ollyett protested. A large red man on a grey horse who had been watching us from the other side of the hedge shouted an order we could not catch. The policeman laid his hand on the rim of the right driving-door (Woodhouse carries his spare tyres aft), and it closed on the button of the electric horn. The grey horse at once bolted, and we could hear the rider swearing all across the landscape.

‘Damn it, man, you’ve got your silly fist on it! Take it off!’ Woodhouse shouted.

‘Ho!’ said the constable, looking carefully at his fingers as though we had trapped them. ‘That won’t do you any good either,’ and he wrote once more in his note-book before he allowed us to go.

This was Woodhouse’s first brush with motor law, and since I expected no ill consequences to myself, I pointed out that it was very serious. I took the same view myself when in due time I found that I, too, was summonsed on charges ranging from the use of obscene language to endangering traffic.

Judgment was done in a little pale-yellow market-town with a small, Jubilee clock-tower and a large corn-exchange. Woodhouse drove us there in his car. Pallant, who had not been included in the summons, came with us as moral support. While we waited

outside, the fat man on the grey horse rode up and entered into loud talk with his brother magistrates. He said to one of them—for I took the trouble to note it down—'It falls away from my lodges, dead straight, three-quarters of a mile. I'd defy any one to resist it. We rooked seventy pounds out of 'em last month. No car can resist the temptation. You ought to have one your side the county, Mike. They simply can't resist it.'

'Whew!' said Woodhouse. 'We're in for trouble. Don't you say a word—or Ollyett either! I'll pay the fines and we'll get it over as soon as possible. Where's Pallant?'

'At the back of the court somewhere,' said Ollyett. 'I saw him slip in just now.'

The fat man then took his seat on the Bench, of which he was chairman, and I gathered from a bystander that his name was Sir Thomas Ingell, Bart., M.P., of Ingell Park, Huckley. He began with an allocution pitched in a tone that would have justified revolt throughout empires. Evidence, when the crowded little court did not drown it with applause, was given in the pauses of the address. They were all very proud of their Sir Thomas, and looked from him to us, wondering why we did not applaud too.

Taking its time from the chairman, the Bench rollicked with us for seventeen minutes. Sir Thomas explained that he was sick and tired of processions of cads of our type, who would be better employed

breaking stones on the road than in frightening horses worth more than themselves or their ancestors. This was after it had been proved that Woodhouse's man had turned on the horn purposely to annoy Sir Thomas, who happened to be riding by'! There were other remarks too—primitive enough,—but it was the unspeakable brutality of the tone, even more than the quality of the justice, or the laughter of the audience that stung our souls out of all reason. When we were dismissed—to the tune of twenty-three pounds, twelve shillings and sixpence—we waited for Pallant to join us, while we listened to the next case—one of driving without a licence. Ollyett with an eye to his evening paper, had already taken very full notes of our own, but we did not wish to seem prejudiced.

'It's all right,' said the reporter of the local paper soothingly. 'We never report Sir Thomas *in extenso*. Only the fines and charges.'

'Oh, thank you,' Ollyett replied, and I heard him ask who every one in court might be. The local reporter was very communicative.

The new victim, a large, flaxen-haired man in somewhat striking clothes, to which Sir Thomas, now thoroughly warmed, drew public attention, said that he had left his licence at home. Sir Thomas asked him if he expected the police to go to his home address at Jerusalem to find it for him; and the court roared. Nor did Sir Thomas approve of the man's name, but insisted on calling him 'Mr. Masquerader,' and every time he did so, all his people

shouted. Evidently this was their established *auto-da-fe*.

'He didn't summons me—because I'm in the House, I suppose. I think I shall have to ask a Question,' said Pallant, reappearing at the close of the case.

'I think *I* shall have to give it a little publicity too,' said Woodhouse. 'We can't have this kind of thing going on, you know.' His face was set and quite white. Pallant's, on the other hand, was black, and I know that my very stomach had turned with rage. Ollyett was dum.

'Well, let's have lunch,' Woodhouse said at last. 'Then we can get away before the show breaks up.'

We drew Ollyett from the arms of the local reporter, crossed the Market Square to the Red Lion and found Sir Thomas's 'Mr. Masquerader' just sitting down to beer, beef and pickles.

'Ah!' said he, in a large voice. 'Companions in misfortune. Won't you gentlemen join me?'

'Delighted,' said Woodhouse. 'What did you get?'

'I haven't decided. It might make a good turn, but—the public aren't educated up to it yet. It's beyond 'em. If it wasn't, that red dub on the Bench would be worth fifty a week.'

'Where?' said Woodhouse. The man looked at him with unaffected surprise.

'At any one of My places,' he replied. 'But perhaps you live here?'

'Good heavens!' cried young Ollyett suddenly. 'You *are* Masquerier, then? I thought you were!'

'Bat Masquerier.' He let the words fall with the weight of an international ultimatum. 'Yes, that's all I am. But you have the advantage of me, gentlemen.'

For the moment, while we were introducing ourselves, I was puzzled. Then I recalled prismatic music-hall posters—of enormous acreage—that had been the unnoticed background of my visits to London for years past. Posters of men and women, singers, jongleurs, impersonators and audacities of every draped and undraped brand, all moved on and off in London and the Provinces by Bat Masquerier—with the long wedge-tailed flourish following the final 'r.'

'I knew you at once,' said Pallant, the trained M.P., and I promptly backed the lie. Woodhouse mumbled excuses. Bat Masquerier was not moved for or against us any more than the frontage of one of his own palaces.

'I always tell My people there's a limit to the size of the lettering,' he said. 'Overdo that and the ret'na doesn't take it in. Advertisin'

is the most delicate of all the sciences.'

'There's one man in the world who is going to get a little of it if I live for the next twenty-four hours,' said Woodhouse, and explained how this would come about.

Masquerier stared at him lengthily with gunmetal-blue eyes.

'You mean it?' he drawled; the voice was as magnetic as the look.

'I do,' said Ollyett. 'That business of the horn alone ought to have him off the Bench in three months.' Masquerier looked at him even longer than he had looked at Woodhouse.

'He told *me*,' he said suddenly, 'that my home-address was Jerusalem. You heard that?'

'But it was the tone—the tone,' Ollyett cried.

'You noticed that, too, did you?' said Masquerier. 'That's the artistic temperament. You can do a lot with it. And I'm Bat Masquerier,' he went on. He dropped his chin in his fists and scowled straight in front of him.... 'I made the Silhouettes—I made the Trefoil and the Jocunda. I made 'Dal Benzaguen.' Here Ollyett sat straight up, for in common with the youth of that year he worshipped Miss Vidal Benzaguen of the Trefoil immensely and unreservedly. "'Is that a dressing-gown or an ulster you're supposed to be wearing?'" You heard *that?*... "And I suppose you

hadn't time to brush your hair either?" You heard *that?*... Now, you hear *me!*' His voice filled the coffee-room, then dropped to a whisper as dreadful as a surgeon's before an operation. He spoke for several minutes. Pallant muttered 'Hear! hear!' I saw Ollyett's eye flash—it was to Ollyett that Masquerier addressed himself chiefly,—and Woodhouse leaned forward with joined hands.

'Are you *with me?*' he went on, gathering us all up in one sweep of the arm. 'When I begin a thing I see it through, gentlemen. What Bat can't break, breaks him! But I haven't struck that thing yet. This is no one-turn turn-it-down show. This is business to the dead finish. Are you with me, gentlemen? Good! Now, we'll pool our assets. One London morning, and one provincial daily, didn't you say? One weekly commercial ditto and one M.P.'

'Not much use, I'm afraid,' Pallant smirked.

'But privileged. *But* privileged,' he returned. 'And we have also my little team—London, Blackburn, Liverpool, Leeds—I'll tell you about Manchester later—and Me! Bat Masquerier.' He breathed the name reverently into his tankard. 'Gentlemen, when our combination has finished with Sir Thomas Ingell, Bart., M.P., and everything else that is his, Sodom and Gomorrah will be a winsome bit of Merrie England beside 'em. I must go back to town now, but I trust you gentlemen will give me the pleasure of your company at dinner to-night at the Chop Suey—the Red Amber Room—and we'll block out the scenario.' He laid his hand on young Ollyett's

shoulder and added: 'It's your brains I want.' Then he left, in a good deal of astrachan collar and nickel-plated limousine, and the place felt less crowded.

We ordered our car a few minutes later. As Woodhouse, Ollyett and I were getting in, Sir Thomas Ingell, Bart., M.P., came out of the Hall of Justice across the square and mounted his horse. I have sometimes thought that if he had gone in silence he might even then have been saved, but as he settled himself in the saddle he caught sight of us and must needs shout: 'Not off yet? You'd better get away and you'd better be careful.' At that moment Pallant, who had been buying picture-postcards, came out of the inn, took Sir Thomas's eye and very leisurely entered the car. It seemed to me that for one instant there was a shade of uneasiness on the baronet's grey-whiskered face.

'I hope,' said Woodhouse after several miles, 'I hope he's a widower.'

'Yes,' said Pallant. 'For his poor, dear wife's sake I hope that, very much indeed. I suppose he didn't see me in Court. Oh, here's the parish history of Huckley written by the Rector and here's your share of the picture-postcards. Are we all dining with this Mr. Masquerier to-night?'

'Yes!' said we all.



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If Woodhouse knew nothing of journalism, young Ollyett, who had graduated in a hard school, knew a good deal. Our halfpenny evening paper, which we will call *The Bun* to distinguish her from her prosperous morning sister, *The Cake*, was not only diseased but corrupt. We found this out when a man brought us the prospectus of a new oil-field and demanded sub-leaders on its prosperity. Ollyett talked pure Brasenose to him for three minutes. Otherwise he spoke and wrote trade-English—a toothsome amalgam of Americanisms and epigrams. But though the slang changes the game never alters, and Ollyett and I and, in the end, some others enjoyed it immensely. It was weeks ere we could see the wood for the trees, but so soon as the staff realised that they had proprietors who backed them right or wrong, and specially when they were wrong (which is the sole secret of journalism), and that their fate did not hang on any passing owner's passing mood, they did miracles.

But we did not neglect Huckley. As Ollyett said our first care was to create an 'arresting atmosphere' round it. He used to visit the village of week-ends, on a motor-bicycle with a side-car; for which reason I left the actual place alone and dealt with it in the abstract. Yet it was I who drew first blood. Two inhabitants of Huckley wrote to contradict a small, quite solid paragraph in *The Bun* that a

hoopoe had been seen at Huckley and had, 'of course, been shot by the local sportsmen.' There was some heat in their letters, both of which we published. Our version of how the hoopoe got his crest from King Solomon was, I grieve to say, so inaccurate that the Rector himself—no sportsman as he pointed out, but a lover of accuracy—wrote to us to correct it. We gave his letter good space and thanked him.

'This priest is going to be useful,' said Ollyett. 'He has the impartial mind. I shall vitalise him.'

Forthwith he created M.L. Sigden, a recluse of refined tastes who in *The Bun* demanded to know whether this Huckley-of-the-Hoopoe was the Hugly of his boyhood and whether, by any chance, the fell change of name had been wrought by collusion between a local magnate and the railway, in the mistaken interests of spurious refinement. 'For I knew it and loved it with the maidens of my day—_eheu ab angulo!_—as Hugly,' wrote M.L. Sigden from Oxf.

Though other papers scoffed, *The Bun* was gravely sympathetic. Several people wrote to deny that Huckley had been changed at birth. Only the Rector—no philosopher as he pointed out, but a lover of accuracy—had his doubts, which he laid publicly before Mr. M.L. Sigden who suggested, through *The Bun*, that the little place might have begun life in Anglo-Saxon days as 'Hogslea' or among the Normans as 'Argile,' on account of its much clay. The

Rector had his own ideas too (he said it was mostly gravel), and M.L. Sigden had a fund of reminiscences. Oddly enough—which is seldom the case with free reading-matter—our subscribers rather relished the correspondence, and contemporaries quoted freely.

'The secret of power,' said Ollyett, 'is not the big stick. It's the liftable stick.' (This means the 'arresting' quotation of six or seven lines.) 'Did you see the *Spec.* had a middle on "Rural Tenacities" last week. That was all Huckley. I'm doing a "Mobiquity" on Huckley next week.'

Our 'Mobiquities' were Friday evening accounts of easy motor-bike-cum-side-car trips round London, illustrated (we could never get that machine to work properly) by smudgy maps. Ollyett wrote the stuff with a fervour and a delicacy which I always ascribed to the side-car. His account of Epping Forest, for instance, was simply young love with its soul at its lips. But his Huckley 'Mobiquity' would have sickened a soap-boiler. It chemically combined loathsome familiarity, leering suggestion, slimy piety and rancid 'social service' in one fuming compost that fairly lifted me off my feet.

'Yes,' said he, after compliments. 'It's the most vital, arresting and dynamic bit of tump I've done up to date. *Non nobis gloria!* I met Sir Thomas Ingell in his own park. He talked to me again. He inspired most of it.'

“Which? The “glutinous native drawl,” or “the neglected adenoids of the village children”?” I demanded.

‘Oh, no! That’s only to bring in the panel doctor. It’s the last flight we—I’m proudest of.’

This dealt with ‘the crepuscular penumbra spreading her dim limbs over the boskage’; with ‘jolly rabbits’; with a herd of ‘gravid polled Angus’; and with the ‘arresting, gipsy-like face of their swart, scholarly owner—as well known at the Royal Agricultural Shows as that of our late King-Emperor.’

“Swart” is good and so’s “gravid,”” said I, ‘but the panel doctor will be annoyed about the adenoids.’

‘Not half as much as Sir Thomas will about his face,’ said Ollyett. ‘And if you only knew what I’ve left out!’

He was right. The panel doctor spent his week-end (this is the advantage of Friday articles) in overwhelming us with a professional counterblast of no interest whatever to our subscribers. We told him so, and he, then and there, battered his way with it into the *Lancet* where they are keen on glands, and forgot us altogether. But Sir Thomas Ingell was of sterner stuff. He must have spent a happy week-end too. The letter which we received from him on Monday proved him to be a kinless loon of upright life, for no woman, however remotely interested in a man would have let it pass the home wastepaper-basket. He objected to

our references to his own herd, to his own labours in his own village, which he said was a Model Village, and to our infernal insolence; but he objected most to our invoice of his features. We wrote him courteously to ask whether the letter was meant for publication. He, remembering, I presume, the Duke of Wellington, wrote back, 'publish and be damned.'

'Oh! This is too easy,' Ollyett said as he began heading the letter.

'Stop a minute,' I said. 'The game is getting a little beyond us. Tonight's the Bat dinner.' (I may have forgotten to tell you that our dinner with Bat Masquerier in the Red Amber Room of the Chop Suey had come to be a weekly affair.) 'Hold it over till they've all seen it.'

'Perhaps you're right,' he said. 'You might waste it.'

At dinner, then, Sir Thomas's letter was handed round. Bat seemed to be thinking of other matters, but Pallant was very interested.

'I've got an idea,' he said presently. 'Could you put something into *The Bun* to-morrow about foot-and-mouth disease in that fellow's herd?'

'Oh, plague if you like,' Ollyett replied. 'They're only five measly Shorthorns. I saw one lying down in the park. She'll serve as a substratum of fact.'

'Then, do that; and hold the letter over meanwhile. I think *I* come in here,' said Pallant.

'Why?' said I.

'Because there's something coming up in the House about foot-and-mouth, and because he wrote me a letter after that little affair when he fined you. 'Took ten days to think it over. Here you are,' said Pallant. 'House of Commons paper, you see.'

We read:

DEAR PALLANT—Although in the past our paths have not lain much together, I am sure you will agree with me that on the floor of the House all members are on a footing of equality. I make bold, therefore, to approach you in a matter which I think capable of a very different interpretation from that which perhaps was put upon it by your friends. Will you let them know that that was the case and that I was in no way swayed by animus in the exercise of my magisterial duties, which as you, as a brother magistrate, can imagine are

frequently very distasteful to—Yours very sincerely,

T. INGELL.

P.S.—I have seen to it that the motor vigilance to which your friends took exception has been considerably relaxed in my district.

'What did you answer?' said Ollyett, when all our opinions had been expressed.

'I told him I couldn't do anything in the matter. And I couldn't—then. But you'll remember to put in that foot-and-mouth paragraph. I want something to work upon.'

'It seems to me *The Bun* has done all the work up to date,' I suggested. 'When does *The Cake* come in?'

'*The Cake*,' said Woodhouse, and I remembered afterwards that he spoke like a Cabinet Minister on the eve of a Budget, 'reserves to itself the fullest right to deal with situations as they arise.'

'Ye-eh!' Bat Masquerier shook himself out of his thoughts.

"'Situations as they arise.'" I ain't idle either. But there's no use fishing till the swim's baited. You'—he turned to Ollyett—'manufacture very good ground-bait.... I always tell My people—What the deuce is that?'

There was a burst of song from another private dining-room across

the landing. 'It ees some ladies from the Trefoil,' the waiter began.

'Oh, I know that. What are they singing, though?'

He rose and went out, to be greeted by shouts of applause from that merry company. Then there was silence, such as one hears in the form-room after a master's entry. Then a voice that we loved began again: 'Here we go gathering nuts in May—nuts in May—nuts in May!'

'It's only 'Dal—and some nuts,' he explained when he returned. 'She says she's coming in to dessert.' He sat down, humming the old tune to himself, and till Miss Vidal Benzaguen entered, he held us speechless with tales of the artistic temperament.

We obeyed Pallant to the extent of slipping into *The Bun* a wary paragraph about cows lying down and dripping at the mouth, which might be read either as an unkind libel or, in the hands of a capable lawyer, as a piece of faithful nature-study.

'And besides,' said Ollyett, 'we allude to "gravid polled Angus." I am advised that no action can lie in respect of virgin Shorthorns. Pallant wants us to come to the House to-night. He's got us places for the Strangers' Gallery. I'm beginning to like Pallant.'

'Masquerier seems to like you,' I said.

'Yes, but I'm afraid of him,' Ollyett answered with perfect

sincerity. 'I am. He's the Absolutely Amoral Soul. I've never met one yet.'

We went to the House together. It happened to be an Irish afternoon, and as soon as I had got the cries and the faces a little sorted out, I gathered there were grievances in the air, but how many of them was beyond me.

'It's all right,' said Ollyett of the trained ear. 'They've shut their ports against—oh yes—export of Irish cattle! Foot-and-mouth disease at Ballyhellion. *I see Pallant's idea!*'

The House was certainly all mouth for the moment, but, as I could feel, quite in earnest. A Minister with a piece of typewritten paper seemed to be fending off volleys of insults. He reminded me somehow of a nervous huntsman breaking up a fox in the face of rabid hounds.

'It's question-time. They're asking questions,' said Ollyett. 'Look! Pallant's up.'

There was no mistaking it. His voice, which his enemies said was his one parliamentary asset, silenced the hubbub as toothache silences mere singing in the ears. He said:

'Arising out of that, may I ask if any special consideration has recently been shown in regard to any suspected outbreak of this disease on *this* side of the Channel?'

He raised his hand; it held a noon edition of *The Bun*. We had thought it best to drop the paragraph out of the later ones. He would have continued, but something in a grey frock-coat roared and bounded on a bench opposite, and waved another *Bun*. It was Sir Thomas Ingell.

'As the owner of the herd so dastardly implicated—' His voice was drowned in shouts of 'Order!'—the Irish leading.

'What's wrong?' I asked Ollyett. 'He's got his hat on his head, hasn't he?'

'Yes, but his wrath should have been put as a question.'

'Arising out of that, Mr. Speaker, Srrrr!' Sir Thomas bellowed through a lull, 'are you aware that—that all this is a conspiracy—part of a dastardly conspiracy to make Huckley ridiculous—to make *us* ridiculous? Part of a deep-laid plot to make *me* ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, Sir!'

The man's face showed almost black against his white whiskers, and he struck out swimmingly with his arms. His vehemence puzzled and held the House for an instant, and the Speaker took advantage of it to lift his pack from Ireland to a new scent. He addressed Sir Thomas Ingell in tones of measured rebuke, meant also, I imagine, for the whole House, which lowered its hackles at the word. Then Pallant, shocked and pained: 'I can only express my profound surprise that in response to my simple question the

honourable member should have thought fit to indulge in a personal attack. If I have in any way offended—'

Again the Speaker intervened, for it appeared that he regulated these matters.

He, too, expressed surprise, and Sir Thomas sat back in a hush of reprobation that seemed to have the chill of the centuries behind it. The Empire's work was resumed.

'Beautiful!' said I, and I felt hot and cold up my back.

'And now we'll publish his letter,' said Ollyett.

We did—on the heels of his carefully reported outburst. We made no comment. With that rare instinct for grasping the heart of a situation which is the mark of the Anglo-Saxon, all our contemporaries and, I should say, two-thirds of our correspondents demanded how such a person could be made more ridiculous than he had already proved himself to be. But beyond spelling his name 'Injle,' we alone refused to hit a man when he was down.

'There's no need,' said Ollyett. 'The whole press is on the buckle from end to end.'

Even Woodhouse was a little astonished at the ease with which it had come about, and said as much.

'Rot!' said Ollyett. 'We haven't really begun. Huckley isn't news yet.'

'What do you mean?' said Woodhouse, who had grown to have great respect for his young but by no means distant connection.

'Mean? By the grace of God, Master Ridley, I mean to have it so that when Huckley turns over in its sleep, Reuters and the Press Association jump out of bed to cable.' Then he went off at score about certain restorations in Huckley Church which, he said—and he seemed to spend his every week-end there—had been perpetrated by the Rector's predecessor, who had abolished a 'leper-window' or a 'squinch-hole' (whatever these may be) to institute a lavatory in the vestry. It did not strike me as stuff for which Reuters or the Press Association would lose much sleep, and I left him declaiming to Woodhouse about a fourteenth-century font which, he said, he had unearthed in the sexton's tool-shed.

My methods were more on the lines of peaceful penetration. An odd copy, in *The Bun's* rag-and-bone library, of Hone's *Every-Day Book* had revealed to me the existence of a village dance founded, like all village dances, on Druidical mysteries connected with the Solar Solstice (which is always unchallengeable) and Mid-summer Morning, which is dewy and refreshing to the London eye. For this I take no credit—Hone being a mine any one can work—but that I rechristened that dance, after I had revised it, 'The Gubby' is my title to immortal fame. It was still to be witnessed, I wrote, 'in all

its poignant purity at Huckley, that last home of significant mediaeval survivals'; and I fell so in love with my creation that I kept it back for days, enamelling and burnishing.

'You's better put it in,' said Ollyett at last. 'It's time we asserted ourselves again. The other fellows are beginning to poach. You saw that thing in the *Pinnacle* about Sir Thomas's Model Village? He must have got one of their chaps down to do it.'

"Nothing like the wounds of a friend,' I said. 'That account of the non-alcoholic pub alone was—'

'I liked the bit best about the white-tiled laundry and the Fallen Virgins who wash Sir Thomas's dress shirts. Our side couldn't come within a mile of that, you know. We haven't the proper flair for sexual slobber.'

'That's what I'm always saying,' I retorted. 'Leave 'em alone. The other fellows are doing our work for us now. Besides I want to touch up my "Gubby Dance" a little more.'

'No. You'll spoil it. Let's shove it in to-day. For one thing it's Literature. I don't go in for compliments as you know, but, etc. etc.'

I had a healthy suspicion of young Ollyett in every aspect, but though I knew that I should have to pay for it, I fell to his flattery, and my priceless article on the 'Gubby Dance' appeared. Next

Saturday he asked me to bring out *The Bun* in his absence, which I naturally assumed would be connected with the little maroon side-car. I was wrong.

On the following Monday I glanced at *The Cake* at breakfast-time to make sure, as usual, of her inferiority to my beloved but unremunerative *Bun*. I opened on a heading: 'The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat.' I read ... I read that the Geoplanarian Society—a society devoted to the proposition that the earth is flat—had held its Annual Banquet and Exercises at Huckley on Saturday, when after convincing addresses, amid scenes of the greatest enthusiasm, Huckley village had decided by an unanimous vote of 438 that the earth was flat. I do not remember that I breathed again till I had finished the two columns of description that followed. Only one man could have written them. They were flawless—crisp, nervous, austere yet human, poignant, vital, arresting—most distinctly arresting—dynamic enough to shift a city—and quotable by whole sticks at a time. And there was a leader, a grave and poised leader, which tore me in two with mirth, until I remembered that I had been left out—infamously and unjustifiably dropped. I went to Ollyett's rooms. He was breakfasting, and, to do him justice, looked conscience-stricken.

'It wasn't my fault,' he began. 'It was Bat Masquerier. I swear I would have asked you to come if—'

'Never mind that,' I said. 'It's the best bit of work you've ever

done or will do. Did any of it happen?’

‘Happen? Heavens! D’you think even *I* could have invented it?’

‘Is it exclusive to *The Cake*?’ I cried.

‘It cost Bat Masquerier two thousand,’ Ollyett replied. ‘D’you think he’d let any one else in on that? But I give you my sacred word I knew nothing about it till he asked me to come down and cover it. He had Huckley posted in three colours, “The Geoplanarians’ Annual Banquet and Exercises.” Yes, he invented “Geoplanarians.” He wanted Huckley to think it meant aeroplanes. Yes, I know that there is a real Society that thinks the world’s flat—they ought to be grateful for the lift—but Bat made his own. He did! He created the whole show, I tell you. He swept out half his Halls for the job. Think of that—on a Saturday! They—we went down in motor char-a-bancs—three of ’em—one pink, one primrose, and one forget-me-not blue—twenty people in each one and “The Earth *is* Flat” on each side and across the back. I went with Teddy Rickets and Lafone from the Trefoil, and both the Silhouette Sisters, and—wait a minute!—the Crossleigh Trio. You know the Every-Day Dramas Trio at the Jocunda—Ada Crossleigh, “Bunt” Crossleigh, and little Victorine? Them. And there was Hoke Ramsden, the lightning-change chap in *Morgiana and Drexel*—and there was Billy Turpeen. Yes, you know him! The North London Star. “I’m the Referee that got himself disliked at Blackheath.” *That* chap! And there was Mackaye—that one-

eyed Scotch fellow that all Glasgow is crazy about. Talk of subordinating yourself for Art's sake! Mackaye was the earnest inquirer who got converted at the end of the meeting. And there was quite a lot of girls I didn't know, and—oh, yes—there was 'Dal! 'Dal Benzaguen herself! We sat together, going and coming. She's all the darling there ever was. She sent you her love, and she told me to tell you that she won't forget about Nellie Farren. She says you've given her an ideal to work for. She? Oh, she was the Lady Secretary to the Geoplanarians, of course. I forget who were in the other brakes—provincial stars mostly—but they played up gorgeously. The art of the music-hall's changed since your day. They didn't overdo it a bit. You see, people who believe the earth is flat don't dress quite like other people. You may have noticed that I hinted at that in my account. It's a rather flat-fronted Ionic style—neo-Victorian, except for the bustles, 'Dal told me,—but 'Dal looked heavenly in it! So did little Victorine. And there was a girl in the blue brake—she's a provincial—but she's coming to town this winter and she'll knock 'em—Winnie Deans. Remember that! She told Huckley how she had suffered for the Cause as a governess in a rich family where they believed that the world is round, and how she threw up her job sooner than teach immoral geography. That was at the overflow meeting outside the Baptist chapel. She knocked 'em to sawdust! We must look out for Winnie.... But Lafone! Lafone was beyond everything. Impact, personality—conviction—the whole bag o' tricks! He sweated conviction. Gad, he convinced *me* while he was speaking! (Him?

He was President of the Geoplanarians, of course. Haven't you read my account?) It *is* an infernally plausible theory. After all, no one has actually proved the earth is round, have they?

'Never mind the earth. What about Huckley?'

'Oh, Huckley got tight. That's the worst of these model villages if you let 'em smell fire-water. There's one alcoholic pub in the place that Sir Thomas can't get rid of. Bat made it his base. He sent down the banquet in two motor lorries—dinner for five hundred and drinks for ten thousand. Huckley voted all right. Don't you make any mistake about that. No vote, no dinner. A unanimous vote—exactly as I've said. At least, the Rector and the Doctor were the only dissentients. We didn't count them. Oh yes, Sir Thomas was there. He came and grinned at us through his park gates. He'll grin worse to-day. There's an aniline dye that you rub through a stencil-plate that eats about a foot into any stone and wears good to the last. Bat had both the lodge-gates stencilled "The Earth *is* flat!" and all the barns and walls they could get at.... Oh Lord, but Huckley was drunk! We had to fill 'em up to make 'em forgive us for not being aeroplanes. Unthankful yokels! D'you realise that Emperors couldn't have commanded the talent Bat decanted on 'em? Why, 'Dal alone was.... And by eight o'clock not even a bit of paper left! The whole show packed up and gone, and Huckley hoo-aying for the earth being flat.'

'Very good,' I began. 'I am, as you know, a one-third proprietor of

The Bun.'

'I didn't forget that,' Ollyett interrupted. 'That was uppermost in my mind all the time. I've got a special account for *The Bun* to-day—it's an idyll—and just to show how I thought of you, I told 'Dal, coming home, about your Gubby Dance, and she told Winnie.

Winnie came back in our char-a-banc. After a bit we had to get out and dance it in a field. It's quite a dance the way we did it—and Lafone invented a sort of gorilla lockstep procession at the end. Bat had sent down a film-chap on the chance of getting something. He was the son of a clergyman—a most dynamic personality. He said there isn't anything for the cinema in meetings *qua* meetings—they lack action. Films are a branch of art by themselves. But he went wild over the Gubby. He said it was like Peter's vision at Joppa. He took about a million feet of it. Then I photoed it exclusive for *The Bun*. I've sent 'em in already, only remember we must eliminate Winnie's left leg in the first figure. It's too arresting.... And there you are! But I tell you I'm afraid of Bat. That man's the Personal Devil. He did it all. He didn't even come down himself. He said he'd distract his people.'

'Why didn't he ask me to come?' I persisted.

'Because he said you'd distract me. He said he wanted my brains on ice. He got 'em. I believe it's the best thing I've ever done.' He reached for *The Cake* and re-read it luxuriously. 'Yes, out and away the best—supremely quotable,' he concluded, and—after another

survey—'By God, what a genius I was yesterday!'

I would have been angry, but I had not the time. That morning, Press agencies grovelled to me in *The Bun* office for leave to use certain photos, which, they understood, I controlled, of a certain village dance. When I had sent the fifth man away on the edge of tears, my self-respect came back a little. Then there was *The Bun's* poster to get out. Art being elimination, I fined it down to two words (one too many, as it proved)—'The Gubby!' in red, at which our manager protested; but by five o'clock he told me that I was *the* Napoleon of Fleet Street. Ollyett's account in *The Bun* of the Geoplanarians' Exercises and Love Feast lacked the supreme shock of his version in *The Cake*, but it bruised more; while the photos of 'The Gubby' (which, with Winnie's left leg, was why I had set the doubtful press to work so early) were beyond praise and, next day, beyond price. But even then I did not understand.

A week later, I think it was, Bat Masquerier telephoned to me to come to the Trefoil.

'It's your turn now,' he said. 'I'm not asking Ollyett. Come to the stage-box.'

I went, and, as Bat's guest, was received as Royalty is not. We sat well back and looked out on the packed thousands. It was *Morgiana and Drexel*, that fluid and electric review which Bat—though he gave Lafone the credit—really created.

'Ye-es,' said Bat dreamily, after Morgiana had given 'the nasty jar' to the Forty Thieves in their forty oil 'combinations.' 'As you say, I've got 'em and I can hold 'em. What a man does doesn't matter much; and how he does it don't matter either. It's the *when*—the psychological moment. 'Press can't make up for it; money can't; brains can't. A lot's luck, but all the rest is genius. I'm not speaking about My people now. I'm talking of Myself.'

Then 'Dal—she was the only one who dared—knocked at the door and stood behind us all alive and panting as Morgiana. Lafone was carrying the police-court scene, and the house was ripped up crossways with laughter.

'Ah! Tell a fellow now,' she asked me for the twentieth time, 'did you love Nellie Farren when you were young?'

'Did we love her?' I answered. "If the earth and the sky and the sea"—There were three million of us, 'Dal, and we worshipped her.'

'How did she get it across?' Dal went on.

'She was Nellie. The houses used to coo over her when she came on.'

'I've had a good deal, but I've never been cooed over yet,' said 'Dal wistfully.

'It isn't the how, it's the when,' Bat repeated. 'Ah!'

He leaned forward as the house began to rock and peel full-throatedly. 'Dal fled. A sinuous and silent procession was filing into the police-court to a scarcely audible accompaniment. It was dressed—but the world and all its picture-palaces know how it was dressed. It danced and it danced, and it danced the dance which bit all humanity in the leg for half a year, and it wound up with the lockstep finale that mowed the house down in swathes, sobbing and aching. Somebody in the gallery moaned, 'Oh Gord, the Gubby!' and we heard the word run like a shudder, for they had not a full breath left among them. Then 'Dal came on, an electric star in her dark hair, the diamonds flashing in her three-inch heels—a vision that made no sign for thirty counted seconds while the police-court scene dissolved behind her into Morgiana's Manicure Palace, and they recovered themselves. The star on her forehead went out, and a soft light bathed her as she took—slowly, slowly to the croon of adoring strings—the eighteen paces forward. We saw her first as a queen alone; next as a queen for the first time conscious of her subjects, and at the end, when her hands fluttered, as a woman delighted, awed not a little, but transfigured and illuminated with sheer, compelling affection and goodwill. I caught the broken mutter of welcome—the coo which is more than tornadoes of applause. It died and rose and died again lovingly.

'She's got it across,' Bat whispered. 'I've never seen her like this. I told her to light up the star, but I was wrong, and she knew it.'

She's an artist.'

"Dal, you darling!' some one spoke, not loudly but it carried through the house.

'Thank *you!*' Dal answered, and in that broken tone one heard the last fetter riveted. 'Good evening, boys! I've just come from—now—where the dooce was it I have come from?' She turned to the impassive files of the Gubby dancers, and went on: 'Ah, so good of you to remind me, you dear, bun-faced things. I've just come from the village—The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat.'

She swept into that song with the full orchestra. It devastated the habitable earth for the next six months. Imagine, then, what its rage and pulse must have been at the incandescent hour of its birth! She only gave the chorus once. At the end of the second verse, 'Are you *with* me, boys?' she cried, and the house tore it clean away from her—'*Earth* was flat—_Earth_ was flat. Flat as my hat—Flutter than that'—drowning all but the bassoons and double-basses that marked the word.

'Wonderful,' I said to Bat. 'And it's only "Nuts in May," with variations.'

'Yes—but *I* did the variations,' he replied.

At the last verse she gestured to Carlini the conductor, who threw her up his baton. She caught it with a boy's ease. 'Are you *with*

me?' she cried once more, and—the maddened house behind her—abolished all the instruments except the guttural belch of the double-basses on '*Earth*'—'The Village that voted the *Earth* was flat—_Earth_ was flat!' It was delirium. Then she picked up the Gubby dancers and led them in a clattering improvised lockstep thrice round the stage till her last kick sent her diamond-hiked shoe catherine-wheeling to the electrolier.

I saw the forest of hands raised to catch it, heard the roaring and stamping pass through hurricanes to full typhoon; heard the song pinned down by the faithful double-basses as the bull-dog pins down the bellowing bull, overbear even those; till at last the curtain fell and Bat took me round to her dressing-room, where she lay spent after her seventh call. Still the song, through all those white-washed walls, shook the reinforced concrete of the Trefoil as steam pile-drivers shake the flanks of a dock.

'I'm all out—first time in my life. Ah! Tell a fellow now, did I get it across?' she whispered huskily.

'You know you did,' I replied as she dipped her nose deep in a beaker of barley-water. 'They cooed over you.'

Bat nodded. 'And poor Nellie's dead—in Africa, ain't it?'

'I hope I'll die before they stop cooing,' said 'Dal.

”*Earth* was flat—_Earth_ was flat!” Now it was more like mine-

pumps in flood.

'They'll have the house down if you don't take another,' some one called.

'Bless 'em!' said 'Dal, and went out for her eighth, when in the face of that cataract she said yawning, 'I don't know how *you* feel, children, but *I*'m dead. You be quiet.'

'Hold a minute,' said Bat to me. 'I've got to hear how it went in the provinces. Winnie Deans had it in Manchester, and Ramsden at Glasgow—and there are all the films too. I had rather a heavy week-end.'

The telephones presently reassured him.

'It'll do,' said he. 'And *he* said my home address was Jerusalem.' He left me humming the refrain of 'The Holy City.' Like Ollyett I found myself afraid of that man.

When I got out into the street and met the disgorging picture-palaces capering on the pavements and humming it (for he had put the gramophones on with the films), and when I saw far to the south the red electrics flash 'Gubby' across the Thames, I feared more than ever.



A few days passed which were like nothing except, perhaps, a suspense of fever in which the sick man perceives the searchlights of the world's assembled navies in act to converge on one minute fragment of wreckage—one only in all the black and agony-strewn sea. Then those beams focussed themselves. Earth as we knew it—the full circuit of our orb—laid the weight of its impersonal and searing curiosity on this Huckley which had voted that it was flat. It asked for news about Huckley—where and what it might be, and how it talked—it knew how it danced—and how it thought in its wonderful soul. And then, in all the zealous, merciless press, Huckley was laid out for it to look at, as a drop of pond water is exposed on the sheet of a magic-lantern show. But Huckley's sheet was only coterminous with the use of type among mankind. For the precise moment that was necessary, Fate ruled it that there should be nothing of first importance in the world's idle eye. One atrocious murder, a political crisis, an incautious or heady continental statesman, the mere catarrh of a king, would have wiped out the significance of our message, as a passing cloud annuls the urgent helio. But it was halcyon weather in every respect. Ollyett and I did not need to lift our little fingers any more than the Alpine climber whose last sentence has unkeyed the arch of the avalanche. The thing roared and pulverised and swept beyond eyesight all by itself—all by itself. And once well away, the fall of kingdoms could not have diverted it.

Ours is, after all, a kindly earth. While The Song ran and raped it with the cataleptic kick of 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,' multiplied by the West African significance of 'Everybody's doing it,' plus twice the infernal elementality of a certain tune in *Dona et Gamma*; when for all practical purposes, literary, dramatic, artistic, social, municipal, political, commercial, and administrative, the Earth *was* flat, the Rector of Huckley wrote to us—again as a lover of accuracy—to point out that the Huckley vote on 'the alleged flatness of this scene of our labours here below' was *not* unanimous; he and the doctor having voted against it. And the great Baron Reuter himself (I am sure it could have been none other) flashed that letter in full to the front, back, and both wings of this scene of our labours. For Huckley was News. *The Bun* also contributed a photograph which cost me some trouble to fake.

'We are a vital nation,' said Ollyett while we were discussing affairs at a Bat dinner. 'Only an Englishman could have written that letter at this present juncture.'

'It reminded me of a tourist in the Cave of the Winds under Niagara. Just one figure in a mackintosh. But perhaps you saw our photo?' I said proudly.

'Yes,' Bat replied. 'I've been to Niagara, too. And how's Huckley taking it?'

'They don't quite understand, of course,' said Ollyett. 'But it's

bringing pots of money into the place. Ever since the motor-bus excursions were started—'

'I didn't know they had been,' said Pallant.

'Oh yes. Motor char-a-bancs—uniformed guides and key-bugles included. They're getting a bit fed up with the tune there nowadays,' Ollyett added.

'They play it under his windows, don't they?' Bat asked. 'He can't stop the right of way across his park.'

'He cannot,' Ollyett answered. 'By the way, Woodhouse, I've bought that font for you from the sexton. I paid fifteen pounds for it.'

'What am I supposed to do with it?' asked Woodhouse.

'You give it to the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is fourteenth-century work all right. You can trust me.'

'Is it worth it—now?' said Pallant. 'Not that I'm weakening, but merely as a matter of tactics?'

'But this is true,' said Ollyett. 'Besides, it is my hobby, I always wanted to be an architect. I'll attend to it myself. It's too serious for *The Bun* and miles too good for *The Cake*.'

He broke ground in a ponderous architectural weekly, which had

never heard of Huckley. There was no passion in his statement, but mere fact backed by a wide range of authorities. He established beyond doubt that the old font at Huckley had been thrown out, on Sir Thomas's instigation, twenty years ago, to make room for a new one of Bath stone adorned with Limoges enamels; and that it had lain ever since in a corner of the sexton's shed. He proved, with learned men to support him, that there was only one other font in all England to compare with it. So Woodhouse bought it and presented it to a grateful South Kensington which said it would see the earth still flatter before it returned the treasure to purblind Huckley. Bishops by the benchful and most of the Royal Academy, not to mention 'Margaritas ante Porcos,' wrote fervently to the papers. *Punch* based a political cartoon on it; the *Times* a third leader, 'The Lust of Newness'; and the *Spectator* a scholarly and delightful middle, 'Village Hausmania.' The vast amused outside world said in all its tongues and types: 'Of course! This is just what Huckley would do!' And neither Sir Thomas nor the Rector nor the sexton nor any one else wrote to deny it.

'You see,' said Ollyett, 'this is much more of a blow to Huckley than it looks—because every word of it's true. Your Gubby dance was inspiration, I admit, but it hadn't its roots in—'

'Two hemispheres and four continents so far,' I pointed out.

'Its roots in the hearts of Huckley was what I was going to say. Why don't you ever come down and look at the place? You've

never seen it since we were stopped there.'

'I've only my week-ends free,' I said, 'and you seem to spend yours there pretty regularly—with the side-car. I was afraid—'

'Oh, *that's* all right,' he said cheerily. 'We're quite an old engaged couple now. As a matter of fact, it happened after "the gravid polled Angus" business. Come along this Saturday. Woodhouse says he'll run us down after lunch. He wants to see Huckley too.'

Pallant could not accompany us, but Bat took his place.

'It's odd,' said Bat, 'that none of us except Ollyett has ever set eyes on Huckley since that time. That's what I always tell My people. Local colour is all right after you've got your idea. Before that, it's a mere nuisance.' He regaled us on the way down with panoramic views of the success—geographical and financial—of 'The Gubby' and The Song.

'By the way,' said he, 'I've assigned 'Dal all the gramophone rights of "The Earth." She's a born artist. 'Hadn't sense enough to hit me for triple-dubs the morning after. She'd have taken it out in coos.'

'Bless her! And what'll she make out of the gramophone rights?' I asked.

'Lord knows!' he replied. 'I've made fifty-four thousand my little end of the business, and it's only just beginning. Hear *that!*'

A shell-pink motor-brake roared up behind us to the music on a key-bugle of 'The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat.' In a few minutes we overtook another, in natural wood, whose occupants were singing it through their noses.

'I don't know that agency. It must be Cook's,' said Ollyett. 'They *do* suffer.' We were never out of earshot of the tune the rest of the way to Huckley.

Though I knew it would be so, I was disappointed with the actual aspect of the spot we had—it is not too much to say—created in the face of the nations. The alcoholic pub; the village green; the Baptist chapel; the church; the sexton's shed; the Rectory whence the so-wonderful letters had come; Sir Thomas's park gate-pillars still violently declaring 'The Earth *is* flat,' were as mean, as average, as ordinary as the photograph of a room where a murder has been committed. Ollyett, who, of course, knew the place specially well, made the most of it to us. Bat, who had employed it as a back-cloth to one of his own dramas, dismissed it as a thing used and emptied, but Woodhouse expressed my feelings when he said: 'Is that all—after all we've done?'

'I know,' said Ollyett soothingly. "Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing: When Iliion like a mist rose into towers." I've felt the same sometimes, though it has been Paradise for me. But they *do* suffer.'

The fourth brake in thirty minutes had just turned into Sir Thomas's park to tell the Hall that 'The *Earth* was flat'; a knot of obviously American tourists were kodaking his lodge-gates; while the tea-shop opposite the lych-gate was full of people buying postcards of the old font as it had lain twenty years in the sexton's shed. We went to the alcoholic pub and congratulated the proprietor.

'It's bringin' money to the place,' said he. 'But in a sense you can buy money too dear. It isn't doin' us any good. People are laughin' at us. That's what they're doin'.... Now, with regard to that Vote of ours you may have heard talk about....'

'For Gorze sake, chuck that votin' business,' cried an elderly man at the door. 'Money-gettin' or no money-gettin', we're fed up with it.'

'Well, I do think,' said the publican, shifting his ground, 'I do think Sir Thomas might ha' managed better in some things.'

'He tole me,'—the elderly man shouldered his way to the bar—'he tole me twenty years ago to take an' lay that font in my tool-shed. He *tole* me so himself. An' now, after twenty years, me own wife makin' me out little better than the common 'angman!'

'That's the sexton,' the publican explained. 'His good lady sells the postcards—if you 'aven't got some. But we feel Sir Thomas might ha' done better.'

'What's he got to do with it?' said Woodhouse.

'There's nothin' we can trace 'ome to 'im in so many words, but we think he might 'ave saved us the font business. Now, in regard to that votin' business—'

'Chuck it! Oh, chuck it!' the sexton roared, 'or you'll 'ave me cuttin' my throat at cock-crow. 'Ere's another parcel of fun-makers!'

A motor-brake had pulled up at the door and a multitude of men and women immediately descended. We went out to look. They bore rolled banners, a reading-desk in three pieces, and, I specially noticed, a collapsible harmonium, such as is used on ships at sea.

'Salvation Army?' I said, though I saw no uniforms.

Two of them unfurled a banner between poles which bore the legend: 'The Earth *is* flat.' Woodhouse and I turned to Bat. He shook his head. 'No, no! Not me.... If I had only seen their costumes in advance!'

'Good Lord!' said Ollyett. 'It's the genuine Society!'

The company advanced on the green with the precision of people well broke to these movements. Scene-shifters could not have been quicker with the three-piece rostrum, nor stewards with the harmonium. Almost before its cross-legs had been kicked into their

catches, certainly before the tourists by the lodge-gates had begun to move over, a woman sat down to it and struck up a hymn:

Hear ther truth our tongues are telling,

Spread ther light from shore to shore,

God hath given man a dwelling

Flat and flat for evermore.

When ther Primal Dark retreated,

When ther deeps were undesigned,

He with rule and level meted

Habitation for mankind!

I saw sick envy on Bat's face. 'Curse Nature,' he muttered. 'She gets ahead of you every time. To think *I* forgot hymns and a harmonium!'

Then came the chorus:

Hear ther truth our tongues are telling,

Spread ther light from shore to shore—

Oh, be faithful! Oh, be truthful!

Earth is flat for evermore.

They sang several verses with the fervour of Christians awaiting their lions. Then there were growlings in the air. The sexton, embraced by the landlord, two-stepped out of the pub-door. Each was trying to out roar the other. 'Apologising in advance for what he says,' the landlord shouted: 'You'd better go away' (here the sexton began to speak words). 'This isn't the time nor yet the place for—for any more o' this chat.'

The crowd thickened. I saw the village police-sergeant come out of his cottage buckling his belt.

'But surely,' said the woman at the harmonium, 'there must be some mistake. We are not suffragettes.'

'Damn it! They'd be a change,' cried the sexton. 'You get out of this! Don't talk! *I* can't stand it for one! Get right out, or we'll font you!'

The crowd which was being recruited from every house in sight echoed the invitation. The sergeant pushed forward. A man beside the reading-desk said: 'But surely we are among dear friends and sympathisers. Listen to me for a moment.'

It was the moment that a passing char-a-banc chose to strike into The Song. The effect was instantaneous. Bat, Ollyett, and I, who by divers roads have learned the psychology of crowds, retreated

towards the tavern door. Woodhouse, the newspaper proprietor, anxious, I presume, to keep touch with the public, dived into the thick of it. Every one else told the Society to go away at once. When the lady at the harmonium (I began to understand why it is sometimes necessary to kill women) pointed at the stencilled park pillars and called them 'the cromlechs of our common faith,' there was a snarl and a rush. The police-sergeant checked it, but advised the Society to keep on going. The Society withdrew into the brake fighting, as it were, a rear-guard action of oratory up each step. The collapsed harmonium was hauled in last, and with the perfect unreason of crowds, they cheered it loudly, till the chauffeur slipped in his clutch and sped away. Then the crowd broke up, congratulating all concerned except the sexton, who was held to have disgraced his office by having sworn at ladies. We strolled across the green towards Woodhouse, who was talking to the police-sergeant near the park-gates. We were not twenty yards from him when we saw Sir Thomas Ingell emerge from the lodge and rush furiously at Woodhouse with an uplifted stick, at the same time shrieking: 'I'll teach you to laugh, you—' but Ollyett has the record of the language. By the time we reached them, Sir Thomas was on the ground; Woodhouse, very white, held the walking-stick and was saying to the sergeant:

'I give this person in charge for assault.'

'But, good Lord!' said the sergeant, whiter than Woodhouse. 'It's Sir Thomas.'

'Whoever it is, it isn't fit to be at large,' said Woodhouse. The crowd suspecting something wrong began to reassemble, and all the English horror of a row in public moved us, headed by the sergeant, inside the lodge. We shut both park-gates and lodge-door.

'You saw the assault, sergeant,' Woodhouse went on. 'You can testify I used no more force than was necessary to protect myself. You can testify that I have not even damaged this person's property. (Here! take your stick, you!) You heard the filthy language he used.'

'I—I can't say I did,' the sergeant stammered.

'Oh, but *we* did!' said Ollyett, and repeated it, to the apron-veiled horror of the lodge-keeper's wife.

Sir Thomas on a hard kitchen chair began to talk. He said he had 'stood enough of being photographed like a wild beast,' and expressed loud regret that he had not killed 'that man,' who was 'conspiring with the sergeant to laugh at him.'

"Ad you ever seen 'im before, Sir Thomas?" the sergeant asked.

'No! But it's time an example was made here. I've never seen the sweep in my life.'

I think it was Bat Masquerier's magnetic eye that recalled the past to him, for his face changed and his jaw dropped. 'But I have!' he

groaned. 'I remember now.'

Here a writhing man entered by the back door. He was, he said, the village solicitor. I do not assert that he licked Woodhouse's boots, but we should have respected him more if he had and been done with it. His notion was that the matter could be accommodated, arranged and compromised for gold, and yet more gold. The sergeant thought so too. Woodhouse undeceived them both. To the sergeant he said, 'Will you or will you not enter the charge?' To the village solicitor he gave the name of his lawyers, at which the man wrung his hands and cried, 'Oh, Sir T., Sir T.!' in a miserable falsetto, for it was a Bat Masquerier of a firm. They conferred together in tragic whispers.

'I don't dive after Dickens,' said Ollyett to Bat and me by the window, 'but every time *I* get into a row I notice the police-court always fills up with his characters.'

'I've noticed that too,' said Bat. 'But the odd thing is you mustn't give the public straight Dickens—not in My business. I wonder why that is.'

Then Sir Thomas got his second wind and cursed the day that he, or it may have been we, were born. I feared that though he was a Radical he might apologise and, since he was an M.P., might lie his way out of the difficulty. But he was utterly and truthfully beside himself. He asked foolish questions—such as what we were doing

in the village at all, and how much blackmail Woodhouse expected to make out of him. But neither Woodhouse nor the sergeant nor the writhing solicitor listened. The upshot of their talk, in the chimney-corner, was that Sir Thomas stood engaged to appear next Monday before his brother magistrates on charges of assault, disorderly conduct, and language calculated, etc. Ollyett was specially careful about the language.

Then we left. The village looked very pretty in the late light—pretty and tuneful as a nest of nightingales.

'You'll turn up on Monday, I hope,' said Woodhouse, when we reached town. That was his only allusion to the affair.

So we turned up—through a world still singing that the Earth was flat—at the little clay-coloured market-town with the large Corn Exchange and the small Jubilee memorial. We had some difficulty in getting seats in the court. Woodhouse's imported London lawyer was a man of commanding personality, with a voice trained to convey blasting imputations by tone. When the case was called, he rose and stated his client's intention not to proceed with the charge. His client, he went on to say, had not entertained, and, of course, in the circumstances could not have entertained, any suggestion of accepting on behalf of public charities any moneys that might have been offered to him on the part of Sir Thomas's estate. At the same time, no one acknowledged more sincerely than his client the spirit in which those offers had been made by those

entitled to make them. But, as a matter of fact—here he became the man of the world colloquing with his equals—certain—er—details had come to his client's knowledge *since* the lamentable outburst, which ... He shrugged his shoulders. Nothing was served by going into them, but he ventured to say that, had those painful circumstances only been known earlier, his client would—again 'of course'—never have dreamed—A gesture concluded the sentence, and the ensnared Bench looked at Sir Thomas with new and withdrawing eyes. Frankly, as they could see, it would be nothing less than cruelty to proceed further with this—er-unfortunate affair. He asked leave, therefore, to withdraw the charge *in toto*, and at the same time to express his client's deepest sympathy with all who had been in any way distressed, as his client had been, by the fact and the publicity of proceedings which he could, of course, again assure them that his client would never have dreamed of instituting if, as he hoped he had made plain, certain facts had been before his client at the time when.... But he had said enough. For his fee it seemed to me that he had.

Heaven inspired Sir Thomas's lawyer—all of a sweat lest his client's language should come out—to rise up and thank him. Then, Sir Thomas—not yet aware what leprosy had been laid upon him, but grateful to escape on any terms—followed suit. He was heard in interested silence, and people drew back a pace as Gehazi passed forth.

'You hit hard,' said Bat to Woodhouse afterwards. 'His own people

think he's mad.'

'You don't say so? I'll show you some of his letters to-night at dinner,' he replied.

He brought them to the Red Amber Room of the Chop Suey. We forgot to be amazed, as till then we had been amazed, over the Song or 'The Gubby,' or the full tide of Fate that seemed to run only for our sakes. It did not even interest Ollyett that the verb 'to huckle' had passed into the English leader-writers' language. We were studying the interior of a soul, flash-lighted to its grimmest corners by the dread of 'losing its position.'

'And then it thanked you, didn't it, for dropping the case?' said Pallant.

'Yes, and it sent me a telegram to confirm.' Woodhouse turned to Bat. 'Now d'you think I hit too hard?' he asked.

'No-o!' said Bat. 'After all—I'm talking of every one's business now—one can't ever do anything in Art that comes up to Nature in any game in life. Just think how this thing has—'

'Just let me run through that little case of yours again,' said Pallant, and picked up *The Bun* which had it set out in full.

'Any chance of 'Dal looking in on us to-night?' Ollyett began.

'She's occupied with her Art too,' Bat answered bitterly. 'What's the use of Art? Tell me, some one!' A barrel-organ outside promptly pointed out that the *Earth* was flat. 'The gramophone's killing street organs, but I let loose a hundred-and-seventy-four of those hurdy gurdys twelve hours after The Song,' said Bat. 'Not counting the Provinces.' His face brightened a little.

'Look here!' said Pallant over the paper. 'I don't suppose you or those asinine J.P.'s knew it—but your lawyer ought to have known that you've all put your foot in it most confoundedly over this assault case.'

'What's the matter?' said Woodhouse.

'It's ludicrous. It's insane. There isn't two penn'orth of legality in the whole thing. Of course, you could have withdrawn the charge, but the way you went about it is childish—besides being illegal. What on earth was the Chief Constable thinking of?'

'Oh, he was a friend of Sir Thomas's. They all were for that matter,' I replied.

'He ought to be hanged. So ought the Chairman of the Bench. I'm talking as a lawyer now.'

'Why, what have we been guilty of? Misprision of treason or compounding a felony—or what?' said Ollyett.

'I'll tell you later.' Pallant went back to the paper with knitted brows, smiling unpleasantly from time to time. At last he laughed.

'Thank you!' he said to Woodhouse. 'It ought to be pretty useful—for us.'

'What d'you mean?' said Ollyett.

'For our side. They are all Rads who are mixed up in this—from the Chief Constable down. There must be a Question. There must be a Question.'

'Yes, but I wanted the charge withdrawn in my own way,' Woodhouse insisted.

'That's nothing to do with the case. It's the legality of your silly methods. You wouldn't understand if I talked till morning' He began to pace the room, his hands behind him. 'I wonder if I can get it through our Whip's thick head that it's a chance.... That comes of stuffing the Bench with radical tinkers,' he muttered.

'Oh, sit down!' said Woodhouse.

'Where's your lawyer to be found now?' he jerked out.

'At the Trefoil,' said Bat promptly. 'I gave him the stage-box for to-night. He's an artist too.'

'Then I'm going to see him,' said Pallant. 'Properly handled this

ought to be a godsend for our side.' He withdrew without apology.

'Certainly, this thing keeps on opening up, and up,' I remarked inanely.

'It's beyond me!' said Bat. 'I don't think if I'd known I'd have ever ... Yes, I would, though. He said my home address was—'

'It was his tone—his tone!' Ollyett almost shouted. Woodhouse said nothing, but his face whitened as he brooded.

'Well, any way,' Bat went on, 'I'm glad I always believed in God and Providence and all those things. Else I should lose my nerve. We've put it over the whole world—the full extent of the geographical globe. We couldn't stop it if we wanted to now. It's got to burn itself out. I'm not in charge any more. What d'you expect'll happen next. Angels?'

I expected nothing. Nothing that I expected approached what I got. Politics are not my concern, but, for the moment, since it seemed that they were going to 'huckle' with the rest, I took an interest in them. They impressed me as a dog's life without a dog's decencies, and I was confirmed in this when an unshaven and unwashed Pallant called on me at ten o'clock one morning, begging for a bath and a couch.

'Bail too?' I asked. He was in evening dress and his eyes were sunk feet in his head.

'No,' he said hoarsely. 'All night sitting. Fifteen divisions. 'Nother to-night. Your place was nearer than mine, so—' He began to undress in the hall.

When he awoke at one o'clock he gave me lurid accounts of what he said was history, but which was obviously collective hysteria. There had been a political crisis. He and his fellow M.P.'s had 'done things'—I never quite got at the things—for eighteen hours on end, and the pitiless Whips were even then at the telephones to herd 'em up to another dog-fight. So he snorted and grew hot all over again while he might have been resting.

'I'm going to pitch in my question about that miscarriage of justice at Huckley this afternoon, if you care to listen to it,' he said. 'It'll be absolutely thrown away—in our present state. I told 'em so; but it's my only chance for weeks. P'raps Woodhouse would like to come.'

'I'm sure he would. Anything to do with Huckley interests us,' I said.

'It'll miss fire, I'm afraid. Both sides are absolutely cooked. The present situation has been working up for some time. You see the row was bound to come, etc. etc.,' and he flew off the handle once more.

I telephoned to Woodhouse, and we went to the House together. It was a dull, sticky afternoon with thunder in the air. For some

reason or other, each side was determined to prove its virtue and endurance to the utmost. I heard men snarling about it all round me. 'If they won't spare us, we'll show 'em no mercy,' 'Break the brutes up from the start. They can't stand late hours.' 'Come on! No shirking! I know *you've* had a Turkish bath,' were some of the sentences I caught on our way. The House was packed already, and one could feel the negative electricity of a jaded crowd wrenching at one's own nerves, and depressing the afternoon soul.

'This is bad!' Woodhouse whispered. 'There'll be a row before they've finished. Look at the Front Benches!' And he pointed out little personal signs by which I was to know that each man was on edge. He might have spared himself. The House was ready to snap before a bone had been thrown. A sullen minister rose to reply to a staccato question. His supporters cheered defiantly. 'None o' that! None o' that!' came from the Back Benches. I saw the Speaker's face stiffen like the face of a helmsman as he humours a hard-mouthed yacht after a sudden following sea. The trouble was barely met in time. There came a fresh, apparently causeless gust a few minutes later—savage, threatening, but futile. It died out—one could hear the sigh—in sudden wrathful realisation of the dreary hours ahead, and the ship of state drifted on.

Then Pallant—and the raw House winced at the torture of his voice—rose. It was a twenty-line question, studded with legal technicalities. The gist of it was that he wished to know whether the appropriate Minister was aware that there had been a grave

miscarriage of justice on such and such a date, at such and such a place, before such and such justices of the peace, in regard to a case which arose—

I heard one desperate, weary 'damn!' float up from the pit of that torment. Pallant sawed on—'out of certain events which occurred at the village of Huckley.'

The House came to attention with a parting of the lips like a hiccough, and it flashed through my mind.... Pallant repeated, 'Huckley. The village—'

'That voted the *Earth* was flat.' A single voice from a back Bench sang it once like a lone frog in a far pool.

'*Earth* was flat,' croaked another voice opposite.

'*Earth* was flat.' There were several. Then several more.

It was, you understand, the collective, overstrained nerve of the House, snapping, strand by strand to various notes, as the hawser parts from its moorings.

'The Village that voted the *Earth* was flat.' The tune was beginning to shape itself. More voices were raised and feet began to beat time. Even so it did not occur to me that the thing would—

'The Village that voted the *Earth* was flat!' It was easier now to see

who were not singing. There were still a few. Of a sudden (and this proves the fundamental instability of the cross-bench mind) a cross-bencher leaped on his seat and there played an imaginary double-bass with tremendous maestro-like waggings of the elbow.

The last strand parted. The ship of state drifted out helpless on the rocking tide of melody.

'The Village that voted the *Earth* was flat!

The Village that voted the *Earth* was flat!'

The Irish first conceived the idea of using their order-papers as funnels wherewith to reach the correct '*vroom—vroom*' on '*Earth*.' Labour, always conservative and respectable at a crisis, stood out longer than any other section, but when it came in it was howling syndicalism. Then, without distinction of Party, fear of constituents, desire for office, or hope of emolument, the House sang at the tops and at the bottoms of their voices, swaying their stale bodies and epileptically beating with their swelled feet. They sang 'The Village that voted the *Earth* was flat': first, because they wanted to, and secondly—which is the terror of that song—because they could not stop. For no consideration could they stop.

Pallant was still standing up. Some one pointed at him and they laughed. Others began to point, lunging, as it were, in time with the tune. At this moment two persons came in practically abreast from behind the Speaker's chair, and halted appalled. One happened to

be the Prime Minister and the other a messenger. The House, with tears running down their cheeks, transferred their attention to the paralysed couple. They pointed six hundred forefingers at them. They rocked, they waved, and they rolled while they pointed, but still they sang. When they weakened for an instant, Ireland would yell: 'Are ye *with* me, bhoys?' and they all renewed their strength like Antaeus. No man could say afterwards what happened in the Press or the Strangers' Gallery. It was the House, the hysterical and abandoned House of Commons that held all eyes, as it deafened all ears. I saw both Front Benches bend forward, some with their foreheads on their despatch-boxes, the rest with their faces in their hands; and their moving shoulders jolted the House out of its last rag of decency. Only the Speaker remained unmoved. The entire press of Great Britain bore witness next day that he had not even bowed his head. The Angel of the Constitution, for vain was the help of man, foretold him the exact moment at which the House would have broken into 'The Gubby.' He is reported to have said: 'I heard the Irish beginning to shuffle it. So I adjourned.' Pallant's version is that he added: 'And I was never so grateful to a private member in all my life as I was to Mr. Pallant.'

He made no explanation. He did not refer to orders or disorders. He simply adjourned the House till six that evening. And the House adjourned—some of it nearly on all fours.

I was not correct when I said that the Speaker was the only man who did not laugh. Woodhouse was beside me all the time. His face

was set and quite white—as white, they told me, as Sir Thomas Ingell’s when he went, by request, to a private interview with his Chief Whip.

[The end]

Rudyard Kipling’s short story: Village That Voted The Earth Was Flat

The Coup

The blue and silver 707 jet, displaying a large “P” on its tail plane, taxied to a halt at the north end of Lagos International Airport. A fleet of six black Mercedes drove up to the side of the aircraft and waited in a line resembling a land-bound crocodile. Six sweating, uniformed drivers leaped out and stood to attention. When the driver of the

front car opened his rear door,
Colonel Usman of the Federal Guard
stepped out, and walked quickly to the
bottom of the passenger steps which
had been hurriedly pushed into place
by four of the airport staff.

The front section cabin door swung
back and the colonel stared up into
the gap, to see, framed against the
dark interior of the cabin, a slim,
attractive hostess dressed in a blue
suit with silver piping. On her jacket
lapel was a large “P”. She turned and
nodded in the direction of the cabin.

A few seconds later, an immaculately

dressed tall man with thick black hair and deep brown eyes replaced her in the doorway. The man had an air of effortless style about him which self-made millionaires would have paid a considerable part of their fortune to possess. The colonel saluted as Senhor Eduardo Francisco de Silveira, head of the Prentino empire gave a curt nod.

De Silveira emerged from the coolness of his airconditioned 707 into the burning Nigerian sun without showing the slightest sign of discomfort. The colonel guided the tall, elegant

Brazilian, who was accompanied only by his private secretary, to the front Mercedes while the rest of the Prentino staff filed down the back stairway of the aircraft and

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filled the other five cars. The driver, a corporal who had been detailed to be available night and day for the honoured guest, opened the rear door of the front car and saluted. Eduardo de Silveira showed no sign of acknowledgment. The corporal smiled nervously, revealing the largest set of

white teeth the Brazilian had ever seen.

“Welcome to Lagos,” the corporal volunteered. “Hope you make very big deal while you are in Nigeria.”

Eduardo did not comment as he settled back into his seat and stared out of the tinted window to watch some passengers of a British Airways 707 that had landed just before him form a long queue on the hot tarmac as they waited patiently to clear customs. The driver put the car into first gear and the black crocodile proceeded on its journey. Colonel Usman who was now

in the front seat beside the corporal, soon discovered that the Brazilian guest did not care for small talk, and the secretary who was seated by his employer's side never once opened his mouth. The colonel, used to doing things by example, remained silent, leaving de Silveira to consider his plan of campaign.

Eduardo Francisco de Silveira had been born in the small village of Rebeti, a hundred miles north of Rio de Janeiro, heir to one of the two most powerful family fortunes in Brazil. He had been educated privately in

Switzerland before attending the University of California in Los Angeles. He went on to complete his education at the Harvard Business School. After Harvard he returned from America to work in Brazil where he started neither at the top or the bottom of the firm but in the middle, managing his family's mining interests in Minas Gerais. He quickly worked his way to the top, even faster than his father had planned, but then the boy turned out to be not so much a chip as a chunk off the old block. At twenty-nine he married Maria, eldest

daughter of his father's closest

friend, and when twelve years later his father died Eduardo succeeded to the Prentino throne. There were seven sons in all: the second son, Alfredo, was now in charge of banking; Joao ran shipping; Carlos orga

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nised construction; Manoel arranged food and supplies; Jaime managed the family newspapers, and little Antonio, the last- and certainly the least – ran the family farms. All the brothers reported to Eduardo before making any mayor decision, for he was still chairman of

the largest private company in Brazil, despite the boastful claims of his old family enemy, Manuel Rodrigues.

When General Castelo Branco's military regime overthrew the civilian government in 1964 the generals agreed that they could not kill off all the de Silveiras or the Rodrigues so they had better learn to live with the two rival families. The de Silveiras for their part had always had enough sense never to involve themselves in politics other than by making payments to every government official, military or civilian, according to his rank. This

ensured that the Prentino empire grew alongside whatever faction came to power. One of the reasons Eduardo de Silveira had allocated three days in his crowded schedule for a visit to Lagos was that the Nigerian system of government seemed to resemble so closely that of Brazil, and at least on this project he had cut the ground from under Manuel Rodrigues' feet which would more than make up for losing the Rio airport tender to him. Eduardo smiled at the thought of Rodrigue8 not realising that he was in Nigeria to close a deal that could make him twice the size of his

rival.

As the black Mercedes moved slowly through the teeming noisy streets paying no attention to traffic lights, red or green, Eduardo thought back to his first meeting with General Mohammed, the Nigerian Head of State, on the occasion of the President's official visit to Brazil. Speaking at the dinner given in General Mohammed's honour, President Ernesto Geisel declared a hope that the two countries would move towards closer co-operation in politics and commerce. Eduardo agreed with his unelected leader and was happy to leave the politics to

the President if he allowed him to get
on with the commerce. General Mohammed
made his reply, on behalf of the guests,
in an English accent that normally

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would only be associated with Oxford.

The general talked at length of the
project that was most dear to his
heart, the building of a new Nigerian
capital in Abuja, a city which he
considered might even rival Brasilia.

After the speeches were over, the
general took de Silveira on one side
and spoke in greater detail of the

Abuja city project asking him if he might consider a private tender.

Eduardo smiled and only wished that his enemy, Rodrigues, could hear the intimate conversation he was having with the Nigerian Head of State.

Eduardo studied carefully the outline proposal sent to him a week later, after the general had returned to Nigeria, and agreed to his first request by despatching a research team of seven men to fly to Lagos and complete a feasibility study on Abuja. One month later, the team's detailed report was in de Silveira's hands.

Eduardo came to the conclusion that the potential profitability of the project was worthy of a full proposal to the Nigerian government. He contacted General Mohammed personally to find that he was in full agreement and authorised the go-ahead. This time twenty-three men were despatched to Lagos and three months and one hundred and seventy pages later, Eduardo signed and sealed the proposal designated as, "A New Capital for Nigeria". He made only one alteration to the final document. The cover of the proposal was in blue and silver

with the Prentino logo in the centre:

Eduardo had that changed to green and

white, the national colours of

Nigeria, with the national emblem of

an eagle astride two horses: he

realised it was the little things that

impressed generals and often tipped

the scales. He sent ten copies of the

feasibility study to Nigeria's Head of

State with an invoice for one million

dollars.

When General Mohammed had studied the

proposal he invited Eduardo de

Silveira to visit Nigeria as his

guest, in order to discuss the next

stage of the project. De Silveira
telexed back, provisionally accepting
the invitation, and pointing out
politely but firmly that he had not
yet received

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reimbursement for the one million
dollars spent on the initial
feasibility study. The money was
telexed by return from the Central Bank
of Nigeria and de Silveira managed to
find four consecutive days in his diary
for “The New Federal Capital project”:
his schedule demanded that he arrived

in Lagos on a Monday morning because he had to be in Paris at the latest by the Thursday night.

While these thoughts were going through Eduardo's mind, the Mercedes drew up outside Dodan Barracks. The iron gates swung open and a full armed guard gave the general salute, an honour normally afforded only to a visiting Head of State. The black Mercedes drove slowly through the gates and came to a halt outside the President's private residence. A brigadier waited on the steps to escort de Silveira through to the President.

The two men had lunch together in a small room that closely resembled a British officers' mess. The meal consisted of a steak, that would not have been acceptable to any South American cowhand surrounded by vegetables that reminded Eduardo of his schooldays.

Still, Eduardo had never yet met a soldier who understood that a good chef was every bit as important as a good barman. During the lunch they talked in overall terms about the problems of building a whole new city in the middle of an equatorial jungle.

The provisional estimate of the cost

of the project had been one thousand million dollars but de Silveira warned the President that the final outcome might well end up nearer three thousand million dollars the President's jaw dropped slightly. De Silveira had to admit that the project would be the most ambitious that Prentino International had ever tackled, but he was quick to point out to the President that the same would be true of any construction company in the world. De Silveira, not a man to play his best card early, waited until the coffee to slip into the conversation

that he had just been awarded, against heavy opposition (that had included Rodrigues), the contract to build an eight-lane highway

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through the Amazonian jungle, which would eventually link up with the Pan-American highway, a contract second in size only to the one they were now contemplating in Nigeria. The President was impressed and inquired if the venture would not prevent de Silveira involving himself in the new capital project.

“I’ll know the answer to that question in three days’ time,” replied the Brazilian, and undertook to have a further discussion with the Head of State at the end of his visit when he would let him know if he was prepared to continue with the scheme.

After lunch Eduardo was driven to the Federal Palace Hotel where the entire sixth floor had been placed at his disposal. Several complaining guests who had come to Nigeria to close deals involving mere millions had been asked to vacate their rooms at short notice to make way for de Silveira and his

staff. Eduardo knew nothing of these goings on, as there was always a room available for him wherever he arrived in the world.

The six Mercedes drew up outside the hotel and the colonel guided his charge through the swing doors and past reception. Eduardo had not checked himself into a hotel for the past fourteen years except on those occasions when he chose to register under an assumed name, not wanting anyone to know the identity of the woman he was with.

The chairman of Prentino

International walked down the centre of the hotel's main corridor and stepped into a waiting lift. His legs went weak and he suddenly felt sick. In the corner of the lift stood a stubby, balding, overweight man, who was dressed in a pair of old jeans and a tee-shirt, his mouth continually opening and closing as he chewed gum. The two men stood as far apart as possible, neither showing any sign of recognition. The lift stopped at the fifth floor and Manuel Rodrigues, chairman of Rodrigues International S.A., stepped out, leaving behind him

the man who had been his bitter rival
for thirty years.

Eduardo held on to the rail in the lift
to steady himself as

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he still felt dizzy. How he despised
that uneducated selfmade upstart whose
family of four half-brothers, all by
different fathers, claimed they now ran
the largest construction company in
Brazil. Both men were as interested in
the other's failure as they were in
their own success.

Eduardo was somewhat puzzled to know

what Rodrigues could possibly be doing in Lagos as he felt certain that his rival had not come into contact with the Nigerian President. After all, Eduardo had never collected the rent on a small house in Rio that was occupied by the mistress of a very senior official in the government's protocol department. And the man's only task was to be certain that Rodrigues was never invited to any function attended by a visiting dignitary when in Brazil. The continual absence of Rodrigues from these state occasions ensured the absent-mindedness of Eduardo's rent collector in Rio.

Eduardo would never have admitted to anyone that Rodrigues' presence worried him, but he nevertheless resolved to find out immediately what had brought his old enemy to Nigeria. Once he reached his suite de Silveira instructed his private secretary to check what Manuel Rodrigues was up to. Eduardo was prepared to return to Brazil immediately if Rodrigues turned out to be involved in any way with the new capital project, while one young lady in Rio would suddenly find herself looking for alternative accommodation.

Within an hour, his private secretary

returned with the information that his chairman had requested. Rodrigues, he had discovered, was in Nigeria to tender for the contract to construct a new port in Lagos and was apparently not involved in any way with the new capital, and in fact was still trying to arrange a meeting with the President.

“Which minister is in charge of the ports and when am I due to see him?” asked de Silveira.

The secretary delved into his appointments file. “The Minister of Transport,” the secretary said. “You have an appointment with him at nine

o'clock on Thursday morning." The

Nigerian Civil Service had mapped out a

four-day

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schedule of meetings for de Silveira

that included every cabinet minister

involved in the new city project.

"It's the last meeting before your

final discussion with the President.

You then fly on to Paris."

"Excellent. Remind me of this

conversation five minutes before I see

the minister and again when I talk to

the President. "

The secretary made a note in the file and left.

Eduardo sat alone in his suite, going over the reports on the new capital project submitted by his experts. Some of his team were already showing signs of nervousness. One particular anxiety that always came up with a large construction contract was the principal's ability to pay, and pay on time. Failure to do so was the quickest route to bankruptcy, but since the discovery of oil in Nigeria there seemed to be no shortage of income and certainly no shortage of

people willing to spend that money on behalf of the government. These anxieties did not worry de Silveira as he always insisted on a substantial payment in advance; otherwise he wouldn't move himself or his vast staff one centimetre out of Brazil.

However, the massive scope of this particular contract made the circumstances somewhat unusual.

Eduardo realised that it would be most damaging to his international reputation if he started the assignment and then was seen not to complete it. He re-read the reports

over a quiet dinner in his room and retired to bed early, having wasted an hour in vainly trying to place a call through to his wife.

De Silveira's first appointment the next morning was with the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Eduardo wore a newly-pressed suit, fresh shirt, and highly polished shoes: for four days no one would see him in the same clothes. At eight-forty-five there was a quiet knock on the door of his suite and the secretary opened it to find Colonel Usman standing to attention, waiting to escort Eduardo

to the bank. As they were leaving the hotel Eduardo again saw Manuel Rodrigues, wearing the same pair of jeans, the same crumpled tee-shirt, and probably chewing the same gum

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as he stepped into a BMW in front of him. De Silveira only stopped scowling at the disappearing BMW when he remembered his Thursday morning appointment with the minister in charge of ports, followed by a meeting with the President.

The Governor of the Central Bank of

Nigeria was in the habit of proposing how payment schedules would be met and completion orders would be guaranteed.

He had never been told by anyone that if the payment was seven days overdue he could consider the contract null and void, and they could take it or leave it. The minister would have made some comment if Abuja had not been the President's pet project. That position established, de Silveira went on to check the bank's reserves, long-term deposits, overseas commitments, and estimated oil revenues for the next five years. He left the Governor in what

could only be described as a
jelly-like state. Glistening and
wobbling. Eduardo's next appointment was
an unavoidable courtesy call on the
Brazilian Ambassador for lunch. He hated
these functions as he believed embassies
to be fit only for cocktail parties and
discussion of out-of-date trivia,
neither of which he cared for. The food
in such establishments was invariably
bad and the company worse. It turned out
to be no different on this occasion and
the only profit (Eduardo considered
everything in terms of profit and loss)
to be derived from the encounter was the

information that Manuel Rodrigues was on a short list of three for the building of the new port in Lagos, and was expecting to have an audience with the President on Friday if he was awarded the contract. By Thursday morning that will be a short list of two and there will be no meeting with the President, de Silveira promised himself, and considered that was the most he was likely to gain from the lunch until the Ambassador added:

“Rodrigues seems most keen on you being awarded the new city contract at Abuja. He’s singing your praises to

every minister he meets. Funny,” the Ambassador continued, “I always thought you two didn’t see eye to eye.”

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Eduardo made no reply as he tried to fathom out what trick Rodrigues could be up to by promoting his cause.

Eduardo spent the afternoon with the Minister of Finance and confirmed the provisional arrangements he had made with the Governor of the bank. The Minister of Finance had been forewarned by the Governor what he was to expect from an encounter with

Eduardo de Silveira and that he was not to be taken aback by the Brazilian's curt demands. De Silveira, aware that this warning would have taken place, let the poor man bargain a little and even gave way on a few minor points that he would be able to tell the President about at the next meeting of the Supreme Military Council. Eduardo left the smiling minister believing that he had scored a point or two against the formidable South American.

That evening, Eduardo dined privately with his senior advisers who

themselves were already dealing with the ministers' officials. Each was now coming up with daily reports about the problems that would have to be faced if they worked in Nigeria. His chief engineer was quick to emphasise that skilled labour could not be hired at any price as the Germans had already cornered the market for their extensive road projects. The financial advisers also presented a gloomy report, of international companies waiting six months or more for their cheques to be cleared by the central bank. Eduardo made notes on the views

they expressed but never ventured an opinion himself. His staff left him a little after eleven and he decided to take a stroll around the hotel grounds before retiring to bed. On his walk through the luxuriant tropical gardens he only just avoided a face-to-face confrontation with Manuel Rodrigues by darting behind a large Iroko plant.

The little man passed by champing away at his gum, oblivious to Eduardo's baleful glare. Eduardo informed a chattering grey parrot of his most secret thoughts: by Thursday afternoon, Rodrigues, you will be on

your way back to Brazil with a suitcase full of plans that can be filed under “abortive projects”. The parrot cocked his head and screeched at him as if he had been let in on his

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secret. Eduardo allowed himself a smile and returned to his room.

Colonel Usman arrived on the dot of eight-forty-five again the next day and

Eduardo spent the morning with the

Minister of Supplies and Co-operatives

- or lack of them, as he commented to

his private secretary afterwards. The

afternoon was spent with the Minister of Labour checking over the availability of unskilled workers and the total lack of skilled operatives. Eduardo was fast reaching the conclusion that, despite the professed optimism of the ministers concerned, this was going to be the toughest contract he had ever tackled.

There was more to be lost than money if the whole international business world stood watching him fall net on his face.

In the evening his staff reported to him once again, having solved a few old problems and unearthed some new ones.

Tentatively, they had come to the

conclusion that if the present regime stayed in power, there need be no serious concern over payment, as the President had earmarked the new city as a priority project. They had even heard a rumour that the army would be willing to lend-lease part of the Service Corps if there turned out to be a shortage of skilled labour. Eduardo made a note to have this point confirmed in writing by the Head of State during their final meeting the next day. But the labour problem was not what was occupying Eduardo's thoughts as he put on his silk pyjamas that night. He was chuckling at

the idea of Manuel Rodrigues' imminent and sudden departure for Brazil. Eduardo slept well.

He rose with renewed vigour the next morning, showered and put on a fresh suit. The four days were turning out to be well worth while and a single stone might yet kill two birds. By eight-forty-five, he was waiting impatiently for the previously punctual colonel. The colonel did not show up at eight-forty-five and had still not appeared when the clock on his mantelpiece struck nine. De Silveira sent his private secretary off to find

out where he was while he paced angrily
backwards and forwards through the hotel
suite. His secre

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tary returned a few minutes later in a
panic with the information that the
hotel was surrounded by armed guards.

Eduardo did not panic. He had been
through eight coupe in his life from
which he had learnt one golden rule:
the new regime never kills visiting
foreigners as it needs their money
every bit as much as the last
government. Eduardo picked up the

telephone but no one answered him so he switched on the radio. A tape recording was playing:

“This is Radio Nigeria, this is Radio Nigeria. There has been a coup. General Mohammed has been overthrown and Lieutenant Colonel Dimka has assumed leadership of the new revolutionary government. Do not be afraid; remain at home and everything will be back to normal in a few hours. This is Radio Nigeria, this is Radio Nigeria. There has been a...”

Eduardo switched off the radio as two thoughts flashed through his mind.

Coups always held up everything and caused chaos, so undoubtedly he had wasted the four days. But worse, would it now be possible for him even to get out of Nigeria and carry on his normal business with the rest of the world?

By lunchtime, the radio was playing martial music interspersed with the tape recorded message he now knew off by heart. Eduardo detailed all his staff to find out anything they could and to report back to him direct. They all returned with the same story; that it was impossible to get past the soldiers surrounding the hotel so no new

information could be unearthed. Eduardo swore for the first time in months. To add to his inconvenience, the hotel manager rang through to say that regretfully Mr. de Silveira would have to eat in the main dining room as there would be no room service until further notice. Eduardo went down to the dining room somewhat reluctantly only to discover that the head waiter showed no interest in who he was and placed him unceremoniously at a small table already occupied by three Italians.

Manuel Rodrigues was seated only two tables away: Eduardo stiffened at the

thought of the other man enjoying his

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discomfiture and then remembered it was

that morning he was supposed to have

seen the Minister of Ports. He ate his

meal quickly despite being served slowly

and when the Italians tried to make

conversation with him he waved them away

with his hand, feigning lack of

understanding, despite the fact that he

spoke their language fluently. As soon

as he had finished the second course he

returned to his room. His staff had only

gossip to pass on and they had been

unable to make contact with the

Brazilian Embassy to lodge an official

protest. “A lot of good an official

protest will do us,” said Eduardo,

slumping down in his chair. “Who do you

send it to, the new regime or the old

one?”

He sat alone in his room for the rest

of the day, interrupted only by what he

thought was the sound of gunfire in the

distance. He read the New Federal

Capital project proposal and his

advisers’ reports for a third time.

The next morning Eduardo, dressed in

the same suit as he had worn on the day

of his arrival, was greeted by his secretary with the news that the coup had been crushed; after fierce street fighting, he informed his unusually attentive chairman, the old regime had regained power but not without losses; among those killed in the uprising had been General Mohammed, the Head of State. The secretary's news was officially confirmed on Radio Nigeria later that morning. The ringleader of the abortive coup had been one Lieutenant Colonel Dimka: Dimka, along with one or two junior officers, had escaped, and the government had ordered

a dusk to dawn curfew until the evil
criminals were apprehended.

Pull off a coup and you're a national
hero, fail and you're an evil criminal;
in business it's the same difference
between bankruptcy and making a fortune,
considered Eduardo as he listened to the
news report. He was beginning to form
plans in his mind for an early departure
from Nigeria when the newscaster made an
announcement that chilled him to the
very marrow.

“While Lieutenant Colonel Dimka and his
accomplices

A Quiver Full of Arrows

remain on the run, airports throughout the country will be closed until further notice.”

When the newscaster had finished his report, martial music was played in memory of the late General Mohammed.

Eduardo went downstairs in a flaming temper. The hotel was still surrounded by armed guards. He stared at the Beet of six empty Mercedes which was parked only ten yards beyond the soldiers' rifles. He marched back into the foyer, irritated by the babble of different tongues coming at him from

every direction. Eduardo looked around him: it was obvious that many people had been stranded in the hotel overnight and had ended up sleeping in the lounge or the bar. He checked the paperback rack in the lobby for something to read but there were only four copies left of a tourist guide to Lagos; everything had been sold.

Authors who had not been read for years were now changing hands at a premium. Eduardo returned to his room which was fast assuming the character of a prison, and baulked at reading the New Federal Capital project for a

fourth time. He tried again to make contact with the Brazilian Ambassador to discover if he could obtain special permission to leave the country as he had his own aircraft. No one answered the Embassy phone. He went down for an early lunch only to find the dining room was once again packed to capacity. Eduardo was placed at a table with some Germans who were worrying about a contract that had been signed by the government the previous week, before the abortive coup. They were wondering if it would still be honoured. Manuel Rodrigues

entered the room a few minutes later and was placed at the next table.

During the afternoon, de Silveira ruefully examined his schedule for the next seven days. He had been due in Paris that morning to see the Minister of the Interior, and from there should have flown on to London to confer with the chairman of the Steel Board. His calendar was fully booked for the next ninety-two days until his family holiday in May.

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“I’m having this year’s holiday in Nigeria,” he commented wryly to an

assistant.

What annoyed Eduardo most about the coup was the lack of communication it afforded with the outside world. He wondered what was going on in Brazil and he hated not being able to telephone or telex Paris or London to explain his absence-personally. He listened addictively to Radio Nigeria on the hour every hour for any new scrap of information. At five o'clock, he learned that the Supreme Military Council had elected a new President who would address the nation on television and radio at nine o'clock

that night.

Eduardo de Silveira switched on the

television at eighty-five;

normally an assistant would have put

it on for him at one minute to nine.

He sat watching a Nigerian lady giving

a talk on dressmaking, followed by the

weather forecast man who supplied

Eduardo with the revealing information

that the temperature would continue to

be hot for the next month. Eduardo's

knee was twitching up and down

nervously as he waited for the address

by the new President. At nine o'clock,

after the national anthem had been

played, the new Head of State, General Obasanjo, appeared on the screen in full dress uniform. He spoke first of the tragic death and sad loss for the nation of the late President, and went on to say that his government would continue to work in the best interest of Nigeria. He looked ill at ease as he apologised to all foreign visitors who were inconvenienced by the attempted coup but went on to make it clear that the dusk to dawn curfew would continue until the rebel leaders were tracked down and brought to justice. He confirmed that,~all

airports would remain closed until Lieutenant Colonel Dimka was in safe custody. The new President ended his statement by saying that all other forms of communication would be opened up again as soon as possible. The national anthem was played for a second time, while Eduardo thought of the millions of dollars that might be lost to him by his incarceration in that hotel room, while his private plane sat idly on the tarmac only a few miles away. One of his senior managers

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opened a book as to how long it would take for the authorities to capture Lieutenant Colonel Dimka; he did not tell de Silveira how short the odds were on a month.

Eduardo went down to the dining room in the suit he had worn the day before.

A junior waiter placed him at a table with some Frenchmen who had been hoping to win a contract to drill bore holes in the Niger state. Again Eduardo waved a languid hand when they tried to include him in their conversation. At that very moment he was meant to be

with the French Minister of the Interior, not with some French hole-borers. He tried to concentrate on his watered-down soup, wondering how much longer it would be before it would be just water. The head waiter appeared by his side, gesturing to the one remaining seat at the table, in which he placed Manuel Rodrigues. Still neither man gave any sign of recognising the other. Eduardo debated with himself whether he should leave the table or carry on as if his oldest rival was still in Brazil. He decided the latter was more dignified. The

Frenchmen began an argument among themselves as to when they would be able to get out of Lagos. One of them declared emphatically that he had heard on the highest authority that the government intended to track down every last one of those involved in the coup before they opened the airports and that might take up to a month.

“What?” said the two Brazilians together, in English.

“I can’t stay here for a month,” said Eduardo.

“Neither can I,” said Manuel Rodrigues.

“You’ll have to, at least until Dimka

is captured,” said one of the

Frenchmen, breaking into English. “So you must both relax yourselves, yes?”

The two Brazilians continued their meal in silence. When Eduardo had finished he rose from the table and without looking directly at Rodrigues said goodnight in Portuguese. The old rival inclined his head in reply to the salutation.

The next day brought forth no new information. The hotel remained surrounded with soldiers and by the evening Eduardo had lost his temper with every member of staff with

Ilk Coup

whom he had come into contact. He went down to dinner on his own and as he entered the dining room he saw Manuel Rodrigues sitting alone at a table in the corner. Rodrigues looked up, seemed to hesitate for a moment, and then beckoned to Eduardo. Eduardo himself hesitated before walking slowly towards Rodrigues and taking the seat opposite him. Rodrigues poured him a glass of wine. Eduardo, who rarely drank, drank it. Their conversation was stilted to begin with, but as both men consumed

more wine so they each began to relax in the other's company. By the time coffee had arrived, Manuel was telling Eduardo what he could do with this god-forsaken country.

“You will not stay on, if you are awarded the ports contract?” inquired Eduardo.

“Not a hope,” said Rodrigues, who showed no surprise that de Silveira knew of his interest in the ports contract.

“I withdrew from the short list the day before the coup. I had intended to By back to Brazil that Thursday morning”

“Can you say why you withdrew?”

“Labour problems mainly, and then the congestion of the ports.”

“I am not sure I understand,” said

Eduardo, understanding full well but curious to learn if Rodrigues had picked up some tiny detail his own staff had missed.

Manuel Rodrigues paused to ingest the fact that the man he had viewed as his most dangerous enemy for over thirty years was now listening to his own inside information. He considered the situation for a moment while he sipped his coffee. Eduardo didn't speak.

“To begin with, there's a terrible

shortage of skilled labour, and on top
of that there's this mad quota system.”

“Quota system?” said Eduardo innocently.

“The percentage of people from the
contractor's country which the
government will allow to work in
Nigeria.”

“Why should that be a problem?” said
Eduardo, leaning forward.

“By law, you have to employ at a ratio
of fifty nationals to

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one foreigner so I could only have

brought over twenty-five of my top men

to organise a fifty million dollar contract, and I'd have had to make do with Nigerians at every other level. The government are cutting their own throats with the wretched system; they can't expect unskilled men, black or white, to become experienced engineers overnight. It's all to do with their national pride. Someone must tell them they can't afford that sort of pride if they want to complete the job at a sensible price. That path is the surest route to bankruptcy. On top of that, the Germans have already rounded up all the best skilled labour for

their road projects.”

“But surely,” said Eduardo, “you charge according to the rules, however stupid, thus covering all eventualities, and as long as you’re certain that payment is guaranteed . . .”

Manuel raised his hand to stop Eduardo’s flow: “That’s another problem. You can’t be certain. The government reneged on a major steel contract only last month. In so doing,” he explained, “they had bankrupted a distinguished international company. So they are

perfectly capable of trying the same trick with me. And if they don't pay up, who do you sue? The Supreme Military Council?"

"And the ports problem?"

"The port is totally congested. There are one hundred and seventy ships desperate to unload their cargo with a waiting time of anything up to six months. On top of that, there is a demurrage charge of five thousand dollars a day and only perishable foods are given any priority."

"But there's always a way round that sort of problem," said Eduardo,

rubbing a thumb twice across the top
of his fingers.

"Bribery? It doesn't work, Eduardo.

How can you possibly jump the queue
when all one hundred and seventy ships
have already bribed the harbour
master? And don't imagine that fixing
the rent on a flat for one of his
mistresses would help either," said
Rodrigues grinning. "With that man you
will have to supply the mistress as
well."

Eduardo held his breath but said
nothing.

7h~ Coup

“Come to think of it,” continued

Rodrigues, “if the situation becomes any worse, the harbour master will be the one man in the country who is richer than you.”

Eduardo laughed for the first time in three days.

“I tell you, Eduardo, we could make a bigger profit building a salt mine in Siberia.”

Eduardo laughed again and some of the Prentino and Rodrigues staff dining at other tables stared in disbelief at their masters.

“You were in for the big one, the new city of Abuja?” said Manuel.

“That’s right,” admitted Eduardo.

“I have done everything in my power to make sure you were awarded that contract,” said the other quietly.

“What?” said Eduardo in disbelief.

“Why?”

“I thought Abuja would give the Prentino empire more headaches than even you could cope with, Eduardo, and that might possibly leave the field wide open for me at home. Think about it. Every time there’s a cutback in Nigeria, what will be the first head to

roll off the chopping block? 'The unnecessary city' as the locals all call it."

"The unnecessary city?" repeated Eduardo.

"Yes, and it doesn't help when you say you won't move without advance payment.

You know as well as I do, you will need one hundred of your best men here full time to organise such a massive enterprise. They'll need feeding, salaries, housing, perhaps even a school and a hospital. Once they were settled down here, you can't just pull them off the job every two weeks

because the government is running late clearing the cheques. It's not practical and you know it “ Rodrigues poured Eduardo de Silveira another glass of wine.

“I had already taken that into consideration,” Eduardo said as he sipped the wine, “but I thought that with the support of the Head of State.”

“The late Head of State – “

“I take your point, Manuel.”

“Maybe the next Head of State will also back you, but

what about the one after that? Nigeria has had three coups in the past three years.”

Eduardo remained silent for a moment.

“Do you play backgammon?”

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“I must make some money while I’m here.” Manual laughed.

“Why don’t you come to my room,” continued de Silveira. “Though I must warn you I always manage to beat my staff.”

“Perhaps they always manage to lose,” said Manuel, as he rose and grabbed the half empty bottle of wine by its neck.

Both men were laughing as they left the dining room.

After that, the two chairmen had lunch and dinner together every day.

Within a week, their staff were eating at the same tables. Eduardo could be seen in the dining room without a tie

while Manuel wore a shirt for the first time in years. By the end of a

fortnight, the two rivals had played

each other at table tennis, backgammon

and bridge with the stakes set at one

hundred dollars a point. At the end of

each day Eduardo always seemed to end

up owing Manuel about a million dollars

which Manuel happily traded for the best bottle of wine left in the hotel's cellar.

Although Lieutenant Colonel Dimka had been sighted by about forty thousand Nigerians in about as many different places, he still remained resolutely uncaptured. As the new President had insisted, airports remained closed but communications were opened which at least allowed Eduardo to telephone and telex Brazil. His brothers and wife were sending replies by the hour, imploring Eduardo to return home at any cost: decisions on major contracts

throughout the world were being held up by his absence. But Eduardo's message back to Brazil was always the same: as long as Dimka is on the loose, the airports will remain closed.

It was on a Tuesday night during dinner that Eduardo took the trouble to explain to Manuel why Brazil had lost the World Cup. Manuel dismissed Eduardo's outrageous claims

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The
as ill-informed and prejudiced. It was the only subject on which they hadn't agreed in the past three weeks.

“I blame the whole fiasco on Zagalo.”

said Eduardo.

“No, no, you cannot blame the manager,” said Manuel. “The fault lies with our stupid selectors who know even less about football than you do. They should never have dropped Leao from goal and in any case we should have learned from the Argentinian defeat last year that our methods are now out of date. You must attack, attack, if you want to score goals.”

“Rubbish. We still have the surest defence in the world.”

“Which means the best result you can

hope for is a O O draw.”

“Never . . .” began Eduardo.

“Excuse me, sir.” Eduardo looked up to see his private secretary standing by his side looking anxiously down at him.

“Yes, what’s the problem?”

“An urgent telex from Brazil, sir.”

Eduardo read the first paragraph and then asked Manuel if he would be kind enough to excuse him for a few minutes.

The latter nodded politely. Eduardo left the table and as he marched through the dining room seventeen other guests left unfinished meals and followed him quickly to his suite on

the top floor, where the rest of his staff were already assembled. He sat down in the corner of the room on his own. No one spoke as he read through the telex carefully, suddenly realising how many days he had been imprisoned in Lagos.

The telex was from his brother Carlos and the contents concerned the Pan-American road project, an eight-lane highway that would stretch from Brazil to Mexico. Prentinos had tendered for the section that ran through the middle of the Amazon jungle and had to have the bank guarantees

signed and certified by midday tomorrow; Tuesday. But Eduardo had quite forgotten which Tuesday it was and the document he was committed to sign by the following day's deadline.

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“What's the problem?” Eduardo asked his private secretary. “The Banco do Brasil have already agreed with Alfredo to act as guarantors. What's stopping Carlos signing the agreement in my absence?”

“The Mexicans are now demanding that responsibility for the contract be

shared because of the insurance

problems: Lloyd's of London will not

cover the entire risk if only one

company is involved. The details are

all on page seven of the telex.”

Eduardo flicked quickly through the

pages. He read that his brothers had

already tried to put pressure on

Lloyd's, but to no avail. That's like

trying to bribe a maiden aunt into

taking part in a public orgy, thought

Eduardo, and he would have told them

as much if he had been back in Brazil.

The Mexican Government was therefore

insisting that the contract be shared

with an international construction company acceptable to Lloyd's if the legal documents were to be signed by the midday deadline the following day.

"Stay put," said Eduardo to his staff, and he returned to the dining room alone, trailing the long telex behind him. Rodrigues watched him as he scurried back to their table.

"You look like a man with a problem."

"I am," said Eduardo. "Read that."

Manuel's experienced eye ran down the telex, picking out the salient points.

He had tendered for the Amazon road project himself and could still recall

the details. At Eduardo's insistence,

he re-read page seven.

"Mexican bandits," he said as he

returned the telex to Eduardo. "Who do

they think they are, telling Eduardo

de Silveira how he must conduct his

business. Telex them back immediately

and inform them you're chairman of the

greatest construction company in the

world and they can roast in hell

before you will agree to their

pathetic terms. You know it's far too

late for them to go out to tender

again with every other section of the

highway ready to begin work. They

would lose millions. Call their bluff,

Eduardo.”

“I think you may be right, Manuel, but

any hold-up now

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can only waste my time and money, so I

intend to agree to their demand and look

for a partner.”

“You’ll never find one at such short

notice.”

“I will.”

“Who?”

Eduardo de Silveira hesitated only for

a second. “You, Manuel. I want to offer

Rodrigues International S.A. fifty per cent of the Amazon road contract.”

Manuel Rodrigues looked up at Eduardo.

It was the first time that he had not anticipated his old rival's next move. “I suppose it might help cover the millions you owe me in table tennis debts.”

The two men laughed, then Rodrigues stood up and they shook hands gravely. De Silveira left the dining room on the run and wrote out a telex for his manager to transmit.

“Sign, accept terms, fifty per cent partner will be Rodrigues International Construction S.A., Brazil.”

“If I telex that message, sir, you do realise that it’s legally binding?”

“Send it,” said Eduardo.

Eduardo returned once again to the dining room where Manuel had ordered the finest bottle of champagne in the hotel.

Just as they were calling for a second bottle, and singing a spirited version of Esta Cheganda a hora, Eduardo’s private secretary appeared by his side again, this time with two telexes, one from the President of the Banco do Brasil and a second from his brother Carlos. Both wanted confirmation of the agreed partner for the Amazon road project. Eduardo

uncorked the second bottle of champagne
without looking up at his private
secretary.

“Confirm Rodrigues International
Construction to the President of the bank
and my brother,” he said as he filled
Manuel’s empty glass. “And don’t bother
me again tonight.”

“Yes, sir,” said the private secretary
and left without another word.

Neither man could recall what time he
climbed into bed

that night but de Silveira

was-abruptly awakened from a deep sleep by his secretary early the next morning. Eduardo took a few minutes to digest the news. Lieutenant Colonel Dimka had been caught in Kano at three o'clock that morning, and all the airports were now open again. Eduardo picked up the phone and dialled three digits.

“Manuel, you've heard the news? ...

Good.... Then you must By back with me in my 707 or it may be days before you get out . . . One hour's time in the lobby . . . See you then.”

At eight-forty-five there was a quiet knock on the door and Eduardo's secretary opened it to find Colonel Usman standing to attention, just as he had done in the days before the coup. He held a note in his hand.

Eduardo tore open the envelope to find an invitation to lunch that day with the new Head of State, General Obasanjo.

“Please convey my apologies to your President,” said Eduardo, “and be kind enough to explain that I have pressing commitments to attend to in my own country.”

The colonel retired reluctantly.

Eduardo dressed in the suit, shirt and

tie he had worn on his first day in

Nigeria and took the lift downstairs

to the lobby where he joined Manuel

who was once more wearing jeans and a

tee-shirt. The two chairmen left the

hotel and climbed into the back of the

leading Mercedes and the motorcade of

six began its journey to the airport.

The colonel, who now sat in front with

the driver, did not venture to speak

to either of the distinguished

Brazilians for the entire journey. The

two men, he would be able to tell the

new President later, seemed to be preoccupied with a discussion on an Amazon road project and how the responsibility should be divided between their two companies.

Customs were bypassed as neither man had anything they wanted to take out of the country other than themselves, and the fleet of cars came to a halt at the side of Eduardo's blue and silver 707. The staff of both companies climbed aboard the rear section of the aircraft, also engrossed in discussion on the Amazon road project.

~ coup

A corporal jumped out of the lead car and opened the back door, to allow the two chairmen to walk straight up the steps and board the front section of the aircraft.

As Eduardo stepped out of the Mercedes, the Nigerian driver saluted smartly. “Goodbye, sir,” he said, revealing the large set of white teeth once again.

Eduardo said nothing.

“I hope,” said the corporal politely, “you made very big deal while you were

in Nigeria.”

57 {the End}

THE GREATEST MAN IN THE WORLD *

- This satiric prophecy was written in 1931, up to which date

our national heroes had been well behaved.

Looking back on it now, from the vantage point of 1940, one -can only

marvel that it hadn't happened long before it did. The United States

of America had been, ever since Kitty Hawk, blindly constructing the

elaborate petard by which, sooner or later, it must be hoist. It was inevitable that some day there would come roaring out of the skies a

national hero of insufficient intelligence, background, and character successfully to endure the mounting orgies of glory prepared for avi-

ators who stayed up a long time or flew a great distance. Both Lind-

bergh and Byrd, fortunately for national decorum and international amity, had been gentlemen; so had our other famous aviators. They wore their laurels gracefully, withstood the awful weather of publicity,

married excellent women, usually of fine family, and quietly retired to private life and the enjoyment of their varying fortunes. No unto-

ward incidents, on a worldwide scale, marred the perfection of their conduct on the perilous heights of fame. The exception to the rule was, however, bound to occur and it did, in July, 1935, when Jack ("Pal") Smurch, erstwhile mechanic's helper in a small garage in Westfield, Iowa, flew a second-hand, single-motored Brethren Dragon-Fly III monoplane all the way around the world, without stopping.

Never before in the history of aviation had such a flight as Smurch's

ever been dreamed of. No one had even taken seriously the weird floating auxiliary gas tanks, invention of the mad New Hampshire professor of astronomy. Dr. Charles Lewis Gresham, upon which Smurch placed full reliance. When the garage worker, a slightly built,

surly, unprepossessing young man of twenty-two, appeared at Roosevelt

Field early in July, 1933, slowly chewing a great quid of scrap tobacco, and announced "Nobody ain't seen no flyin' yet," the news-

papers touched briefly and satirically upon his projected twenty-five-

thousand-mile flight. Aeronautical and automotive experts dismissed

the idea curtly, implying that it was a hoax, a publicity stunt. The rusty, battered, second-hand plane wouldn't go. The Gresham

auxiliary

tanks wouldn't work. It was simply a cheap joke.

Smurch, however, after calling on a girl in Brooklyn who worked in the flap-folding department of a large paper-box factory, a girl whom

he later described as his "sweet patootie," climbed nonchalantly into

his ridiculous plane at dawn of the memorable seventh of July, 1935

spit a curve of tobacco juice into the still air, and took off, carrying with him only a gallon of bootleg gin and six pounds-of salami.

When the garage boy thundered out over the ocean the papers were forced to record, in all seriousness, that a mad, 'unknown young man –

his name was variously misspelled – had actually set out upon a prepos-

terous attempt to span the world in a rickety, one-engined contraption,

trusting to the long-distance refuelling device of a crazy schoolmaster.

When, nine days later, without having stopped once, the tiny plane appeared above San Francisco Bay, headed for New York, spluttering

and choking, to be sure, but still magnificently and miraculously aloft,

the headlines, which long since had crowded everything else off the front page – even the shooting of the Governor of Illinois by the

Capone gang – swelled to unprecedented size, and the news stories

began to run to twenty-five and thirty columns. It was noticeable, however, that the accounts of the epoch-making flight touched rather

lightly upon the aviator himself. This was not because facts about the

hero as a man were too meagre, but because they were too complete.

Reporters, who had been rushed out to Iowa when Smurch's plane

was first sighted over the little French coast town of Serly-le-Mer, to dig up the story of the great man's life, had promptly discovered

that the story of his life could not be printed. His mother, a sullen short-order cook in a shack restaurant on the edge of a tourists' camping ground near Westfield, met all inquiries as to her son with an angry "Ah, the hell with him; I hope he drowns." His father appeared to be in jail somewhere for stealing spotlights and laprobes

from tourists' automobiles; his young brother, a weak minded lad, had but recently escaped from the Preston, Iowa, Reformatory and was already wanted in several Western towns for the theft of money-

order blanks from post offices. These alarming discoveries were still

piling up at the very time that Pal Smurch, the greatest hero of the twentieth century, blear-eyed, dead for sleep, half-starved, was

piloting

his crazy junk heap high above the region in which the lamentable story of his private life was being unearthed, headed for New York and a greater glory than any man of his time had ever known.

The necessity for printing some account in the papers of the young man's career and personality had led to a remarkable predicament.

It was of course impossible to reveal the facts, for a tremendous popular

feeling in favor of the young hero had sprung up, like a grass fire, when he was halfway across Europe on his flight around the globe.

He was, therefore, described as a modest chap, taciturn, blond, pop-

ular with his friends, popular with girls. The only available snapshot

of Smurch, taken at the wheel of a phony automobile in a cheap photo studio at an amusement park, was touched up so that the little

vulgarian looked quite handsome. His twisted leer was smoothed into a pleasant smile. The truth was, in this way, kept from the youth's ecstatic compatriots; they did not dream that the Smurch family was despised and feared by its neighbors in the obscure Iowa town, nor that the hero himself, ~~because of numerous unsavory exploits~~, had come to be regarded in Westfield as a nuisance and a menace. He had, the reporters discovered, once knifed the principal of his high school – not mortally, to be sure, but he had knifed him; and on another occasion, surprised in the act of stealing an altarcloth from a church, he had hashed the sacristan over the head with a pot of Easter lilies; for each of these offences he had served a sentence in the reformatory.

Inwardly, the authorities, both in New York and in Washington, prayed that an understanding Providence might, however awful such

a thing seemed, bring disaster to the rusty, battered plane and its illustrious pilot, whose unheard-of flight had aroused the civilized world to hosannas of hysterical praise. The authorities were convinced that the character of the renowned aviator was such that the limelight of adulation was bound to reveal him, 'to all the world, as a congenital hooligan mentally and morally unequipped to cope with his own prodigious fame. "I trust," said the Secretary of State,

at one of many secret Cabinet meetings called to consider the national

dilemma, "I trust that his mother's prayer will be answered," by which he referred to Mrs. Emma Smurch's wish that her son might be drowned. It was, however, too late for that – Smurch had leaped the Atlantic and then the Pacific as if they were millponds. At three

minutes after two o'clock on the afternoon of July 17, 1935 the garage boy brought his idiotic plane into 'Roosevelt Field for a

perfect

three-point landing.

It had, of course, been out of the question to arrange a modest little reception for the greatest flier in the history of the world. He was received at Roosevelt Field with such elaborate and pretentious cere-

monies as rocked the world. Fortunately, however, the worn and spent hero promptly swooned, had to be removed bodily from his plane, and was spirited from the field without having opened his mouth once. Thus he did not jeopardize the dignity of this first reception, a reception illumined by the presence of the Secretaries of War and the Navy, Mayor Michael J. Moriarity of New York, the Premier of Canada, Governors Fanniman, Groves, McFeely, and Critchfield, and a brilliant array of European diplomats. Smurch

did not, in fact, come to in time to take part in the gigantic hullabaloo

arranged at City Hall for the next day. He was rushed to a secluded nursing home and confined in bed. It was nine days before he was able to get up, or to be more exact, before he was permitted to get up. Meanwhile the greatest minds in the country, in solemn assembly,

had arranged a secret conference of city, state, and government officials,

which Smurch was to attend for the purpose of being instructed in the

ethics and behavior of heroism.

On the day that the little mechanic was finally allowed to get up and dress and, for the first time in two weeks, took a great chew of tobacco, he was permitted to receive the newspapermen – this by way

of testing him out. Smurch did not wait for questions. “Youse guys,”

he said – and the Times man winced – “youse guys can tell the cock-

eyed world dat I put it over on Lindbergh, see? Yeh – an’ made an ass o’ them two frogs.” The “two frogs” was a reference to a pair of gallant French fliers who, in attempting a flight only halfway round the world, had, two weeks before, unhappily been lost at sea.

The Times man was bold enough, at this point, to sketch out for Smurch the accepted formula for interviews in cases of this ' kind; he explained that there should be no arrogant statements belittling the achievements of other heroes, particularly heroes of foreign nations.

“Ah, the hell with that,” said Smurch. “I did it, see? I did it, an’ I’m talkin’ about it.” And he did talk about it.

None of this extraordinary interview was, of course, printed. On the contrary, the newspapers, already under the disciplined direction

of a secret directorate created for the occasion and composed of states-

men and editors, gave out to a panting and restless world that
“Jacky,”

as he had been arbitrarily nicknamed, would consent to say only
that he was very happy and that anyone could have done what he
did. “My achievement has been, I fear, slightly exaggerated,” the
Times man’s article had him protest, with a modest smile. These
newspaper stories were kept from the hero, a restriction which did
not serve to abate the rising malevolence of his temper. The
situation

was, indeed, extremely grave, for Pal Smurch was, as he kept in-
sisting, “rarin’ to go.” He could not much longer be kept from a
nation clamorous to lionize him. It was the most desperate crisis
the

United States of America had faced since the sinking of the
Lusitania.

On the afternoon of the twenty-seventh of July, Smurch was
spirited

away to a conference-room in which were gathered mayors, governors,

government officials, behaviorist psychologists, and editors. He gave

them each a limp, moist paw and a brief unlovely grin. “Hah ya?”

he said. When Smurch was seated, the Mayor of New York arose

and, with obvious pessimism, attempted to explain what he must

say and how he must act when presented to the world, ending his

talk with a high tribute to the hero’s courage and integrity. The

Mayor was followed by Governor Fanniman of New York, who, after

a touching declaration of faith, introduced Cameron Spottiswood,

Second Secretary of the American Embassy in Paris, the gentleman

selected to coach Smurch in the amenities of public ceremonies.

Sitting

in a chair, with a soiled yellow tie in his hand and his shirt open

at the throat, unshaved, smoking a rolled cigarette, Jack Smurch

listened with a leer on his lips. "I get ya, I get ya," he cut in, nastily. "Ya want me to ack like a softy, hub? Ya want me to ack like that — baby-face Lindbergh, hub? Well, nuts to that, see?" Everyone took in his breath sharply; it was a sigh and a hiss. "Mr. Lindbergh," began a United States Senator, purple with rage, "and Mr. Byrd — " Smurch) who was paring his nails with a jackknife, cut in again. "Byrd!" he exclaimed. "Aw fa God's sake, dat big — " Somebody shut off his blasphemies with a sharp word. A newcomer had entered the room. Everyone stood up, except Smurch, who, still busy with his nails, did not even glance up. "Mr. Smurch," said someone, sternly, "the President of the United States!" It had been thought that the presence of the Chief Executive might have a chastening effect upon

the young hero, and the former had been, thanks to the remarkable cooperation of the press, secretly brought to the obscure conference-room.

A great, painful silence fell. Smurch looked up, waved a hand at the President. "How ya comin'?" he asked, and began rolling a fresh cigarette. The silence deepened. Someone coughed in a strained way.

"Geez, it's hot, ain't it?" said Smurch. He loosened two more shirt buttons, revealing a hairy chest and the tattooed word "Sadie" enclosed in a stencilled heart. The great and important men in the room, faced by the most serious crisis in recent American history, exchanged worried frowns. Nobody seemed to know how to proceed.

"Come awn, come awn," said Smurch. "Let's get the hell out of here!"

When do I start cuttin' in on de parties, hub? And what's they goin' to be in it?" He rubbed a thumb and forefinger together meaningfully. "Money!" exclaimed a state senator, shocked, pale. "Ych, money,"

said Pal, flipping his cigarette out of a window. "An' big money."

He began rolling a fresh cigarette. "Big money," he repeated, frown-

ing over the rice paper. He tilted back in his chair, and leered at each

gentleman, separately, the leer of an animal that knows its power,

the leer of a leopard loose in a bird-and-dog shop. "Aw fa God's

sake, let's get some place where it's cooler," he said. "I been cooped

up plenty for three weeks!"

Smurch stood up and walked over to an open- window, where he

stood staring down into the street, nine floors below. The faint shouting

of newsboys floated up to him. He made out his name. "Hot dog!"

he cried, grinning, ecstatic. He leaned out over the sill. "You tell 'em,

babies!" he shouted down. "Hot diggity dog!" In the tense little knot of men standing behind him, a quick, mad impulse flared up.

An unspoken word of appeal, of command, seemed to ring through the room. Yet it was deadly silent. Charles K. L. Brand, secretary to

the Mayor of New York City, happened to be standing nearest Smurch; he looked inquiringly at the President of the United States.

The President, pale, grim, nodded shortly. Brand, a tall, powerfully built man, once a tackle at Rutgers, stepped forward, seized the greatest

man in the world by his left shoulder and the seat of his pants, and pushed him out the window.

"My God, he's fallen out the window!" cried a quick-witted editor.

“Get me out of here I” cried the President. Several men sprang to his side and he was hurriedly escorted out of a door toward a side-entrance of the building. The editor of the Associated Press took charge, being used to such things. Crisply he ordered certain men to leave, others to stay; quickly he outlined a story which all the papers were to agree on, sent two men to the street to handle that end of the tragedy, commanded a Senator to sob and two Congressmen to go to pieces nervously. In a word, he skillfully set the stage for the gigantic task that was to follow, the task of breaking to a grief-stricken world the sad story of the untimely, accidental death of its most illustrious and spectacular figure.

The funeral was, as you know, the most elaborate, the finest, the solemnest, and the saddest ever held in the United States of America.

The monument in Arlington Cemetery, with its clean white shaft

of marble and the simple device of a tiny plane carved on its base, is a place for pilgrims, in deep reverence, to visit. The nations of the

world paid lofty tributes to little Jacky Smurch, America's greatest hero. At a given hour there were two minutes of silence throughout the nation. Even the inhabitants of the small, bewildered town of Westfield, Iowa, observed this touching ceremony; agents of the Department of Justice saw to that. One of them was especially assigned

to stand grimly in the doorway of a little shack restaurant on the edge of the tourists' camping ground just outside the town. There, under his stern scrutiny, Mrs. Emma Smurch bowed her head above

two hamburger steaks sizzling on her grill – bowed her head and turned away, so that the Secret Service man could not see the twisted,

strangely familiar, leer on her lips.

{the end}

Title: "Ministers Of Grace"

Author: Saki [More Titles by Saki]

Although he was scarcely yet out of his teens, the Duke of Scaw was already marked out as a personality widely differing from others of his caste and period. Not in externals; therein he conformed correctly to type. His hair was faintly reminiscent of Houbigant, and at the other end of him his shoes exhaled the right SOUPÇON of harness-room; his socks compelled one's attention without losing one's respect; and his attitude in repose had just that suggestion of Whistler's mother, so becoming in the really young. It was within that the trouble lay, if trouble it could be accounted, which marked him apart from his fellows. The Duke was religious. Not in any of the ordinary senses of the word; he took small heed of High Church or Evangelical standpoints, he stood outside of all the movements and missions and cults and crusades of the day, uncaring and uninterested. Yet in a mystical-practical way of his own, which had served him unscathed and unshaken through the fickle years of boyhood, he was intensely and intensively religious. His family were naturally, though unobtrusively, distressed about it. "I am so afraid it may affect his bridge," said his mother.

The Duke sat in a pennyworth of chair in St. James's Park,

listening to the pessimisms of Belturbet, who reviewed the existing political situation from the gloomiest of standpoints.

“Where I think you political spade-workers are so silly,” said the Duke, “is in the misdirection of your efforts. You spend thousands of pounds of money, and Heaven knows how much dynamic force of brain power and personal energy, in trying to elect or displace this or that man, whereas you could gain your ends so much more simply by making use of the men as you find them. If they don’t suit your purpose as they are, transform them into something more satisfactory.”

“Do you refer to hypnotic suggestion?” asked Belturbet, with the air of one who is being trifled with.

“Nothing of the sort. Do you understand what I mean by the verb to koepenick? That is to say, to replace an authority by a spurious imitation that would carry just as much weight for the moment as the displaced original; the advantage, of course, being that the koepenick replica would do what you wanted, whereas the original does what seems best in its own eyes.”

“I suppose every public man has a double, if not two or three,” said Belturbet; “but it would be a pretty hard task to koepenick a whole bunch of them and keep the originals out of the way.”

“There have been instances in European history of highly successful koepenickery,” said the Duke dreamily.

“Oh, of course, there have been False Dimitris and Perkin Warbecks, who imposed on the world for a time,” assented Belturbet, “but they personated people who were dead or safely out of the way. That was a comparatively simple matter. It would be far easier to pass oneself off as dead Hannibal than as living Haldane, for instance.”

“I was thinking,” said the Duke, “of the most famous case of all, the angel who koepenicked King Robert of Sicily with such brilliant results. Just imagine what an advantage it would be to have angels deputizing, to use a horrible but convenient word, for Quinston and Lord Hugo Sizzle, for example. How much smoother the Parliamentary machine would work than at present!”

“Now you’re talking nonsense,” said Belturbet; “angels don’t exist nowadays, at least, not in that way, so what is the use of dragging them into a serious discussion? It’s merely silly.”

“If you talk to me like that I shall just DO it,” said the Duke.

“Do what?” asked Belturbet. There were times when his young friend’s uncanny remarks rather frightened him.

“I shall summon angelic forces to take over some of the more troublesome personalities of our public life, and I shall send the ousted originals into temporary retirement in suitable animal organisms. It’s not every one who would have the knowledge or the power necessary to bring such a thing off—”

“Oh, stop that inane rubbish,” said Belturbet angrily; “it’s getting wearisome. Here’s Quinston coming,” he added, as there approached along the almost deserted path the well-known figure of a young Cabinet Minister, whose personality evoked a curious mixture of public interest and unpopularity.

“Hurry along, my dear man,” said the young Duke to the Minister, who had given him a condescending nod; “your time is running short,” he continued in a provocative strain; “the whole inept crowd of you will shortly be swept away into the world’s waste-paper basket.”

“You poor little strawberry-leafed nonentity,” said the Minister, checking himself for a moment in his stride and rolling out his words spasmodically; “who is going to sweep us away, I should like to know? The voting masses are on our side, and all the ability and administrative talent is on our side too. No power of earth or Heaven is going to move us from our place till we choose to quit it. No power of earth or—”

Belturbet saw, with bulging eyes, a sudden void where a moment earlier had been a Cabinet Minister; a void emphasized rather than relieved by the presence of a puffed-out bewildered-looking sparrow, which hopped about for a moment in a dazed fashion and then fell to a violent cheeping and scolding.

“If we could understand sparrow-language,” said the Duke

serenely, “I fancy we should hear something infinitely worse than 'strawberry-leafed nonentity.’”

“But good Heavens, Eugčne,” said Belturbet hoarsely, “what has become of— Why, there he is! How on earth did he get there?” And he pointed with a shaking finger towards a semblance of the vanished Minister, which approached once more along the unfrequented path.

The Duke laughed.

“It is Quinston to all outward appearance,” he said composedly, “but I fancy you will find, on closer investigation, that it is an angel understudy of the real article.”

The Angel-Quinston greeted them with a friendly smile.

“How beastly happy you two look sitting there!” he said wistfully.

“I don’t suppose you’d care to change places with poor little us,” replied the Duke chaffingly.

“How about poor little me?” said the Angel modestly. “I’ve got to run about behind the wheels of popularity, like a spotted dog behind a carriage, getting all the dust and trying to look as if I was an important part of the machine. I must seem a perfect fool to you onlookers sometimes.”

“I think you are a perfect angel,” said the Duke.

The Angel-that-had-been-Quinston smiled and passed on his way, pursued across the breadth of the Horse Guards Parade by a tiresome little sparrow that cheeped incessantly and furiously at him.

“That’s only the beginning” said the Duke complacently; “I’ve made it operative with all of them, irrespective of parties.”

Belturbet made no coherent reply; he was engaged in feeling his pulse. The Duke fixed his attention with some interest on a black swan that was swimming with haughty, stiff-necked aloofness amid the crowd of lesser water-fowl that dotted the ornamental water. For all its pride of bearing, something was evidently ruffling and enraging it; in its way it seemed as angry and amazed as the sparrow had been.

At the same moment a human figure came along the pathway. Belturbet looked up apprehensively.

“Kedzon,” he whispered briefly.

“An Angel-Kedzon, if I am not mistaken,” said the Duke. “Look, he is talking affably to a human being. That settles it.”

A shabbily dressed loungeur had accosted the man who had been Viceroy in the splendid East, and who still reflected in his mien

some of the cold dignity of the Himalayan snow-peaks.

“Could you tell me, sir, if them white birds is storks or halbatrosses? I had an argyment—”

The cold dignity thawed at once into genial friendliness.

“Those are pelicans, my dear sir. Are you interested in birds? If you would join me in a bun and a glass of milk at the stall yonder, I could tell you some interesting things about Indian birds. Right oh! Now the hill-mynah, for instance—”

The two men disappeared in the direction of the bun stall, chatting volubly as they went, and shadowed from the other side of the railed enclosure by a black swan, whose temper seemed to have reached the limit of inarticulate rage.

Belturbet gazed in an open-mouthed wonder after the retreating couple, then transferred his attention to the infuriated swan, and finally turned with a look of scared comprehension at his young friend lolling unconcernedly in his chair. There was no longer any room to doubt what was happening. The “silly talk” had been translated into terrifying action.

“I think a prairie oyster on the top of a stiffish brandy-and-soda might save my reason,” said Belturbet weakly, as he limped towards his club.

It was late in the day before he could steady his nerves sufficiently to glance at the evening papers. The Parliamentary report proved significant reading, and confirmed the fears that he had been trying to shake off. Mr. Ap Dave, the Chancellor, whose lively controversial style endeared him to his supporters and embittered him, politically speaking, to his opponents, had risen in his place to make an unprovoked apology for having alluded in a recent speech to certain protesting taxpayers as “skulkers.” He had realized on reflection that they were in all probability perfectly honest in their inability to understand certain legal technicalities of the new finance laws. The House had scarcely recovered from this sensation when Lord Hugo Sizzle caused a further flutter of astonishment by going out of his way to indulge in an outspoken appreciation of the fairness, loyalty, and straightforwardness not only of the Chancellor, but of all the members of the Cabinet. A wit had gravely suggested moving the adjournment of the House in view of the unexpected circumstances that had arisen.

Belturbet anxiously skimmed over a further item of news printed immediately below the Parliamentary report: “Wild cat found in an exhausted condition in Palace Yard.”

“Now I wonder which of them—” he mused, and then an appalling idea came to him. “Supposing he’s put them both into the same beast!” He hurriedly ordered another prairie oyster.

Belturbet was known in his club as a strictly moderate drinker; his

consumption of alcoholic stimulants that day gave rise to considerable comment.

The events of the next few days were piquantly bewildering to the world at large; to Belturbet, who knew dimly what was happening, the situation was fraught with recurring alarms. The old saying that in politics it's the unexpected that always happens received a justification that it had hitherto somewhat lacked, and the epidemic of startling personal changes of front was not wholly confined to the realm of actual politics. The eminent chocolate magnate, Sadbury, whose antipathy to the Turf and everything connected with it was a matter of general knowledge, had evidently been replaced by an Angel-Sadbury, who proceeded to electrify the public by blossoming forth as an owner of race-horses, giving as a reason his matured conviction that the sport was, after all, one which gave healthy open-air recreation to large numbers of people drawn from all classes of the community, and incidentally stimulated the important industry of horse-breeding. His colours, chocolate and cream hoops spangled with pink stars, promised to become as popular as any on the Turf. At the same time, in order to give effect to his condemnation of the evils resulting from the spread of the gambling habit among wage-earning classes, who lived for the most part from hand to mouth, he suppressed all betting news and tipsters' forecasts in the popular evening paper that was under his control. His action received instant recognition and support from the Angel-proprietor of the EVENING VIEWS, the principal rival evening halfpenny paper, who forthwith issued an

ukase decreeing a similar ban on betting news, and in a short while the regular evening Press was purged of all mention of starting prices and probable winners. A considerable drop in the circulation of all these papers was the immediate result, accompanied, of course, by a falling-off in advertisement value, while a crop of special betting broadsheets sprang up to supply the newly-created want. Under their influence the betting habit became if anything rather more widely diffused than before. The Duke had possibly overlooked the futility of koeppenicking the leaders of the nation with excellently intentioned angel under- studies, while leaving the mass of the people in its original condition.

Further sensation and dislocation was caused in the Press world by the sudden and dramatic RAPPROCHEMENT which took place between the Angel-Editor of the SCRUTATOR and the Angel-Editor of the ANGLIAN REVIEW, who not only ceased to criticize and disparage the tone and tendencies of each other's publication, but agreed to exchange editorships for alternating periods. Here again public support was not on the side of the angels; constant readers of the SCRUTATOR complained bitterly of the strong meat which was thrust upon them at fitful intervals in place of the almost vegetarian diet to which they had become confidently accustomed; even those who were not mentally averse to strong meat as a separate course were pardonably annoyed at being supplied with it in the pages of the SCRUTATOR. To be suddenly confronted with a pungent herring salad when one had attuned oneself to tea and toast, or to discover a richly truffled

segment of PATÉ DE FOIE dissembled in a bowl of bread and milk, would be an experience that might upset the equanimity of the most placidly disposed mortal. An equally vehement outcry arose from the regular subscribers of the ANGLIAN REVIEW who protested against being served from time to time with literary fare which no young person of sixteen could possibly want to devour in secret. To take infinite precautions, they complained, against the juvenile perusal of such eminently innocuous literature was like reading the Riot Act on an uninhabited island. Both reviews suffered a serious falling-off in circulation and influence. Peace hath its devastations as well as war.

The wives of noted public men formed another element of discomfiture which the young Duke had almost entirely left out of his calculations. It is sufficiently embarrassing to keep abreast of the possible wobblings and veerings-round of a human husband, who, from the strength or weakness of his personal character, may leap over or slip through the barriers which divide the parties; for this reason a merciful politician usually marries late in life, when he has definitely made up his mind on which side he wishes his wife to be socially valuable. But these trials were as nothing compared to the bewilderment caused by the Angel-husbands who seemed in some cases to have revolutionized their outlook on life in the interval between breakfast and dinner, without premonition or preparation of any kind, and apparently without realizing the least need for subsequent explanation. The temporary peace which brooded over the Parliamentary situation was by no means

reproduced in the home circles of the leading statesmen and politicians. It had been frequently and extensively remarked of Mrs. Exe that she would try the patience of an angel; now the tables were reversed, and she unwittingly had an opportunity for discovering that the capacity for exasperating behaviour was not all on one side.

And then, with the introduction of the Navy Estimates, Parliamentary peace suddenly dissolved. It was the old quarrel between Ministers and the Opposition as to the adequacy or the reverse of the Government's naval programme. The Angel-Quinston and the Angel-Hugo-Sizzle contrived to keep the debates free from personalities and pinpricks, but an enormous sensation was created when the elegant lackadaisical Halfan Halfour threatened to bring up fifty, thousand stalwarts to wreck the House if the Estimates were not forthwith revised on a Two-Power basis. It was a memorable scene when he rose in his place, in response to the scandalized shouts of his opponents, and thundered forth, "Gentlemen, I glory in the name of Apache."

Belturbet, who had made several fruitless attempts to ring up his young friend since the fateful morning in St. James's Park, ran him to earth one afternoon at his club, smooth and spruce and unruffled as ever.

"Tell me, what on earth have you turned Cocksley Coxon into?" Belturbet asked anxiously, mentioning the name of one of the

pillars of unorthodoxy in the Anglican Church. “I don’t fancy he BELIEVES in angels, and if he finds an angel preaching orthodox sermons from his pulpit while he’s been turned into a fox-terrier, he’ll develop rabies in less than no time.”

“I rather think it was a fox-terrier,” said the Duke lazily.

Belturbet groaned heavily, and sank into a chair.

“Look here, Eugčne,” he whispered hoarsely, having first looked well round to see that no one was within hearing range, “you’ve got to stop it. Consols are jumping up and down like bronchos, and that speech of Halfour’s in the House last night has simply startled everybody out of their wits. And then on the top of it, Thistlebery —”

“What has he been saying?” asked the Duke quickly.

“Nothing. That’s just what’s so disturbing. Every one thought it was simply inevitable that he should come out with a great epoch-making speech at this juncture, and I’ve just seen on the tape that he has refused to address any meetings at present, giving as a reason his opinion that something more than mere speech-making was wanted.”

The young Duke said nothing, but his eyes shone with quiet exultation.

“It’s so unlike Thistlebery,” continued Belturbet; “at least,” he said suspiciously, “it’s unlike the REAL Thistlebery—”

“The real Thistlebery is flying about somewhere as a vocally-industrious lapwing,” said the Duke calmly; “I expect great things of the Angel-Thistlebery,” he added.

At this moment there was a magnetic stampede of members towards the lobby, where the tape-machines were ticking out some news of more than ordinary import.

“COUP D'ÉTAT in the North. Thistlebery seizes Edinburgh Castle. Threatens civil war unless Government expands naval programme.”

In the babel which ensued Belturbet lost sight of his young friend. For the best part of the afternoon he searched one likely haunt after another, spurred on by the sensational posters which the evening papers were displaying broadcast over the West End. “General Baden-Baden mobilizes Boy-Scouts. Another COUP D'ÉTAT feared. Is Windsor Castle safe?” This was one of the earlier posters, and was followed by one of even more sinister purport: “Will the Test-match have to be postponed?” It was this disquietening question which brought home the real seriousness of the situation to the London public, and made people wonder whether one might not pay too high a price for the advantages of party government. Belturbet, questing round in the hope of finding

the originator of the trouble, with a vague idea of being able to induce him to restore matters to their normal human footing, came across an elderly club acquaintance who dabbled extensively in some of the more sensitive market securities. He was pale with indignation, and his pallor deepened as a breathless newsboy dashed past with a poster inscribed: "Premier's constituency harried by moss-troopers. Halfour sends encouraging telegram to rioters. Letchworth Garden City threatens reprisals. Foreigners taking refuge in Embassies and National Liberal Club."

"This is devils' work!" he said angrily.

Belturbet knew otherwise.

At the bottom of St. James's Street a newspaper motor-cart, which had just come rapidly along Pall Mall, was surrounded by a knot of eagerly talking people, and for the first time that afternoon Belturbet heard expressions of relief and congratulation.

It displayed a placard with the welcome announcement: "Crisis ended. Government gives way. Important expansion of naval programme."

There seemed to be no immediate necessity for pursuing the quest of the errant Duke, and Belturbet turned to make his way homeward through St. James's Park. His mind, attuned to the alarums and excursions of the afternoon, became dimly aware that some excitement of a detached nature was going on around him. In

spite of the political ferment which reigned in the streets, quite a large crowd had gathered to watch the unfolding of a tragedy that had taken place on the shore of the ornamental water. A large black swan, which had recently shown signs of a savage and dangerous disposition, had suddenly attacked a young gentleman who was walking by the water's edge, dragged him down under the surface, and drowned him before any one could come to his assistance. At the moment when Belturbet arrived on the spot several park-keepers were engaged in lifting the corpse into a punt. Belturbet stooped to pick up a hat that lay near the scene of the struggle. It was a smart soft felt hat, faintly reminiscent of Houbigant.

More than a month elapsed before Belturbet had sufficiently recovered from his attack of nervous prostration to take an interest once more in what was going on in the world of politics. The Parliamentary Session was still in full swing, and a General Election was looming in the near future. He called for a batch of morning papers and skimmed rapidly through the speeches of the Chancellor, Quinston, and other Ministerial leaders, as well as those of the principal Opposition champions, and then sank back in his chair with a sigh of relief. Evidently the spell had ceased to act after the tragedy which had overtaken its invoker. There was no trace of angel any where.

THE END

[Hector Munro] Saki's short story: "Ministers Of Grace"

Title: The Dream of Debs

Author: Jack London [More Titles by London]

I awoke fully an hour before my customary time. This in itself was remarkable, and I lay very wide awake, pondering over it.

Something was the matter, something was wrong—I knew not what. I was oppressed by a premonition of something terrible that had happened or was about to happen. But what was it? I strove to orient myself. I remembered that at the time of the Great Earthquake of 1906 many claimed they awakened some moments before the first shock and that during these moments they experienced strange feelings of dread. Was San Francisco again to be visited by earthquake?

I lay for a full minute, numbly expectant, but there occurred no reeling of walls nor shock and grind of falling masonry. All was quiet. That was it! The silence! No wonder I had been perturbed. The hum of the great live city was strangely absent. The surface cars passed along my street, at that time of day, on an average of one every three minutes; but in the ten succeeding minutes not a car passed. Perhaps it was a street-railway strike, was my thought; or perhaps there had been an accident and the power was shut off. But no, the silence was too profound. I heard no jar and rattle of waggon wheels, nor stamp of iron-shod hoofs straining up the

steep cobble-stones.

Pressing the push-button beside my bed, I strove to hear the sound of the bell, though I well knew it was impossible for the sound to rise three stories to me even if the bell did ring. It rang all right, for a few minutes later Brown entered with the tray and morning paper. Though his features were impassive as ever, I noted a startled, apprehensive light in his eyes. I noted, also, that there was no cream on the tray.

“The Creamery did not deliver this morning,” he explained; “nor did the bakery.”

I glanced again at the tray. There were no fresh French rolls— only slices of stale graham bread from yesterday, the most detestable of bread so far as I was concerned.

“Nothing was delivered this morning, sir,” Brown started to explain apologetically; but I interrupted him.

“The paper?”

“Yes, sir, it was delivered, but it was the only thing, and it is the last time, too. There won’t be any paper to-morrow. The paper says so. Can I send out and get you some condensed milk?”

I shook my head, accepted the coffee black, and spread open the paper. The headlines explained everything—explained too much, in

fact, for the lengths of pessimism to which the journal went were ridiculous. A general strike, it said, had been called all over the United States; and most foreboding anxieties were expressed concerning the provisioning of the great cities.

I read on hastily, skimming much and remembering much of labour troubles in the past. For a generation the general strike had been the dream of organized labour, which dream had arisen originally in the mind of Debs, one of the great labour leaders of thirty years before. I recollected that in my young college-settlement days I had even written an article on the subject for one of the magazines and that I had entitled it "The Dream of Debs." And I must confess that I had treated the idea very cavalierly and academically as a dream and nothing more. Time and the world had rolled on, Gompers was gone, the American Federation of Labour was gone, and gone was Debs with all his wild revolutionary ideas; but the dream had persisted, and here it was at last realized in fact. But I laughed, as I read, at the journal's gloomy outlook. I knew better. I had seen organized labour worsted in too many conflicts. It would be a matter only of days when the thing would be settled. This was a national strike, and it wouldn't take the Government long to break it.

I threw the paper down and proceeded to dress. It would certainly be interesting to be out in the streets of San Francisco when not a wheel was turning and the whole city was taking an enforced vacation.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” Brown said, as he handed me my cigar-case, “but Mr. Harmmed has asked to see you before you go out.”

“Send him in right away,” I answered.

Harmmed was the butler. When he entered I could see he was labouring under controlled excitement. He came at once to the point.

“What shall I do, sir? There will be needed provisions, and the delivery drivers are on strike. And the electricity is shut off—I guess they’re on strike, too.”

“Are the shops open?” I asked.

“Only the small ones, sir. The retail clerks are out, and the big ones can’t open; but the owners and their families are running the little ones themselves.”

“Then take the machine,” I said, “and go the rounds and make your purchases. Buy plenty of everything you need or may need. Get a box of candles—no, get half-a-dozen boxes. And, when you’re done, tell Harrison to bring the machine around to the club for me—not later than eleven.”

Harmmed shook his head gravely. “Mr. Harrison has struck along with the Chauffeurs’ Union, and I don’t know how to run the machine myself.”

“Oh, ho, he has, has he?” said. “Well, when next Mister Harrison happens around you tell him that he can look elsewhere for a position.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You don’t happen to belong to a Butlers’ Union, do you, Harmmed?”

“No, sir,” was the answer. “And even if I did I’d not desert my employer in a crisis like this. No, sir, I would—”

“All right, thank you,” I said. “Now you get ready to accompany me. I’ll run the machine myself, and we’ll lay in a stock of provisions to stand a siege.”

It was a beautiful first of May, even as May days go. The sky was cloudless, there was no wind, and the air was warm—almost balmy. Many autos were out, but the owners were driving them themselves. The streets were crowded but quiet. The working class, dressed in its Sunday best, was out taking the air and observing the effects of the strike. It was all so unusual, and withal so peaceful, that I found myself enjoying it. My nerves were tingling with mild excitement. It was a sort of placid adventure. I passed Miss Chickering. She was at the helm of her little runabout. She swung around and came after me, catching me at the corner.

“Oh, Mr. Corf!” she hailed. “Do you know where I can buy

candles? I've been to a dozen shops, and they're all sold out. It's dreadfully awful, isn't it?"

But her sparkling eyes gave the lie to her words. Like the rest of us, she was enjoying it hugely. Quite an adventure it was, getting those candles. It was not until we went across the city and down into the working-class quarter south of Market Street that we found small corner groceries that had not yet sold out. Miss Chickering thought one box was sufficient, but I persuaded her into taking four. My car was large, and I laid in a dozen boxes. There was no telling what delays might arise in the settlement of the strike. Also, I filled the car with sacks of flour, baking-powder, tinned goods, and all the ordinary necessities of life suggested by Harmed, who fussed around and clucked over the purchases like an anxious old hen.

The remarkable thing, that first day of the strike, was that no one really apprehended anything serious. The announcement of organized labour in the morning papers that it was prepared to stay out a month or three months was laughed at. And yet that very first day we might have guessed as much from the fact that the working class took practically no part in the great rush to buy provisions. Of course not. For weeks and months, craftily and secretly, the whole working class had been laying in private stocks of provisions. That was why we were permitted to go down and buy out the little groceries in the working-class neighbourhoods.

It was not until I arrived at the club that afternoon that I began to feel the first alarm. Everything was in confusion. There were no olives for the cocktails, and the service was by hitches and jerks. Most of the men were angry, and all were worried. A babel of voices greeted me as I entered. General Folsom, nursing his capacious paunch in a window-seat in the smoking-room was defending himself against half-a-dozen excited gentlemen who were demanding that he should do something.

“What can I do more than I have done?” he was saying. “There are no orders from Washington. If you gentlemen will get a wire through I’ll do anything I am commanded to do. But I don’t see what can be done. The first thing I did this morning, as soon as I learned of the strike, was to order in the troops from the Presidio—three thousand of them. They’re guarding the banks, the Mint, the post office, and all the public buildings. There is no disorder whatever. The strikers are keeping the peace perfectly. You can’t expect me to shoot them down as they walk along the streets with wives and children all in their best bib and tucker.”

“I’d like to know what’s happening on Wall Street,” I heard Jimmy Wombold say as I passed along. I could imagine his anxiety, for I knew that he was deep in the big Consolidated-Western deal.

“Say, Corf,” Atkinson bustled up to me, “is your machine running?”

“Yes,” I answered, “but what’s the matter with your own?”

“Broken down, and the garages are all closed. And my wife’s somewhere around Truckee, I think, stalled on the overland. Can’t get a wire to her for love or money. She should have arrived this evening. She may be starving. Lend me your machine.”

“Can’t get it across the bay,” Halstead spoke up. “The ferries aren’t running. But I tell you what you can do. There’s Rollinson—oh, Rollinson, come here a moment. Atkinson wants to get a machine across the bay. His wife is stuck on the overland at Truckee. Can’t you bring the Lurette across from Tiburon and carry the machine over for him?”

The Lurette was a two-hundred-ton, ocean-going schooner-yacht.

Rollinson shook his head. “You couldn’t get a longshoreman to land the machine on board, even if I could get the Lurette over, which I can’t, for the crew are members of the Coast Seamen’s Union, and they’re on strike along with the rest.”

“But my wife may be starving,” I could hear Atkinson wailing as I moved on.

At the other end of the smoking-room I ran into a group of men bunched excitedly and angrily around Bertie Messener. And Bertie was stirring them up and prodding them in his cool, cynical way. Bertie didn’t care about the strike. He didn’t care much about

anything. He was blase—at least in all the clean things of life; the nasty things had no attraction for him. He was worth twenty millions, all of it in safe investments, and he had never done a tap of productive work in his life—inherited it all from his father and two uncles. He had been everywhere, seen everything, and done everything but get married, and this last in the face of the grim and determined attack of a few hundred ambitious mammas. For years he had been the greatest catch, and as yet he had avoided being caught. He was disgracefully eligible. On top of his wealth he was young, handsome, and, as I said before, clean. He was a great athlete, a young blond god that did everything perfectly and admirably with the solitary exception of matrimony. And he didn't care about anything, had no ambitions, no passions, no desire to do the very things he did so much better than other men.

“This is sedition!” one man in the group was crying. Another called it revolt and revolution, and another called it anarchy.

“I can't see it,” Bertie said. “I have been out in the streets all morning. Perfect order reigns. I never saw a more law-abiding populace. There's no use calling it names. It's not any of those things. It's just what it claims to be, a general strike, and it's your turn to play, gentlemen.”

“And we'll play all right!” cried Garfield, one of the traction millionaires. “We'll show this dirt where its place is—the beasts! Wait till the Government takes a hand.”

“But where is the Government?” Bertie interposed. “It might as well be at the bottom of the sea so far as you’re concerned. You don’t know what’s happening at Washington. You don’t know whether you’ve got a Government or not.”

“Don’t you worry about that,” Garfield blurted out.

“I assure you I’m not worrying,” Bertie smiled languidly. “But it seems to me it’s what you fellows are doing. Look in the glass, Garfield.”

Garfield did not look, but had he looked he would have seen a very excited gentleman with ruffled, iron-grey hair, a flushed face, mouth sullen and vindictive, and eyes wildly gleaming.

“It’s not right, I tell you,” little Hanover said; and from his tone I was sure that he had already said it a number of times.

“Now that’s going too far, Hanover,” Bertie replied. “You fellows make me tired. You’re all open-shop men. You’ve eroded my eardrums with your endless gabble for the open shop and the right of a man to work. You’ve harangued along those lines for years. Labour is doing nothing wrong in going out on this general strike. It is violating no law of God nor man. Don’t you talk, Hanover. You’ve been ringing the changes too long on the God-given right to work . . . or not to work; you can’t escape the corollary. It’s a dirty little sordid scrap, that’s all the whole thing is. You’ve got labour down and gouged it, and now labour’s got you down and is

gouging you, that's all, and you're squealing."

Every man in the group broke out in indignant denials that labour had ever been gouged.

"No, sir!" Garfield was shouting. "We've done the best for labour. Instead of gouging it, we've given it a chance to live. We've made work for it. Where would labour be if it hadn't been for us?"

"A whole lot better off," Bertie sneered. "You've got labour down and gouged it every time you got a chance, and you went out of your way to make chances."

"No! No!" were the cries.

"There was the teamsters' strike, right here in San Francisco," Bertie went on imperturbably. "The Employers' Association precipitated that strike. You know that. And you know I know it, too, for I've sat in these very rooms and heard the inside talk and news of the fight. First you precipitated the strike, then you bought the Mayor and the Chief of Police and broke the strike. A pretty spectacle, you philanthropists getting the teamsters down and gouging them.

"Hold on, I'm not through with you. It's only last year that the labour ticket of Colorado elected a governor. He was never seated. You know why. You know how your brother philanthropists and capitalists of Colorado worked it. It was a case of getting labour

down and gouging it. You kept the president of the South-western Amalgamated Association of Miners in jail for three years on trumped-up murder charges, and with him out of the way you broke up the association. That was gouging labour, you'll admit. The third time the graduated income tax was declared unconstitutional was a gouge. So was the eight-hour Bill you killed in the last Congress.

“And of all unmitigated immoral gouges, your destruction of the closed-shop principle was the limit. You know how it was done. You bought out Farburg, the last president of the old American Federation of Labour. He was your creature—or the creature of all the trusts and employers' associations, which is the same thing. You precipitated the big closed-shop strike. Farburg betrayed that strike. You won, and the old American Federation of Labour crumbled to pieces. You follows destroyed it, and by so doing undid yourselves; for right on top of it began the organization of the I.L.W.—the biggest and solidest organization of labour the United States has ever seen, and you are responsible for its existence and for the present general strike. You smashed all the old federations and drove labour into the I.L.W., and the I.L.W. called the general strike—still fighting for the closed shop. And then you have the effrontery to stand here face to face and tell me that you never got labour down and gouged it. Bah!”

This time there were no denials. Garfield broke out in self-defence

“We’ve done nothing we were not compelled to do, if we were to win.”

“I’m not saying anything about that,” Bertie answered. “What I am complaining about is your squealing now that you’re getting a taste of your own medicine. How many strikes have you won by starving labour into submission? Well, labour’s worked out a scheme whereby to starve you into submission. It wants the closed shop, and, if it can get it by starving you, why, starve you shall.”

“I notice that you have profited in the past by those very labour gouges you mention,” insinuated Brentwood, one of the wiliest and most astute of our corporation lawyers. “The receiver is as bad as the thief,” he sneered. “You had no hand in the gouging, but you took your whack out of the gouge.”

“That is quite beside the question, Brentwood,” Bertie drawled. “You’re as bad as Hanover, intruding the moral element. I haven’t said that anything is right or wrong. It’s all a rotten game, I know; and my sole kick is that you fellows are squealing now that you’re down and labour’s taking a gouge out of you. Of course I’ve taken the profits from the gouging and, thanks to you, gentlemen, without having personally to do the dirty work. You did that for me—oh, believe me, not because I am more virtuous than you, but because my good father and his various brothers left me a lot of money with which to pay for the dirty work.”

“If you mean to insinuate—” Brentwood began hotly.

“Hold on, don’t get all-ruffled up,” Bertie interposed insolently. “There’s no use in playing hypocrites in this thieves’ den. The high and lofty is all right for the newspapers, boys’ clubs, and Sunday schools—that’s part of the game; but for heaven’s sake don’t let’s play it on one another. You know, and you know that I know just what jobbery was done in the building trades’ strike last fall, who put up the money, who did the work, and who profited by it.” (Brentwood flushed darkly.) “But we are all tarred with the same brush, and the best thing for us to do is to leave morality out of it. Again I repeat, play the game, play it to the last finish, but for goodness’ sake don’t squeal when you get hurt.”

When I left the group Bertie was off on a new tack tormenting them with the more serious aspects of the situation, pointing out the shortage of supplies that was already making itself felt, and asking them what they were going to do about it. A little later I met him in the cloak-room, leaving, and gave him a lift home in my machine.

“It’s a great stroke, this general strike,” he said, as we bowled along through the crowded but orderly streets. “It’s a smashing body-blow. Labour caught us napping and struck at our weakest place, the stomach. I’m going to get out of San Francisco, Corf. Take my advice and get out, too. Head for the country, anywhere. You’ll have more chance. Buy up a stock of supplies and get into a tent or

a cabin somewhere. Soon there'll be nothing but starvation in this city for such as we.”

How correct Bertie Messener was I never dreamed. I decided that he was an alarmist. As for myself, I was content to remain and watch the fun. After I dropped him, instead of going directly home, I went on in a hunt for more food. To my surprise, I learned that the small groceries where I had bought in the morning were sold out. I extended my search to the Potrero, and by good luck managed to pick up another box of candles, two sacks of wheat flour, ten pounds of graham flour (which would do for the servants), a case of tinned corn, and two cases of tinned tomatoes. It did look as though there was going to be at least a temporary food shortage, and I hugged myself over the goodly stock of provisions I had laid in.

The next morning I had my coffee in bed as usual, and, more than the cream, I missed the daily paper. It was this absence of knowledge of what was going on in the world that I found the chief hardship. Down at the club there was little news. Rider had crossed from Oakland in his launch, and Halstead had been down to San Jose and back in his machine. They reported the same conditions in those places as in San Francisco. Everything was tied up by the strike. All grocery stocks had been bought out by the upper classes. And perfect order reigned. But what was happening over the rest of the country—in Chicago? New York? Washington? Most probably the same things that were happening with us, we

concluded; but the fact that we did not know with absolute surety was irritating.

General Folsom had a bit of news. An attempt had been made to place army telegraphers in the telegraph offices, but the wires had been cut in every direction. This was, so far, the one unlawful act committed by labour, and that it was a concerted act he was fully convinced. He had communicated by wireless with the army post at Benicia, the telegraph lines were even then being patrolled by soldiers all the way to Sacramento. Once, for one short instant, they had got the Sacramento call, then the wires, somewhere, were cut again. General Folsom reasoned that similar attempts to open communication were being made by the authorities all the way across the continent, but he was non-committal as to whether or not he thought the attempt would succeed. What worried him was the wire-cutting; he could not but believe that it was an important part of the deep-laid labour conspiracy. Also, he regretted that the Government had not long since established its projected chain of wireless stations.

The days came and went, and for a while it was a humdrum time. Nothing happened. The edge of excitement had become blunted. The streets were not so crowded. The working class did not come uptown any more to see how we were taking the strike. And there were not so many automobiles running around. The repair-shops and garages were closed, and whenever a machine broke down it went out of commission. The clutch on mine broke, and neither

love nor money could get it repaired. Like the rest, I was now walking. San Francisco lay dead, and we did not know what was happening over the rest of the country. But from the very fact that we did not know we could conclude only that the rest of the country lay as dead as San Francisco. From time to time the city was placarded with the proclamations of organized labour—these had been printed months before, and evidenced how thoroughly the I.L.W. had prepared for the strike. Every detail had been worked out long in advance. No violence had occurred as yet, with the exception of the shooting of a few wire-cutters by the soldiers, but the people of the slums were starving and growing ominously restless.

The business men, the millionaires, and the professional class held meetings and passed resolutions, but there was no way of making the proclamations public. They could not even get them printed. One result of these meetings, however, was that General Folsom was persuaded into taking military possession of the wholesale houses and of all the flour, grain, and food warehouses. It was high time, for suffering was becoming acute in the homes of the rich, and bread-lines were necessary. I knew that my servants were beginning to draw long faces, and it was amazing—the hole they made in my stock of provisions. In fact, as I afterward surmised, each servant was stealing from me and secreting a private stock of provisions for himself.

But with the formation of the bread-lines came new troubles. There

was only so much of a food reserve in San Francisco, and at the best it could not last long. Organized labour, we knew, had its private supplies; nevertheless, the whole working class joined the bread-lines. As a result, the provisions General Folsom had taken possession of diminished with perilous rapidity. How were the soldiers to distinguish between a shabby middle-class man, a member of the I.L.W., or a slum dweller? The first and the last had to be fed, but the soldiers did not know all the I.L.W. men in the city, much less the wives and sons and daughters of the I.L.W. men. The employers helping, a few of the known union men were flung out of the bread-lines; but that amounted to nothing. To make matters worse, the Government tugs that had been hauling food from the army depots on Mare Island to Angel Island found no more food to haul. The soldiers now received their rations from the confiscated provisions, and they received them first.

The beginning of the end was in sight. Violence was beginning to show its face. Law and order were passing away, and passing away, I must confess, among the slum people and the upper classes. Organized labour still maintained perfect order. It could well afford to—it had plenty to eat. I remember the afternoon at the club when I caught Halstead and Brentwood whispering in a corner. They took me in on the venture. Brentwood's machine was still in running order, and they were going out cow-stealing. Halstead had a long butcher knife and a cleaver. We went out to the outskirts of the city. Here and there were cows grazing, but always they were guarded by their owners. We pursued our quest,

following along the fringe of the city to the east, and on the hills near Hunter's Point we came upon a cow guarded by a little girl. There was also a young calf with the cow. We wasted no time on preliminaries. The little girl ran away screaming, while we slaughtered the cow. I omit the details, for they are not nice—we were unaccustomed to such work, and we bungled it.

But in the midst of it, working with the haste of fear, we heard cries, and we saw a number of men running toward us. We abandoned the spoils and took to our heels. To our surprise we were not pursued. Looking back, we saw the men hurriedly cutting up the cow. They had been on the same lay as ourselves. We argued that there was plenty for all, and ran back. The scene that followed begged description. We fought and squabbled over the division like savages. Brentwood, I remember, was a perfect brute, snarling and snapping and threatening that murder would be done if we did not get our proper share.

And we were getting our share when there occurred a new irruption on the scene. This time it was the dreaded peace officers of the I.L.W. The little girl had brought them. They were armed with whips and clubs, and there were a score of them. The little girl danced up and down in anger, the tears streaming down her cheeks, crying: "Give it to 'em! Give it to 'em! That guy with the specs—he did it! Mash his face for him! Mash his face!" That guy with the specs was I, and I got my face mashed, too, though I had the presence of mind to take off my glasses at the first. My! but we

did receive a trouncing as we scattered in all directions. Brentwood, Halstead, and I fled away for the machine. Brentwood's nose was bleeding, while Halstead's cheek was cut across with the scarlet slash of a black-snake whip.

And, lo, when the pursuit ceased and we had gained the machine, there, hiding behind it, was the frightened calf. Brentwood warned us to be cautious, and crept up on it like a wolf or tiger. Knife and cleaver had been left behind, but Brentwood still had his hands, and over and over on the ground he rolled with the poor little calf as he throttled it. We threw the carcass into the machine, covered it over with a robe, and started for home. But our misfortunes had only begun. We blew out a tyre. There was no way of fixing it, and twilight was coming on. We abandoned the machine, Brentwood pulling and staggering along in advance, the calf, covered by the robe, slung across his shoulders. We took turn about carrying that calf, and it nearly killed us. Also, we lost our way. And then, after hours of wandering and toil, we encountered a gang of hoodlums. They were not I.L.W. men, and I guess they were as hungry as we. At any rate, they got the calf and we got the thrashing. Brentwood raged like a madman the rest of the way home, and he looked like one, with his torn clothes, swollen nose, and blackened eyes.

There wasn't any more cow-stealing after that. General Folsom sent his troopers out and confiscated all the cows, and his troopers, aided by the militia, ate most of the meat. General Folsom was not to be blamed; it was his duty to maintain law and

order, and he maintained it by means of the soldiers, wherefore he was compelled to feed them first of all.

It was about this time that the great panic occurred. The wealthy classes precipitated the flight, and then the slum people caught the contagion and stampeded wildly out of the city. General Folsom was pleased. It was estimated that at least 200,000 had deserted San Francisco, and by that much was his food problem solved. Well do I remember that day. In the morning I had eaten a crust of bread. Half of the afternoon I had stood in the bread-line; and after dark I returned home, tired and miserable, carrying a quart of rice and a slice of bacon. Brown met me at the door. His face was worn and terrified. All the servants had fled, he informed me. He alone remained. I was touched by his faithfulness and, when I learned that he had eaten nothing all day, I divided my food with him. We cooked half the rice and half the bacon, sharing it equally and reserving the other half for morning. I went to bed with my hunger, and tossed restlessly all night. In the morning I found Brown had deserted me, and, greater misfortune still, he had stolen what remained of the rice and bacon.

It was a gloomy handful of men that came together at the club that morning. There was no service at all. The last servant was gone. I noticed, too, that the silver was gone, and I learned where it had gone. The servants had not taken it, for the reason, I presume, that the club members got to it first. Their method of disposing of it was simple. Down south of Market Street, in the dwellings of the

I.L.W., the housewives had given square meals in exchange for it. I went back to my house. Yes, my silver was gone—all but a massive pitcher. This I wrapped up and carried down south of Market Street.

I felt better after the meal, and returned to the club to learn if there was anything new in the situation. Hanover, Collins, and Dakon were just leaving. There was no one inside, they told me, and they invited me to come along with them. They were leaving the city, they said, on Dakon's horses, and there was a spare one for me. Dakon had four magnificent carriage horses that he wanted to save, and General Folsom had given him the tip that next morning all the horses that remained in the city were to be confiscated for food. There were not many horses left, for tens of thousands of them had been turned loose into the country when the hay and grain gave out during the first days. Birdall, I remember, who had great draying interests, had turned loose three hundred dray horses. At an average value of five hundred dollars, this had amounted to \$150,000. He had hoped, at first, to recover most of the horses after the strike was over, but in the end he never recovered one of them. They were all eaten by the people that fled from San Francisco. For that matter, the killing of the army mules and horses for food had already begun.

Fortunately for Dakon, he had had a plentiful supply of hay and grain stored in his stable. We managed to raise four saddles, and we found the animals in good condition and spirited, withal unused to

being ridden. I remembered the San Francisco of the great earthquake as we rode through the streets, but this San Francisco was vastly more pitiable. No cataclysm of nature had caused this, but, rather, the tyranny of the labour unions. We rode down past Union Square and through the theatre, hotel, and shopping districts. The streets were deserted. Here and there stood automobiles, abandoned where they had broken down or when the gasolene had given out. There was no sign of life, save for the occasional policemen and the soldiers guarding the banks and public buildings. Once we came upon an I.L.W. man pasting up the latest proclamation. We stopped to read. "We have maintained an orderly strike," it ran; "and we shall maintain order to the end. The end will come when our demands are satisfied, and our demands will be satisfied when we have starved our employers into submission, as we ourselves in the past have often been starved into submission."

"Messener's very words," Collins said. "And I, for one, am ready to submit, only they won't give me a chance to submit. I haven't had a full meal in an age. I wonder what horse-meat tastes like?"

We stopped to read another proclamation: "When we think our employers are ready to submit we shall open up the telegraphs and place the employers' associations of the United States in communication. But only messages relating to peace terms shall be permitted over the wires."

We rode on, crossed Market Street, and a little later were passing through the working-class district. Here the streets were not deserted. Leaning over the gates or standing in groups were the I.L.W. men. Happy, well-fed children were playing games, and stout housewives sat on the front steps gossiping. One and all cast amused glances at us. Little children ran after us, crying: "Hey, mister, ain't you hungry?" And one woman, nursing a child at her breast, called to Dakon: "Say, Fatty, I'll give you a meal for your skate—ham and potatoes, currant jelly, white bread, canned butter, and two cups of coffee."

"Have you noticed, the last few days," Hanover remarked to me, "that there's not been a stray dog in the streets?"

I had noticed, but I had not thought about it before. It was high time to leave the unfortunate city. We at last managed to connect with the San Bruno Road, along which we headed south. I had a country place near Menlo, and it was our objective. But soon we began to discover that the country was worse off and far more dangerous than the city. There the soldiers and the I.L.W. kept order; but the country had been turned over to anarchy. Two hundred thousand people had fled from San Francisco, and we had countless evidences that their flight had been like that of an army of locusts.

They had swept everything clean. There had been robbery and fighting. Here and there we passed bodies by the roadside and saw

the blackened ruins of farm-houses. The fences were down, and the crops had been trampled by the feet of a multitude. All the vegetable patches had been rooted up by the famished hordes. All the chickens and farm animals had been slaughtered. This was true of all the main roads that led out of San Francisco. Here and there, away from the roads, farmers had held their own with shotguns and revolvers, and were still holding their own. They warned us away and refused to parley with us. And all the destruction and violence had been done by the slum-dwellers and the upper classes. The I.L.W. men, with plentiful food supplies, remained quietly in their homes in the cities.

Early in the ride we received concrete proof of how desperate was the situation. To the right of us we heard cries and rifle-shots. Bullets whistled dangerously near. There was a crashing in the underbrush; then a magnificent black truck-horse broke across the road in front of us and was gone. We had barely time to notice that he was bleeding and lame. He was followed by three soldiers. The chase went on among the trees on the left. We could hear the soldiers calling to one another. A fourth soldier limped out upon the road from the right, sat down on a boulder, and mopped the sweat from his face.

“Militia,” Dakon whispered. “Deserters.”

The man grinned up at us and asked for a match. In reply to Dakon’s “What’s the word?” he informed us that the militiamen

were deserting. “No grub,” he explained. “They’re feedin’ it all to the regulars.” We also learned from him that the military prisoners had been released from Alcatraz Island because they could no longer be fed.

I shall never forget the next sight we encountered. We came upon it abruptly around a turn of the road. Overhead arched the trees. The sunshine was filtering down through the branches. Butterflies were fluttering by, and from the fields came the song of larks. And there it stood, a powerful touring car. About it and in it lay a number of corpses. It told its own tale. Its occupants, fleeing from the city, had been attacked and dragged down by a gang of slum dwellers—hoodlums. The thing had occurred within twenty-four hours. Freshly opened meat and fruit tins explained the reason for the attack. Dakon examined the bodies.

“I thought so,” he reported. “I’ve ridden in that car. It was Perriton—the whole family. We’ve got to watch out for ourselves from now on.”

“But we have no food with which to invite attack,” I objected.

Dakon pointed to the horse I rode, and I understood.

Early in the day Dakon’s horse had cast a shoe. The delicate hoof had split, and by noon the animal was limping. Dakon refused to ride it farther, and refused to desert it. So, on his solicitation, we went on. He would lead the horse and join us at my place. That

was the last we saw of him; nor did we ever learn his end.

By one o'clock we arrived at the town of Menlo, or, rather, at the site of Menlo, for it was in ruins. Corpses lay everywhere. The business part of the town, as well as part of the residences, had been gutted by fire. Here and there a residence still held out; but there was no getting near them. When we approached too closely we were fired upon. We met a woman who was poking about in the smoking ruins of her cottage. The first attack, she told us had been on the stores, and as she talked we could picture that raging, roaring, hungry mob flinging itself on the handful of townspeople. Millionaires and paupers had fought side by side for the food, and then fought with one another after they got it. The town of Palo Alto and Stanford University had been sacked in similar fashion, we learned. Ahead of us lay a desolate, wasted land; and we thought we were wise in turning off to my place. It lay three miles to the west, snuggling among the first rolling swells of the foothills.

But as we rode along we saw that the devastation was not confined to the main roads. The van of the flight had kept to the roads, sacking the small towns as it went; while those that followed had scattered out and swept the whole countryside like a great broom. My place was built of concrete, masonry, and tiles, and so had escaped being burned, but it was gutted clean. We found the gardener's body in the windmill, littered around with empty shotgun shells. He had put up a good fight. But no trace could we find of the two Italian labourers, nor of the house-keeper and her

husband. Not a live thing remained. The calves, the colts, all the fancy poultry and thoroughbred stock, everything, was gone. The kitchen and the fireplaces, where the mob had cooked, were a mess, while many camp-fires outside bore witness to the large number that had fed and spent the night. What they had not eaten they had carried away. There was not a bite for us.

We spent the rest of the night vainly waiting for Dakon, and in the morning, with our revolvers, fought off half-a-dozen marauders. Then we killed one of Dakon's horses, hiding for the future what meat we did not immediately eat. In the afternoon Collins went out for a walk, but failed to return. This was the last straw to Hanover. He was for flight there and then, and I had great difficulty in persuading him to wait for daylight. As for myself, I was convinced that the end of the general strike was near, and I was resolved to return to San Francisco. So, in the morning, we parted company, Hanover heading south, fifty pounds of horse-meat strapped to his saddle, while I, similarly loaded, headed north. Little Hanover pulled through all right, and to the end of his life he will persist, I know, in boring everybody with the narrative of his subsequent adventures.

I got as far as Belmont, on the main road back, when I was robbed of my horse-meat by three militiamen. There was no change in the situation, they said, except that it was going from bad to worse. The I.L.W. had plenty of provisions hidden away and could last out for months. I managed to get as far as Baden, when my horse

was taken away from me by a dozen men. Two of them were San Francisco policemen, and the remainder were regular soldiers. This was ominous. The situation was certainly extreme when the regulars were beginning to desert. When I continued my way on foot, they already had the fire started, and the last of Dakon's horses lay slaughtered on the ground.

As luck would have it, I sprained my ankle, and succeeded in getting no farther than South San Francisco. I lay there that night in an out-house, shivering with the cold and at the same time burning with fever. Two days I lay there, too sick to move, and on the third, reeling and giddy, supporting myself on an extemporized crutch, I tottered on toward San Francisco. I was weak as well, for it was the third day since food had passed my lips. It was a day of nightmare and torment. As in a dream I passed hundreds of regular soldiers drifting along in the opposite direction, and many policemen, with their families, organized in large groups for mutual protection.

As I entered the city I remembered the workman's house at which I had traded the silver pitcher, and in that direction my hunger drove me. Twilight was falling when I came to the place. I passed around by the alleyway and crawled up the black steps, on which I collapsed. I managed to reach out with the crutch and knock on the door. Then I must have fainted, for I came to in the kitchen, my face wet with water, and whisky being poured down my throat. I choked and spluttered and tried to talk. I began saying something

about not having any more silver pitchers, but that I would make it up to them afterward if they would only give me something to eat. But the housewife interrupted me.

“Why, you poor man,” she said, “haven’t you heard? The strike was called off this afternoon. Of course we’ll give you something to eat.”

She bustled around, opening a tin of breakfast bacon and preparing to fry it.

“Let me have some now, please,” I begged; and I ate the raw bacon on a slice of bread, while her husband explained that the demands of the I.L.W. had been granted. The wires had been opened up in the early afternoon, and everywhere the employers’ associations had given in. There hadn’t been any employers left in San Francisco, but General Folsom had spoken for them. The trains and steamers would start running in the morning, and so would everything else just as soon as system could be established.

And that was the end of the general strike. I never want to see another one. It was worse than a war. A general strike is a cruel and immoral thing, and the brain of man should be capable of running industry in a more rational way. Harrison is still my chauffeur. It was part of the conditions of the I.L.W. that all of its members should be reinstated in their old positions. Brown never came back, but the rest of the servants are with me. I hadn’t the heart to

discharge them—poor creatures, they were pretty hard-pressed when they deserted with the food and silver. And now I can't discharge them. They have all been unionized by the I.L.W. The tyranny of organized labour is getting beyond human endurance. Something must be done.

~~THE END~~

Jack London's short story: The Dream of Debs

Title: Ivy Day in the Committee Room

Author: James Joyce [More Titles by Joyce]

OLD JACK raked the cinders together with a piece of cardboard and spread them judiciously over the whitening dome of coals. When the dome was thinly covered his face lapsed into darkness but, as he set himself to fan the fire again, his crouching shadow ascended the opposite wall and his face slowly reemerged into light. It was an old man's face, very bony and hairy. The moist blue eyes blinked at the fire and the moist mouth fell open at times, munching once or twice mechanically when it closed. When the cinders had caught he laid the piece of cardboard against the wall, sighed and said:

“That's better now, Mr. O'Connor.”

Mr. O'Connor, a grey-haired young man, whose face was

disfigured by many blotches and pimples, had just brought the tobacco for a cigarette into a shapely cylinder but when spoken to he undid his handiwork meditatively. Then he began to roll the tobacco again meditatively and after a moment's thought decided to lick the paper.

“Did Mr. Tierney say when he'd be back?” he asked in a sky falsetto.

“He didn't say.”

Mr. O'Connor put his cigarette into his mouth and began search his pockets. He took out a pack of thin pasteboard cards.

“I'll get you a match,” said the old man.

“Never mind, this'll do,” said Mr. O'Connor.

He selected one of the cards and read what was printed on it:

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

ROYAL EXCHANGE WARD

Mr. Richard J. Tierney, P.L.G., respectfully solicits the favour of

your vote and influence at the coming election in the Royal Exchange Ward.

Mr. O'Connor had been engaged by Tierney's agent to canvass one part of the ward but, as the weather was inclement and his boots let in the wet, he spent a great part of the day sitting by the fire in the Committee Room in Wicklow Street with Jack, the old caretaker. They had been sitting thus since the short day had grown dark. It was the sixth of October, dismal and cold out of doors.

Mr. O'Connor tore a strip off the card and, lighting it, lit his cigarette. As he did so the flame lit up a leaf of dark glossy ivy the lapel of his coat. The old man watched him attentively and then, taking up the piece of cardboard again, began to fan the fire slowly while his companion smoked.

"Ah, yes," he said, continuing, "it's hard to know what way to bring up children. Now who'd think he'd turn out like that! I sent him to the Christian Brothers and I done what I could him, and there he goes boosing about. I tried to make him someway decent."

He replaced the cardboard wearily.

"Only I'm an old man now I'd change his tune for him. I'd take the stick to his back and beat him while I could stand over him—as I done many a time before. The mother, you know, she cocks him up with this and that...."

“That’s what ruins children,” said Mr. O’Connor.

“To be sure it is,” said the old man. “And little thanks you get for it, only impudence. He takes th’upper hand of me whenever he sees I’ve a sup taken. What’s the world coming to when sons speaks that way to their fathers?”

“What age is he?” said Mr. O’Connor.

“Nineteen,” said the old man.

“Why don’t you put him to something?”

“Sure, amn’t I never done at the drunken bowsy ever since he left school? ‘I won’t keep you,’ I says. ‘You must get a job for yourself.’ But, sure, it’s worse whenever he gets a job; he drinks it all.”

Mr. O’Connor shook his head in sympathy, and the old man fell silent, gazing into the fire. Someone opened the door of the room and called out:

“Hello! Is this a Freemason’s meeting?”

“Who’s that?” said the old man.

“What are you doing in the dark?” asked a voice.

“Is that you, Hynes?” asked Mr. O’Connor.

“Yes. What are you doing in the dark?” said Mr. Hynes, advancing into the light of the fire.

He was a tall, slender young man with a light brown moustache. Imminent little drops of rain hung at the brim of his hat and the collar of his jacket-coat was turned up.

“Well, Mat,” he said to Mr. O’Connor, “how goes it?”

Mr. O’Connor shook his head. The old man left the hearth and after stumbling about the room returned with two candlesticks which he thrust one after the other into the fire and carried to the table. A denuded room came into view and the fire lost all its cheerful colour. The walls of the room were bare except for a copy of an election address. In the middle of the room was a small table on which papers were heaped.

Mr. Hynes leaned against the mantelpiece and asked:

“Has he paid you yet?”

“Not yet,” said Mr. O’Connor. “I hope to God he’ll not leave us in the lurch tonight.”

Mr. Hynes laughed.

“O, he’ll pay you. Never fear,” he said.

“I hope he’ll look smart about it if he means business,” said Mr.

O'Connor.

“What do you think, Jack?” said Mr. Hynes satirically to the old man.

The old man returned to his seat by the fire, saying:

“It isn't but he has it, anyway. Not like the other tinker.”

“What other tinker?” said Mr. Hynes.

“Colgan,” said the old man scornfully.

“It is because Colgan's a working—man you say that? What's the difference between a good honest bricklayer and a publican—eh? Hasn't the working-man as good a right to be in the Corporation as anyone else—ay, and a better right than those shoneens that are always hat in hand before any fellow with a handle to his name? Isn't that so, Mat?” said Mr. Hynes, addressing Mr. O'Connor.

“I think you're right,” said Mr. O'Connor.

“One man is a plain honest man with no hunker-sliding about him. He goes in to represent the labour classes. This fellow you're working for only wants to get some job or other.”

“Of course, the working-classes should be represented,” said the old man.

“The working-man,” said Mr. Hynes, “gets all kicks and no halfpence. But it’s labour produces everything. The workingman is not looking for fat jobs for his sons and nephews and cousins. The working-man is not going to drag the honour of Dublin in the mud to please a German monarch.”

“How’s that?” said the old man.

“Don’t you know they want to present an address of welcome to Edward Rex if he comes here next year? What do we want kowtowing to a foreign king?”

“Our man won’t vote for the address,” said Mr. O’Connor. “He goes in on the Nationalist ticket.”

“Won’t he?” said Mr. Hynes. “Wait till you see whether he will or not. I know him. Is it Tricky Dicky Tierney?”

“By God! perhaps you’re right, Joe,” said Mr. O’Connor. “Anyway, I wish he’d turn up with the spondulics.”

The three men fell silent. The old man began to rake more cinders together. Mr. Hynes took off his hat, shook it and then turned down the collar of his coat, displaying, as he did so, an ivy leaf in the lapel.

“If this man was alive,” he said, pointing to the leaf, “we’d have no talk of an address of welcome.”

“That’s true,” said Mr. O’Connor.

“Musha, God be with them times!” said the old man. “There was some life in it then.”

The room was silent again. Then a bustling little man with a snuffling nose and very cold ears pushed in the door. He walked over quickly to the fire, rubbing his hands as if he intended to produce a spark from them.

“No money, boys,” he said.

“Sit down here, Mr. Henchy,” said the old man, offering him his chair.

“O, don’t stir, Jack, don’t stir,” said Mr. Henchy

He nodded curtly to Mr. Hynes and sat down on the chair which the old man vacated.

“Did you serve Aungier Street?” he asked Mr. O’Connor.

“Yes,” said Mr. O’Connor, beginning to search his pockets for memoranda.

“Did you call on Grimes?”

“I did.”

“Well? How does he stand?”

“He wouldn’t promise. He said: ‘I won’t tell anyone what way I’m going to vote.’ But I think he’ll be all right.”

“Why so?”

“He asked me who the nominators were; and I told him. I mentioned Father Burke’s name. I think it’ll be all right.”

Mr. Henchy began to snuffle and to rub his hands over the fire at a terrific speed. Then he said:

“For the love of God, Jack, bring us a bit of coal. There must be some left.”

The old man went out of the room.

“It’s no go,” said Mr. Henchy, shaking his head. “I asked the little shoeboy, but he said: ‘Oh, now, Mr. Henchy, when I see work going on properly I won’t forget you, you may be sure.’ Mean little tinker! ‘Usha, how could he be anything else?’”

“What did I tell you, Mat?” said Mr. Hynes. “Tricky Dicky Tierney.”

“O, he’s as tricky as they make ‘em,” said Mr. Henchy. “He hasn’t got those little pigs’ eyes for nothing. Blast his soul! Couldn’t he pay up like a man instead of: ‘O, now, Mr. Henchy, I must speak

to Mr. Fanning.... I've spent a lot of money'? Mean little schoolboy of hell! I suppose he forgets the time his little old father kept the hand-me-down shop in Mary's Lane."

"But is that a fact?" asked Mr. O'Connor.

"God, yes," said Mr. Henchy. "Did you never hear that? And the men used to go in on Sunday morning before the houses were open to buy a waistcoat or a trousers—moya! But Tricky Dicky's little old father always had a tricky little black bottle up in a corner. Do you mind now? That's that. That's where he first saw the light."

The old man returned with a few lumps of coal which he placed here and there on the fire.

"That's a nice how-do-you-do," said Mr. O'Connor. "How does he expect us to work for him if he won't stump up?"

"I can't help it," said Mr. Henchy. "I expect to find the bailiffs in the hall when I go home."

Mr. Hynes laughed and, shoving himself away from the mantelpiece with the aid of his shoulders, made ready to leave.

"It'll be all right when King Eddie comes," he said. "Well boys, I'm off for the present. See you later. 'Bye, 'bye."

He went out of the room slowly. Neither Mr. Henchy nor the old

man said anything, but, just as the door was closing, Mr. O'Connor, who had been staring moodily into the fire, called out suddenly:

“Bye, Joe.”

Mr. Henchy waited a few moments and then nodded in the direction of the door.

“Tell me,” he said across the fire, “what brings our friend in here? What does he want?”

“Usha, poor Joe!” said Mr. O'Connor, throwing the end of his cigarette into the fire, “he's hard up, like the rest of us.”

Mr. Henchy snuffled vigorously and spat so copiously that he nearly put out the fire, which uttered a hissing protest.

“To tell you my private and candid opinion,” he said, “I think he's a man from the other camp. He's a spy of Colgan's, if you ask me. Just go round and try and find out how they're getting on. They won't suspect you. Do you twig?”

“Ah, poor Joe is a decent skin,” said Mr. O'Connor.

“His father was a decent, respectable man,” Mr. Henchy admitted. “Poor old Larry Hynes! Many a good turn he did in his day! But I'm greatly afraid our friend is not nineteen carat. Damn it, I can

understand a fellow being hard up, but what I can't understand is a fellow sponging. Couldn't he have some spark of manhood about him?"

"He doesn't get a warm welcome from me when he comes," said the old man. "Let him work for his own side and not come spying around here."

"I don't know," said Mr. O'Connor dubiously, as he took out cigarette-papers and tobacco. "I think Joe Hynes is a straight man. He's a clever chap, too, with the pen. Do you remember that thing he wrote...?"

"Some of these hillsiders and fenians are a bit too clever if ask me," said Mr. Henchy. "Do you know what my private and candid opinion is about some of those little jokers? I believe half of them are in the pay of the Castle."

"There's no knowing," said the old man.

"O, but I know it for a fact," said Mr. Henchy. "They're Castle hacks.... I don't say Hynes.... No, damn it, I think he's a stroke above that.... But there's a certain little nobleman with a cock-eye—you know the patriot I'm alluding to?"

Mr. O'Connor nodded.

"There's a lineal descendant of Major Sirr for you if you like! O,

the heart's blood of a patriot! That's a fellow now that'd sell his country for fourpence—ay—and go down on his bended knees and thank the Almighty Christ he had a country to sell.”

There was a knock at the door.

“Come in!” said Mr. Henchy.

A person resembling a poor clergyman or a poor actor appeared in the doorway. His black clothes were tightly buttoned on his short body and it was impossible to say whether he wore a clergyman's collar or a layman's, because the collar of his shabby frock-coat, the uncovered buttons of which reflected the candlelight, was turned up about his neck. He wore a round hat of hard black felt. His face, shining with raindrops, had the appearance of damp yellow cheese save where two rosy spots indicated the cheekbones. He opened his very long mouth suddenly to express disappointment and at the same time opened wide his very bright blue eyes to express pleasure and surprise.

“O Father Keon!” said Mr. Henchy, jumping up from his chair. “Is that you? Come in!”

“O, no, no, no!” said Father Keon quickly, pursing his lips as if he were addressing a child.

“Won't you come in and sit down?”

“No, no, no!” said Father Keon, speaking in a discreet, indulgent, velvety voice. “Don’t let me disturb you now! I’m just looking for Mr. Fanning...”

“He’s round at the Black Eagle,” said Mr. Henchy. “But won’t you come in and sit down a minute?”

“No, no, thank you. It was just a little business matter,” said Father Keon. “Thank you, indeed.”

He retreated from the doorway and Mr. Henchy, seizing one of the candlesticks, went to the door to light him downstairs.

“O, don’t trouble, I beg!”

“No, but the stairs is so dark.”

“No, no, I can see.... Thank you, indeed.”

“Are you right now?”

“All right, thanks.... Thanks.”

Mr. Henchy returned with the candlestick and put it on the table. He sat down again at the fire. There was silence for a few moments.

“Tell me, John,” said Mr. O’Connor, lighting his cigarette with another pasteboard card.

“Hm? “

“What he is exactly?”

“Ask me an easier one,” said Mr. Henchy.

“Fanning and himself seem to me very thick. They’re often in Kavanagh’s together. Is he a priest at all?”

“Mmmyes, I believe so.... I think he’s what you call black sheep. We haven’t many of them, thank God! but we have a few.... He’s an unfortunate man of some kind....”

“And how does he knock it out?” asked Mr. O’Connor.

“That’s another mystery.”

“Is he attached to any chapel or church or institution or—”

“No,” said Mr. Henchy, “I think he’s travelling on his own account.... God forgive me,” he added, “I thought he was the dozen of stout.”

“Is there any chance of a drink itself?” asked Mr. O’Connor.

“I’m dry too,” said the old man.

“I asked that little shoeboy three times,” said Mr. Henchy, “would he send up a dozen of stout. I asked him again now, but he was

leaning on the counter in his shirt-sleeves having a deep goster with Alderman Cowley.”

“Why didn’t you remind him?” said Mr. O’Connor.

“Well, I couldn’t go over while he was talking to Alderman Cowley. I just waited till I caught his eye, and said: ‘About that little matter I was speaking to you about....’ ‘That’ll be all right, Mr. H.,’ he said. Yerra, sure the little hop-o’-my-thumb has forgotten all about it.”

“There’s some deal on in that quarter,” said Mr. O’Connor thoughtfully. “I saw the three of them hard at it yesterday at Suffolk Street corner.”

“I think I know the little game they’re at,” said Mr. Henchy. “You must owe the City Fathers money nowadays if you want to be made Lord Mayor. Then they’ll make you Lord Mayor. By God! I’m thinking seriously of becoming a City Father myself. What do you think? Would I do for the job?”

Mr. O’Connor laughed.

“So far as owing money goes....”

“Driving out of the Mansion House,” said Mr. Henchy, “in all my vermin, with Jack here standing up behind me in a powdered wig—eh?”

“And make me your private secretary, John.”

“Yes. And I’ll make Father Keon my private chaplain. We’ll have a family party.”

“Faith, Mr. Henchy,” said the old man, “you’d keep up better style than some of them. I was talking one day to old Keegan, the porter. ‘And how do you like your new master, Pat?’ says I to him. ‘You haven’t much entertaining now,’ says I. ‘Entertaining!’ says he. ‘He’d live on the smell of an oil-rag.’ And do you know what he told me? Now, I declare to God I didn’t believe him.”

“What?” said Mr. Henchy and Mr. O’Connor.

“He told me: ‘What do you think of a Lord Mayor of Dublin sending out for a pound of chops for his dinner? How’s that for high living?’ says he. ‘Wisha! wisha,’ says I. ‘A pound of chops,’ says he, ‘coming into the Mansion House.’ ‘Wisha!’ says I, ‘what kind of people is going at all now?’”

At this point there was a knock at the door, and a boy put in his head.

“What is it?” said the old man.

“From the Black Eagle,” said the boy, walking in sideways and depositing a basket on the floor with a noise of shaken bottles.

The old man helped the boy to transfer the bottles from the basket to the table and counted the full tally. After the transfer the boy put his basket on his arm and asked:

“Any bottles?”

“What bottles?” said the old man.

“Won’t you let us drink them first?” said Mr. Henchy.

“I was told to ask for the bottles.”

“Come back tomorrow,” said the old man.

“Here, boy!” said Mr. Henchy, “will you run over to O’Farrell’s and ask him to lend us a corkscrew—for Mr. Henchy, say. Tell him we won’t keep it a minute. Leave the basket there.”

The boy went out and Mr. Henchy began to rub his hands cheerfully, saying:

“Ah, well, he’s not so bad after all. He’s as good as his word, anyhow.”

“There’s no tumblers,” said the old man.

“O, don’t let that trouble you, Jack,” said Mr. Henchy. “Many’s the good man before now drank out of the bottle.”

“Anyway, it’s better than nothing,” said Mr. O’Connor.

“He’s not a bad sort,” said Mr. Henchy, “only Fanning has such a loan of him. He means well, you know, in his own tinpot way.”

The boy came back with the corkscrew. The old man opened three bottles and was handing back the corkscrew when Mr. Henchy said to the boy:

“Would you like a drink, boy?”

“If you please, sir,” said the boy.

The old man opened another bottle grudgingly, and handed it to the boy.

“What age are you?” he asked.

“Seventeen,” said the boy.

As the old man said nothing further, the boy took the bottle. said: “Here’s my best respects, sir, to Mr. Henchy,” drank the contents, put the bottle back on the table and wiped his mouth with his sleeve. Then he took up the corkscrew and went out of the door sideways, muttering some form of salutation.

“That’s the way it begins,” said the old man.

“The thin edge of the wedge,” said Mr. Henchy.

The old man distributed the three bottles which he had opened and the men drank from them simultaneously. After having drank each placed his bottle on the mantelpiece within hand's reach and drew in a long breath of satisfaction.

“Well, I did a good day's work today,” said Mr. Henchy, after a pause.

“That so, John?”

“Yes. I got him one or two sure things in Dawson Street, Crofton and myself. Between ourselves, you know, Crofton (he's a decent chap, of course), but he's not worth a damn as a canvasser. He hasn't a word to throw to a dog. He stands and looks at the people while I do the talking.”

Here two men entered the room. One of them was a very fat man whose blue serge clothes seemed to be in danger of falling from his sloping figure. He had a big face which resembled a young ox's face in expression, staring blue eyes and a grizzled moustache. The other man, who was much younger and frailer, had a thin, clean-shaven face. He wore a very high double collar and a wide-brimmed bowler hat.

“Hello, Crofton!” said Mr. Henchy to the fat man. “Talk of the devil...”

“Where did the boose come from?” asked the young man. “Did the

cow calve?”

“O, of course, Lyons spots the drink first thing!” said Mr. O’Connor, laughing.

“Is that the way you chaps canvass,” said Mr. Lyons, “and Crofton and I out in the cold and rain looking for votes?”

“Why, blast your soul,” said Mr. Henchy, “I’d get more votes in five minutes than you two’d get in a week.”

“Open two bottles of stout, Jack,” said Mr. O’Connor.

“How can I?” said the old man, “when there’s no corkscrew?”

“Wait now, wait now!” said Mr. Henchy, getting up quickly. “Did you ever see this little trick?”

He took two bottles from the table and, carrying them to the fire, put them on the hob. Then he sat down again by the fire and took another drink from his bottle. Mr. Lyons sat on the edge of the table, pushed his hat towards the nape of his neck and began to swing his legs.

“Which is my bottle?” he asked.

“This, lad,” said Mr. Henchy.

Mr. Crofton sat down on a box and looked fixedly at the other

bottle on the hob. He was silent for two reasons. The first reason, sufficient in itself, was that he had nothing to say; the second reason was that he considered his companions beneath him. He had been a canvasser for Wilkins, the Conservative, but when the Conservatives had withdrawn their man and, choosing the lesser of two evils, given their support to the Nationalist candidate, he had been engaged to work for Mr. Tiemey.

In a few minutes an apologetic “Pok!” was heard as the cork flew out of Mr. Lyons’ bottle. Mr. Lyons jumped off the table, went to the fire, took his bottle and carried it back to the table.

“I was just telling them, Crofton,” said Mr. Henchy, that we got a good few votes today.”

“Who did you get?” asked Mr. Lyons.

“Well, I got Parkes for one, and I got Atkinson for two, and got Ward of Dawson Street. Fine old chap he is, too—regular old toff, old Conservative! 'But isn't your candidate a Nationalist?' said he. 'He's a respectable man,' said I. 'He's in favour of whatever will benefit this country. He's a big ratepayer,' I said. 'He has extensive house property in the city and three places of business and isn't it to his own advantage to keep down the rates? He's a prominent and respected citizen,' said I, 'and a Poor Law Guardian, and he doesn't belong to any party, good, bad, or indifferent.' That's the way to talk to 'em.”

“And what about the address to the King?” said Mr. Lyons, after drinking and smacking his lips.

“Listen to me,” said Mr. Henchy. “What we want in this country, as I said to old Ward, is capital. The King’s coming here will mean an influx of money into this country. The citizens of Dublin will benefit by it. Look at all the factories down by the quays there, idle! Look at all the money there is in the country if we only worked the old industries, the mills, the ship-building yards and factories. It’s capital we want.”

“But look here, John,” said Mr. O’Connor. “Why should we welcome the King of England? Didn’t Parnell himself...”

“Parnell,” said Mr. Henchy, “is dead. Now, here’s the way I look at it. Here’s this chap come to the throne after his old mother keeping him out of it till the man was grey. He’s a man of the world, and he means well by us. He’s a jolly fine decent fellow, if you ask me, and no damn nonsense about him. He just says to himself: ‘The old one never went to see these wild Irish. By Christ, I’ll go myself and see what they’re like.’ And are we going to insult the man when he comes over here on a friendly visit? Eh? Isn’t that right, Crofton?”

Mr. Crofton nodded his head.

“But after all now,” said Mr. Lyons argumentatively, “King Edward’s life, you know, is not the very...”

“Let by gones be by gones,” said Mr. Henchy. “I admire the man personally. He’s just an ordinary knockabout like you and me. He’s fond of his glass of grog and he’s a bit of a rake, perhaps, and he’s a good sportsman. Damn it, can’t we Irish play fair?”

“That’s all very fine,” said Mr. Lyons. “But look at the case of Parnell now.”

“In the name of God,” said Mr. Henchy, “where’s the analogy between the two cases?”

“What I mean,” said Mr. Lyons, “is we have our ideals. Why, now, would we welcome a man like that? Do you think now after what he did Parnell was a fit man to lead us? And why, then, would we do it for Edward the Seventh?”

“This is Parnell’s anniversary,” said Mr. O’Connor, “and don’t let us stir up any bad blood. We all respect him now that he’s dead and gone—even the Conservatives,” he added, turning to Mr. Crofton.

Pok! The tardy cork flew out of Mr. Crofton’s bottle. Mr. Crofton got up from his box and went to the fire. As he returned with his capture he said in a deep voice:

“Our side of the house respects him, because he was a gentleman.”

“Right you are, Crofton!” said Mr. Henchy fiercely. “He was the

only man that could keep that bag of cats in order. 'Down, ye dogs! Lie down, ye curs!' That's the way he treated them. Come in, Joe! Come in!" he called out, catching sight of Mr. Hynes in the doorway.

Mr. Hynes came in slowly.

"Open another bottle of stout, Jack," said Mr. Henchy. "O, I forgot there's no corkscrew! Here, show me one here and I'll put it at the fire."

The old man handed him another bottle and he placed it on the hob.

"Sit down, Joe," said Mr. O'Connor, "we're just talking about the Chief."

"Ay, ay!" said Mr. Henchy.

Mr. Hynes sat on the side of the table near Mr. Lyons but said nothing.

"There's one of them, anyhow," said Mr. Henchy, "that didn't renege him. By God, I'll say for you, Joe! No, by God, you stuck to him like a man!"

"O, Joe," said Mr. O'Connor suddenly. "Give us that thing you wrote—do you remember? Have you got it on you?"

"O, ay!" said Mr. Henchy. "Give us that. Did you ever hear that.

Crofton? Listen to this now: splendid thing”

“Go on,” said Mr. O’Connor. “Fire away, Joe.”

Mr. Hynes did not seem to remember at once the piece to which they were alluding but, after reflecting a while, he said:

“O, that thing is it.... Sure, that’s old now.”

“Out with it, man!” said Mr. O’Connor.

“Sh, 'sh,” said Mr. Henchy. “Now, Joe!”

Mr. Hynes hesitated a little longer. Then amid the silence he took off his hat, laid it on the table and stood up. He seemed to be rehearsing the piece in his mind. After a rather long pause he announced:

THE DEATH OF PARNELL

6th October, 1891

He cleared his throat once or twice and then began to recite:

He is dead. Our Uncrowned King is dead.

O, Erin, mourn with grief and woe

For he lies dead whom the fell gang

Of modern hypocrites laid low.

He lies slain by the coward hounds

He raised to glory from the mire;

And Erin's hopes and Erin's dreams

Perish upon her monarch's pyre.

In palace, cabin or in cot

The Irish heart where'er it be

Is bowed with woe—for he is gone

Who would have wrought her destiny.

He would have had his Erin famed,

The green flag gloriously unfurled,

Her statesmen, bards and warriors raised

Before the nations of the World.

He dreamed (alas, 'twas but a dream!)

Of Liberty: but as he strove

To clutch that idol, treachery
Sundered him from the thing he loved.
Shame on the coward, caitiff hands
That smote their Lord or with a kiss
Betrayed him to the rabble-rout
Of fawning priests—no friends of his.
May everlasting shame consume
The memory of those who tried
To befoul and smear the exalted name
Of one who spurned them in his pride.
He fell as fall the mighty ones,
Nobly undaunted to the last,
And death has now united him
With Erin's heroes of the past.
No sound of strife disturb his sleep!

Calmly he rests: no human pain

Or high ambition spurs him now

The peaks of glory to attain.

They had their way: they laid him low.

But Erin, list, his spirit may

Rise, like the Phoenix from the flames,

When breaks the dawning of the day,

The day that brings us Freedom's reign.

And on that day may Erin well

Pledge in the cup she lifts to Joy

One grief—the memory of Parnell.

Mr. Hynes sat down again on the table. When he had finished his recitation there was a silence and then a burst of clapping: even Mr. Lyons clapped. The applause continued for a little time. When it had ceased all the auditors drank from their bottles in silence.

Pok! The cork flew out of Mr. Hynes' bottle, but Mr. Hynes remained sitting flushed and bare-headed on the table. He did not

seem to have heard the invitation.

“Good man, Joe!” said Mr. O’Connor, taking out his cigarette papers and pouch the better to hide his emotion.

“What do you think of that, Crofton?” cried Mr. Henchy. “Isn’t that fine? What?”

Crofton said that it was a very fine piece of writing.

[The end]

James Joyce’s short story: Ivy Day in the Committee Rooms