LITTLE GENTLEMAN

BOOTH TARKINGTON
Booth Tarkington was born at Indianapolis and educated at Princeton University. He made his reputation both here and in America with *Monsieur Beaucaire*, and added to it later by writing that delightful story of a very human boy, *Penrod*. 
LITTLE GENTLEMAN

THE midsummer sun was stinging hot outside the little barber-shop next to the corner drug-store and Penrod, undergoing a toilette preliminary to his very slowly approaching twelfth birthday, was adhesive enough to retain upon his face much hair as it fell from the shears. There is a mystery here: the torsorial processes are not unagreeable to manhood; in truth, they are soothing; but the hairs detached from a boy’s head get into his eyes, his ears, his nose, his mouth, and down his neck, and he does everywhere itch excruciatingly. Wherefore he blinks, winks, weeps, twitches, condenses his countenance, and squirms, and perchance the barber’s scissors clip more than intended—belike an overlying flange of ear.

“Um—muh—owl!” said Penrod, this thing having happened.

“D’ I touch y’ up a little?” inquired the barber, smiling falsely.

“Ooh—rub!” The boy in the chair offered inarticulate protest, as the wound was rubbed with alum.

“That don’t hurt!” said the barber. “You will get it, though, if you don’t sit stiller,” he continued, nipping in the bud any attempt on the part of his patient to think that he already had “it.”

“Pfuff!” said Penrod, meaning no disrespect, but endeavouring to dislodge a temporary moustache from his lip.

“You ought to see how still that little Georgie Bassett sits,” the barber went on, reprovingly. “I hear everybody says he’s the best boy in town.”

“Pfuff! Phurr!” There was a touch of intentional contempt in this.

“I haven’t heard nobody around the neighbourhood makin’ no such remarks,” added the barber, “about nobody of the name of Penrod Schofield.”

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“Well,” said Penrod, clearing his mouth after a struggle, “who wants ’em to? Ouch!”

“I hear they call Georgie Bassett the ‘little gentleman,’” ventured the barber, provocatively, meeting with instant success.

“They’d better not call me that,” returned Penrod truculently. “I’d like to hear anybody try. Just once, that’s all! I bet they’d never try it ag— Ouch!”

“What? What’d you do to ’em?”

“It’s all right what I’d do! I bet they wouldn’t want to call me that again long as they lived!”

“What’d you do if it was a little girl? You wouldn’t hit her, would you?”

“Well, I’d— Ouch!”

“You wouldn’t hit a little girl, would you?” the barber persisted, gathering into his powerful fingers a mop of hair from the top of Penrod’s head and pulling that suffering head into an unnatural position. “Doesn’t the Bible say it ain’t never right to hit the weak sex?”

“Ow! Say, look out!”

“So you’d go and punch a pore, weak, little girl, would you?” said the barber, reprovingly.

“Well, who said I’d hit her?” demanded the chivalrous Penrod. “I bet I’d fix her though, all right. She’d see!”

“You wouldn’t call her names, would you?”

“No, I wouldn’t! What hurt is it to call anybody names?”

“Is that so?” exclaimed the barber. “Then you was intending what I heard you hollering at Fisher’s grocery delivery wagon driver fer a favour, the other day when I was goin’ by your house, was you? I reckon I better tell him, because he says to me afterwards if he ever lays eyes on you when you ain’t in your own yard, he’s goin’ to do a whole lot o’ things you ain’t goin’ to like! Yessir, that’s what he says to me!”

“He better catch me first, I guess, before he talks so much.”

“Well,” resumed the barber, “that ain’t sayin’ what you’d do if a young lady ever walked up and called you a little gentleman. I want to hear what you’d do to her. I guess I know, though—come to think of it.”

“What?” demanded Penrod.

“You’d sick that pore ole dog of yours on her cat, if she had one, I expect,” guessed the barber derisively.
"No, I would not!"
"Well, what would you do?"
"I'd do enough. Don't worry about that!"
"Well, suppose it was a boy, then: what'd you do if a boy come up to you and says, 'Hello, little gentleman'?"
"He'd be lucky," said Penrod, with a sinister frown, "if he got home alive."
"Suppose it was a boy twice your size?"
"Just let him try," said Penrod ominously. "You just let him try. He'd never see daylight again; that's all!"

The barber dug ten active fingers into the helpless scalp before him and did his best to displace it, while the anguished Penrod, becoming instantly a seething crucible of emotion, misdirected his natural resentment into maddened brooding upon what he would do to a boy "twice his size" who should dare to call him "little gentleman." The barber shook him as his father had never shaken him; the barber buffeted him, rocked him frantically to and fro; the barber seemed to be trying to wring his neck; and Penrod saw himself in staggering zigzag pictures, destroying large, Screaming, fragmentary boys who had insulted him.

The torture stopped suddenly; and clenched, weeping eyes began to see again, while the barber applied cooling lotions which made Penrod smell like a coloured housemaid's ideal.

"Now what," asked the barber, combing the reeking locks gently, "what would it make you so mad fer, to have somebody call you a little gentleman? It's a kind of compliment, as it were, you might say. What would you want to hit anybody fer that fer?"

To the mind of Penrod, this question was without meaning or reasonableness. It was within neither his power nor his desire to analyze the process by which the phrase had become offensive to him, and was now rapidly assuming the proportions of an outrage. He knew only that his gorge rose at the thought of it.

"You just let 'em try it!" he said threateningly, as he slid down from the chair. And as he went out of the door, after further conversation on the same subject, he called back those warning words once more: "Just let 'em try it! Just once—that's all I ask 'em to. They'll find out what they get!"
The barber chuckled. Then a fly lit on the barber’s nose and he slapped at it, and the slap missed the fly but did not miss the nose. The barber was irritated. At this moment his birdlike eye gleamed a gleam as it fell upon customers approaching: the prettiest little girl in the world, leading by the hand her baby brother, Mitchy-Mitch, coming to have Mitchy-Mitch’s hair clipped, against the heat.

It was a hot day and idle, with little to feed the mind—and the barber was a mischievous man with an irritated nose. He did his worst.

Meanwhile, the brooding Penrod pursued his homeward way; no great distance, but long enough for several one-sided conflicts with malign insulter made of thin air. “You better not call me that!” he muttered. “You just try it, and you’ll get what other people got when they tried it. You better not ask fresh with me! Oh, you will, will you?” He delivered a vicious kick full upon the shins of an iron fence-post, which suffered little, though Penrod instantly regretted his indiscretion. “Oof!” he grunted, hopping; and went on after bestowing a look of awful hostility upon the fence-post. “I guess you’ll know better next time,” he said, in parting, to this antagonist. “You just let me catch you around here again and I’ll—” His voice sank to inarticulate but ominous murmurings. He was in a dangerous mood.

Nearing home, however, his belligerent spirit was diverted to happier interests by the discovery that some workmen had left a caldron of tar in the cross-street, close by his father’s stable. He tested it, but found it inedible. Also, as a substitute for professional chewing-gum it was unsatisfactory, being insufficiently boiled down and too thin, though of a pleasant, lukewarm temperature. But it had an excess of one quality—it was sticky. It was the stickiest tar Penrod had ever used for any purposes whatsoever, and nothing upon which he wiped his hands served to rid them of it; neither his polka-dotted shirt waist nor his knickerbockers: neither the fence, nor even Duke, who came unthinkingly wagging out to greet him, and retired wiser.

Nevertheless, tar is tar. Much can be done with it, no matter what its condition; so Penrod lingered by the caldron, though from a neighbouring yard could be heard the voices of comrades, including that of Sam Williams. On the ground
about the caldron were scattered chips and sticks and bits of wood to the number of a great multitude. Penrod mixed quantities of this refuse into the tar, and interested himself in seeing how much of it he could keep moving in slow swirls upon the ebon surface.

Other surprises were arranged for the absent workmen. The caldron was almost full, and the surface of the tar near the rim. Penrod endeavoured to ascertain how many pebbles and brickbats, dropped in, would cause an overflow. Labouring heartily to this end, he had almost accomplished it, when he received the suggestion for an experiment on a much larger scale. Embedded at the corner of a grass-plot across the street was a whitewashed stone, the size of a small watermelon and serving no purpose whatever save the questionable one of decoration. It was easily pried up with a stick; though getting it to the caldron tested the full strength of the ardent labourer. Instructed to perform such a task, he would have sincerely maintained its impossibility; but now, as it was unbidden, and promised rather destructive results, he set about it with unconquerable energy, feeling certain that he would be rewarded with a mighty splash. Perspiring, grunting vehemently, his back aching and all muscles strained, he progressed in short stages until the big stone lay at the base of the caldron. He rested a moment, panting, then lifted the stone, and was bending his shoulders for the heave that would lift it over the rim, when a sweet, taunting voice, close behind him, startled him cruelly.

"How do you do, little gentleman!"

Penrod squawked, dropped the stone, and shouted, "Shut up, you dern fool!" purely from instinct, even before his about-face made him aware who had so spitefully addressed him.

It was Marjorie Jones. Always dainty, and prettily dressed, she was in speckless and starchly white to-day, and a refreshing picture she made, with the new-shorn and powerfully scented Mitchy-Mitch clinging to her hand. They had stolen up behind the toiler, and now stood laughing together in sweet merriment. Since the passing of Penrod’s Rupe Collins period he had experienced some severe qualms at the recollection of his last meeting with Marjorie and his Apache behaviour; in truth, his heart instantly became as wax a t sight of her, and he would have offered her fair speech;
but, alas! in Marjorie's wonderful eyes there shone a consciousness of new powers for his undoing, and she denied him opportunity.

"Oh, oh!" she cried, mocking his pained outcry. "What a way for a little gentleman to talk! Little gentlemen don't say wicked——"

"Marjorie!" Penrod, enraged and dismayed, felt himself stung beyond all endurance. Insult from her was bitterer to endure than from any other. "Don't you call me that again!"

"Why not, little gentleman?"

He stamped his foot. "You better stop!"

Marjorie sent into his furious face her lovely, spiteful laughter.

"Little gentleman, little gentleman, little gentleman!" she said deliberately. "How's the little gentleman, this afternoon? Hello, little gentleman!"

Penrod, quite beside himself, danced eccentrically. "Dry up!" he howled. "Dry up, dry up, dry up, dry up!"

Mitchy-Mitch shouted with delight and applied a finger to the side of the caldron—a finger immediately snatched away and wiped upon a handkerchief by his fastidious sister.

"'Ittle gellamun!" said Mitchy-Mitch.

"You better look out!" Penrod whirled upon this small offender with grim satisfaction. Here was at least something male that could without dishonour be held responsible. "You say that again, and I'll give you the worst——"

"You will not!" snapped Marjorie, instantly vitriolic. "He'll say just whatever he wants to, and he'll say it just as much as he wants to. Say it again, Mitchy-Mitch!"

"'Ittle gellamun!" said Mitchy-Mitch promptly.

"Ow-yab!" Penrod's tone-production was becoming affected by his mental condition. "You say that again, and I'll——"

"Go on, Mitchy-Mitch," cried Marjorie. "He can't do a thing. He don't dare! Say it some more, Mitchy-Mitch—say it a whole lot!"

Mitchy-Mitch, his small, fat face shining with confidence in his immunity, complied.

"'Ittle gellamun!" squeaked malevolently.

"'Ittle gellamun! 'Ittle gellamun! 'Ittle gellamun!"

The desperate Penrod bent over the whitewashed rock,
lifted it, and then—outdoing Porthos, John Ridd, and Ursus in one miraculous burst of strength—heaved it into the air.

Marjorie screamed.

But it was too late. The big stone descended into the precise midst of the caldron and Penrod got his mighty splash. It was far, far beyond his expectations.

Spontaneously there were grand and awful effects—volcanic spectacles of nightmare and eruption. A black sheet of eccentric shape rose out of the caldron and descended upon the three children, who had no time to evade it.

After it fell, Mitchy-Mitch, who stood nearest the caldron, was the thickest, though there was enough for all. Bre'ër Rabbit would have fled from any of them.

When Marjorie and Mitchy-Mitch got their breath, they used it vocally, and seldom have more penetrating sounds issued from human throats. Coincidentally, Marjorie, quite berserk, laid hands upon the largest stick within reach and fell upon Penrod with blind fury. He had the presence of mind to flee, and they went round and round the caldron, while Mitchy-Mitch feebly endeavoured to follow—his appearance, in this pursuit, being pathetically like that of a bug fished out of an ink-well, alive but discouraged.

Attracted by the riot, Samuel Williams made his appearance, vaulting a fence, and was immediately followed by Maurice Levy and Georgie Bassett. They stared incredulously at the extraordinary spectacle before them.

"Little gen'-til-mun!'" shrieked Marjorie, with a wild stroke that landed full upon Penrod's tarry cap.

"Ooach!" bleated Penrod.

"It's Penrod!" shouted Sam Williams, recognizing him by the voice. For an instant he had been in some doubt.

"Penrod Schofield!" exclaimed Georgie Bassett. "What does this mean?" That was Georgie's style, and had helped to win him his title.


Unexpectedly, she smote again—with results—and then, seizing the indistinguishable hand of Mitchy-Mitch, she ran wailing homeward down the street.
"Little gentleman?" said Georgie Bassett, with some evidences of disturbed complacency. "Why, that's what they call me!"

"Yes, and you are one, too!" shouted the maddened Penrod. "But you better not let anybody call me that! I've stood enough around here for one day, and you can't run over me, Georgie Bassett. Just you put that in your gizzard and smoke it!"

"Anybody has a perfect right," said Georgie, with dignity, "to call a person a little gentleman. There's lots of names nobody ought to call, but this one's a nice——"

"You better look out!"

Unavenged bruises were distributed all over Penrod, both upon his body and upon his spirit. Driven by subtle forces, he had dipped his hands in catastrophe and disaster: it was not for a Georgie Bassett to beard him. Penrod was about to run amuck.

"I haven't called you a little gentleman, yet," said Georgie. "I only said it. Anybody's got a right to say it."

"Not around me! You just try it again and——"

"I shall say it," returned Georgie, "all I please. Anybody in this town has a right to say 'little gentleman'——"

Bellowing insanely, Penrod plunged his right hand into the caldron, rushed upon Georgie and made awful work of his hair and features.

Alas, it was but the beginning! Sam Williams and Maurice Levy screamed with delight, and, simultaneously infected, danced about the struggling pair, shouting frantically:

"Little gentleman! Little gentleman! Sick him, Georgie! Sick him, little gentleman! Little gentleman! Little gentleman!"

The infuriated outlaw turned upon them with blows and more tar, which gave Georgie Bassett his opportunity and later seriously impaired the purity of his fame. Feeling himself hopelessly tarred, he dipped both hands repeatedly into the caldron and applied his gatherings to Penrod. It was bringing coals to Newcastle, but it helped to assuage the just wrath of Georgie.

The four boys gave a fine imitation of the Laocoön group complicated by an extra figure—frantic splutterings and chokings, strange cries and stranger words issued from this tangle; hands dipped lavishly into the inexhaustible reservoir
of tar, with more and more picturesque results. The caldron had been elevated upon bricks and was not perfectly balanced; and under a heavy impact of the struggling group it lurched and went partly over, pouring forth a Stygian tide which formed a deep pool in the gutter.

It was the fate of Master Roderick Bitts, that exclusive and immaculate person, to make his appearance upon the chaotic scene at this juncture. All in the cool of a white "sailor suit," he turned aside from the path of duty—which led straight to the house of a maiden aunt—and paused to hop with joy upon the pavement. A repeated epithet, continuously half panting, half squawked, somewhere in the nest of gladiators, caught his ear, and he took it up excitedly, not knowing why.

"Little gentleman!" shouted Roderick, jumping up and down in childish glee. "Little gentleman! Little gentleman! Lit—"

A frightful figure tore itself free from the group, encircled this innocent bystander with a black arm, and hurled him headlong. Full length and flat on his face went Roderick into the Stygian pool. The frightful figure was Penrod. Instantly, the pack flung themselves upon him again, and, carrying them with him, he went over upon Roderick, who from that instant was as active a belligerent as any there.

Thus began the Great Tar Fight, the origin of which proved, afterward, so difficult for parents to trace, owing to the opposing accounts of the combatants. Marjorie said Penrod began it; Penrod said Mitchy-Mitch began it; Sam Williams said Georgie Bassett began it; Georgie and Maurice Levy said Penrod began it; Roderick Bitts, who had not recognized his first assailant, said Sam Williams began it.

Nobody thought of accusing the barber. But the barber did not begin it; it was the fly on the barber's nose that began it—though, of course, something else began the fly. Somehow, we never manage to hang the real offender.

The end came only with the arrival of Penrod's mother who had been having a painful conversation by telephone with Mrs. Jones, the mother of Marjorie, and came forth to seek an errant son. It is a mystery how she was able to pick out her own, for by the time she got there his voice was too hoarse to be recognizable.

Mr. Schofield's version of things was that Penrod was
insane. "He's a stark, raving lunatic!" declared the father, descending to the library from a before-dinner interview with the outlaw, that evening. "I'd send him to the military school, but I don't believe they'd take him. Do you know why he says all that awfulness happened?"

"When Margaret and I were trying to scrub him," responded Mrs. Schofield wearily, "he said 'everybody' had been calling him names."

"'Names!'" snorted her husband. "'Little gentleman!' That's the vile epithet they called him! And because of it he wrecks the peace of six homes!"

"Sh! Yes; he told us about it," said Mrs. Schofield, moaning. "He told us several hundred times, I should guess, though I didn't count. He's got it fixed in his head, and we couldn't get it out. All we could do was to put him in the closet. He'd have gone out again after those boys if we hadn't. I don't know what to make of him!"

"He's a mystery to me!" said her husband. "And he refuses to explain why he objects to being called 'little gentleman.' Says he'd do the same thing—and worse—if anybody dared to call him that again. He said if the President of the United States called him that he'd try to whip him. How long did you have him locked up in the closet?"

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield warningly. "About two hours; but I don't think it softened his spirit at all, because when I took him to the barber's to get his hair clipped again, on account of the tar in it, Sammy Williams and Maurice Levy were there for the same reason, and they just whispered 'little gentleman,' so low you could hardly hear them—and Penrod began fighting with them right before me, and it was really all the barber and I could do to drag him away from them. The barber was very kind about it, but Penrod——"

"I tell you he's a lunatic!" Mr. Schofield would have said the same thing of a Frenchman infuriated by the epithet "camel." The philosophy of insult needs expounding.

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield. "It does seem a kind of frenzy."

"Why on earth should any sane person mind being called——"

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield. "It's beyond me!"

"What are you sh-ing me for?" demanded Mr. Schofield explosively.
"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield. "It's Mr. Kinosling, the new rector of Saint Joseph's."

"Where?"

"Sh!" On the front porch with Margaret; he's going to stay for dinner. I do hope——"

"Bachelor, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Our old minister was speaking of him the other day," said Mr. Schofield, "and he didn't seem so terribly impressed."

"Sh! Yes; about thirty, and of course so superior to most of Margaret's friends—boys home from college. She thinks she likes young Robert Williams, I know—but he laughs so much! Of course there isn't any comparison. Mr. Kinosling talks so intellectually; it's a good thing for Margaret to hear that kind of thing, for a change—and, of course, he's very spiritual. He seems very much interested in her." She paused to muse. "I think Margaret likes him; he's so different, too. It's the third time he's dropped in this week, and I——"

"Well," said Mr. Schofield grimly, "if you and Margaret want him to come again, you'd better not let him see Penrod."

"But he's asked to see him; he seems interested in meeting all the family. And Penrod nearly always behaves fairly well at table." She paused, and then put to her husband a question referring to his interview with Penrod upstairs. "Did you—did you—do it?"

"No," he answered gloomily. "No, I didn't, but——" He was interrupted by a violent crash of china and metal in the kitchen, a shriek from Della, and the outrageous voice of Penrod. The well-informed Della, ill-inspired to set up for a wit, had ventured to address the scion of the house rougishly as "little gentleman", and Penrod, by means of the rapid elevation of his right foot, had removed from her supporting hands a laden tray. Both parents started for the kitchen, Mr. Schofield completing his interrupted sentence on the way.

"But I will, now!"

The rite thus promised was hastily but accurately performed in that apartment most distant from the front porch; and, twenty minutes later, Penrod descended to dinner. The Rev. Mr. Kinosling had asked for the pleasure of meeting
him, and it had been decided that the only course possible was to cover up the scandal for the present, and to offer an undisturbed and smiling family surface to the gaze of the visitor.

Scorched but not bowed, the smouldering Penrod was led forward for the social formulae simultaneously with the somewhat bleak departure of Robert Williams, who took his guitar with him, this time, and went in forlorn unconsciousness of the powerful forces already set in secret motion to be his allies.

The punishment just undergone had but made the haughty and unyielding soul of Penrod more stalwart in revolt. He was unconquered. Every time the one intolerable insult had been offered him, his resentment had become the hotter, his vengeance the more instant and furious. And, still burning with outrage, but upheld by the conviction of right, he was determined to continue to the last drop of his blood the defence of his honour, whenever it should be assailed, no matter how mighty or august the powers that attacked it. In all ways, he was a very sore boy.

During the brief ceremony of presentation, his usually inscrutable countenance wore an expression interpreted by his father as one of insane obstinacy, while Mrs. Schofield found it an incentive to inward prayer. The fine graciousness of Mr. Kinosling, however, was unimpaired by the glare of virulent suspicion given him by this little brother: Mr. Kinosling mistook it for a natural curiosity concerning one who might possibly become, in time, a member of the family. He patted Penrod upon the head, which was, for many reasons, in no condition to be patted with any pleasure to the pattee. Penrod felt himself in the presence of a new enemy.

"How do you do, my little lad," said Mr. Kinosling. "I trust we shall become fast friends."

To the ear of his little lad, it seemed he said, "A tryst we shall bick-home fawst friends." Mr. Kinosling’s pronunciation was, in fact, slightly precious; and the little lad, simply mistaking it for some cryptic form of mockery of himself, assumed a manner and expression which argued so ill for the proposed friendship that Mrs. Schofield hastily interposed the suggestion of dinner, and the small procession went in to the dining-room.
"It has been a delicious day," said Mr. Kinosling, presently; "warm but balmy." With a benevolent smile he addressed Penrod, who sat opposite him. "I suppose, little gentleman, you have been indulging in the usual outdoor sports of vacation?"

Penrod laid down his fork and glared, open-mouthed at Mr. Kinosling.

"You'll have another slice of breast of the chicken?" Mr. Schofield inquired, loudly and quickly.

"A lovely day!" exclaimed Margaret, with equal promptitude and emphasis. "Lovely, oh, lovely! Lovely!"

"Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!" said Mrs. Schofield, and after a glance at Penrod which confirmed her impression that he intended to say something, she continued, "Yes, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!"

Penrod closed his mouth and sank back in his chair—and his relatives took breath.

Mr. Kinosling looked pleased. This responsive family, with its ready enthusiasm, made the kind of audience he liked. He passed a delicate, white hand gracefully over his tall, pale forehead, and smiled indulgently.

"Youth relaxes in summer," he said. "Boyhood is the age of relaxation; one is playful, light, free, unfettered. One runs and leaps and enjoys one's self with one's companions. It is good for the little lads to play with their friends; they jostle, push, and wrestle, and simulate little, happy struggles with one another in harmless conflict. The young muscles are toughening. It is good. Boyish chivalry develops, enlarges, expands. The young learn quickly, intuitively, spontaneously. They perceive the obligations of noblesse oblige. They begin to comprehend the necessity of caste and its requirements. They learn what birth means—ah—that is, they learn what it means to be well born. They learn courtesy in their games; they learn politeness, consideration for one another in their pastimes, amusements, lighter occupations. I make it my pleasure to join them often, for I sympathize with them in all their wholesome joys as well as in their little bothers and perplexities. I understand them, you see; and let me tell you it is no easy matter to understand the little lads and lasses." He sent to each listener his beaming glance, and, permitting it to come to rest upon Penrod, inquired:
“And what do you say to that, little gentleman?”

Mr. Schofield uttered a stentorian cough. “More? You’d better have some more chicken! More! Do!”


It is not known in what light Mr. Kinosling viewed the expression of Penrod’s face. Perhaps he mistook it for awe; perhaps he received no impression at all of its extraordinary quality. He was a rather self-engrossed young man, just then engaged in a double occupation, for he not only talked, but supplied from his own consciousness a critical though favourable auditor as well, which of course kept him quite busy. Besides, it is oftener than is suspected the case that extremely peculiar expressions upon the countenances of boys are entirely overlooked, and suggest nothing to the minds of people staring straight at them. Certainly Penrod’s expression—which, to the perception of his family, was perfectly horrible—caused not the faintest perturbation in the breast of Mr. Kinosling.

Mr. Kinosling waived the chicken, and continued to talk. “Yes, I think I may claim to understand boys,” he said, smiling thoughtfully. “One has been a boy one’s self. Ah, it is not all playtime! I hope our young scholar here does not overwork himself at his Latin, at his classics, as I did, so that at the age of eight years I was compelled to wear glasses. He must be careful not to strain the little eyes at his scholar’s tasks, not to let the little shoulders grow round over his scholar’s desk. Youth is golden; we should keep it golden, bright, glistening. Youth should frolic, should be sprightly; it should play its cricket, its tennis, its hand-ball. It should run and leap; it should laugh, should sing madrigals and glees, carol with the lark, ring out in chanties, folk-songs, ballads, roundelay—”

He talked on. At any instant Mr. Schofield held himself ready to cough vehemently and shout, “More chicken,” to drown out Penrod in case the fatal words again fell from those eloquent lips; and Mrs. Schofield and Margaret kept themselves prepared at all times to assist him. So passed a threatening meal, which Mrs. Schofield hurried, by every means within decency, to its conclusion. She felt that somehow
they would all be safer out in the dark of the front porch, and led the way therither as soon as possible.

"No cigar, I thank you." Mr. Kinosling, establishing himself in a wicker chair beside Margaret, waved away her father's proffer. "I do not smoke. I have never tasted tobacco in any form." Mrs. Schofield was confirmed in her opinion that this would be an ideal son-in-law. Mr. Schofield was not so sure.

"No," said Mr. Kinosling. "No tobacco for me. No cigar, no pipe, no cigarette, no cheroot. For me, a book—a volume of poems, perhaps. Verses, rhymes, lines metrical and cadenced—those are my dissipation. Tennyson by preference: 'Maud,' or 'Idylls of the King'—poetry of the sound Victorian days; there is none later. Or Longfellow will rest me in a tired hour. Yes, for me, a book, a volume in the hand, held lightly between the fingers."

Mr. Kinosling looked pleasantly at his fingers as he spoke, waving his hand in a curving gesture which brought it into the light of a window faintly illumined from the interior of the house. Then he passed those graceful fingers over his hair, and turned toward Penrod, who was perched upon the railing in a dark corner.

"The evening is touched with a slight coolness," said Mr. Kinosling. "Perhaps I may request the little gentleman—"

"B'gr-r-ruff!" coughed Mr. Schofield. "You'd better change your mind about a cigar."

"No, I thank you. I was about to request the lit—"

"Do try one," Margaret urged. "I'm sure papa's are nice ones. Do try—"

"No, I thank you. I remarked a slight coolness in the air, and my hat is in the hallway. I was about to request—"

"I'll get it for you," said Penrod suddenly.

"If you will be so good," said Mr. Kinosling. "It is a black bowler hat, little gentleman, and placed upon a table in the hall."

"I know where it is." Penrod entered the door, and a feeling of relief, mutually experienced, carried from one to another of his three relatives their interchanged congratulations that he had recovered his sanity.
"The day is done, and the darkness," began Mr. Kinosling—and recited that poem entire. He followed it with "The Children's Hour," and after a pause at the close, to allow his listeners time for a little reflection upon his rendition, he passed his hand again over his head, and called, in the direction of the doorway:

"I believe I will take my hat now, little gentleman."

"Here it is," said Penrod, unexpectedly climbing over the porch railing, in the other direction. His mother and father and Margaret had supposed him to be standing in the hall out of deference, and because he thought it tactful not to interrupt the recitations. All of them remembered, later, that this supposed thoughtfulness on his part struck them as unnatural.

"Very good, little gentleman!" said Mr. Kinosling, and being somewhat chilled, placed the hat firmly upon his head, pulling it down as far as it would go. It had a pleasant warmth, which he noticed at once. The next instant, he noticed something else, a peculiar sensation of the scalp—a sensation which he was quite unable to define. He lifted his hand to take the hat off, and entered upon a strange experience: his hat seemed to have decided to remain where it was.

"Do you like Tennyson as much as Longfellow, Mr. Kinosling?" inquired Margaret.

"I—ah—I cannot say," he returned absently. "I—ah—each has his own—ugh! flavour and savour, each his—ah—ah——"

Struck by a strangeness in his tone, she peered at him curiously through the dusk. His outlines were indistinct, but she made out that his arms were uplifted in a singular gesture. He seemed to be wrenching at his head.

"Is—is anything the matter?" she asked anxiously.

"Mr. Kinosling, are you ill?"

"Not at—ugh!—all," he replied, in the same odd tone. "I—ah—I believe—ugh!"

He dropped his hands from his hat, and rose. His manner was slightly agitated. "I fear I may have taken a trifling—ah—cold. I should—ah—perhaps be—ah—better at home. I will—ah—say good night."

At the steps, he instinctively lifted his hand to remove his hat, but did not do so, and, saying "Good night," again in a
frigid voice, departed with visible stiffness from that house, to return no more.

"Well, of all—!" cried Mrs. Schofield, astounded. "What was the matter? He just went—like that!" She made a flurried gesture. "In heaven's name, Margaret, what did you say to him?"

"I!" exclaimed Margaret indignantly. "Nothing! He just went!"

"Why, he didn't even take off his hat when he said good night!" said Mrs. Schofield.

Margaret, who had crossed to the doorway, caught the ghost of a whisper behind her, where stood Penrod.

"You bet he didn't!"

He knew not that he was overheard.

A frightful suspicion flashed through Margaret's mind—a suspicion that Mr. Kinosling's hat would have to be either boiled off or shaved off. With growing horror she recalled Penrod's long absence when he went to bring the hat.

"Penrod," she cried, "let me see your hands!"

She had toiled at those hands herself late that afternoon, nearly scalding her own, but at last achieving a lily purity.

"Let me see your hands!"

She seized them.

Again they were tarred.
AN ACCOUNT OF THE LAST DERBY DAY

ALBERT SMITH
Albert Smith was trained as a doctor, but soon turned his powers of humorous observation to a good use as a contributor to Punch, and as a writer of plays and pantomimes. He published a large number of books, including The Physiology of London Evening Parties. He was the originator of the form of entertainment now known as the "travelogue."
AN ACCOUNT OF THE LAST DERBY DAY
(REPORTED WITHOUT HAVING BEEN TO THE RACE)

We are by no means a sporting character. We never kept a racer; we do not care a straw which horse wins or loses; and have about as much idea of what is meant by the fluctuation of the odds in the sporting divisions of the newspapers as we have of playing upon the ophicleide—an instrument we could never bring ourselves to learn, for fear of some day tumbling into it and never being heard of again. Neither did we ever make a bet on the course higher than half a dozen pairs of gloves with some dark-eyed peri in lined muslin and guirlandes Joséphine, or a foolish half-crown at a roulette table—a very precarious chance in either case. We know as much of Tattersalls as Geoffrey Chaucer did of Musard’s quadrilles; and yet we always look forward to the Derby as one of the greatest treats in the whole twelve months.

With these sentiments, it may be conceived that we were not over-pleased at being compelled to stay in town on the last Derby Day—the more so, as we had already received several invitations; and similar despatches to the following were continually dropping in:

No. 1.

(Hurried writing, and no wafers; brought by a little boy in buttons.)

Dear Al,

Will you have a go-in at a drag to Epsom? It won’t come to much—about £2 1os. each, including feed. We shall take something better than cape and gooseberry. Let’s know soon; and learn “The Monks of Old” and “The Irish Quadrilles” on your cornet.

Yours always,

Harry ——

Lincoln’s Inn.
This was refused, for obvious reasons hereafter stated. Besides, we know how these parties always end, where the charm of female society is wanted to check the exuberance of youthful spirits. We joined one some time back, of which our last reminiscence is that of endeavouring to cut up a cold fowl with the corkscrew, and drinking champagne out of a mustard-pot. We have a faint idea of leaving the course with a thousand other vehicles, all jostling along in one whirling cloud of dust and confusion, and disputing about a turnpike ticket—somewhere—and offering to decide the quarrel by the ancient ordeal of trial by battle with the tollman; but this scene is as indistinct and evanescent as an unfixed daguerreotype.

No. II.

(Lace-work envelope, scented paper, medallion wafer, stamped with an unintelligible coat-of-arms, and small, formal, angular handwriting—a good specimen of "a style after six lessons").

Mrs. — is very happy in being able to offer Mr. S—— a seat in her landau to Epsom. Should he be inclined to join her party, an early answer will oblige.

This was received, and also refused, on Tuesday morning. We were evidently pitched upon to fill up a sudden hiatus at the eleventh hour: besides, three very plain daughters, all single, and carrying flaring parasols all different—servants in gaudy liveries, who would have made capital harlequins if put into a kaleidoscope—nothing for lunch but warm sandwiches and flabby cucumber, peppered with dust—together with an air of intense parvenu dash flung over the whole set-out—all these combined were too much even for the sake of a cast to the Derby.

No. III.

(A dirty piece of paper, folded in that peculiar ingenious and intricate manner which only the inferior orders can contrive; closed with a common red wafer ornamented with five distinct impressions of the end of a watch-key.)
Hond sir i Take the librty to Inform you of A wan as will start from My shop on Wensday for The Darby to epsm for a Sowrin there And back and shall be omnord by your cumpry from your obedient and Humbil servent

John Higgs.

This was from our friend the greengrocer in the next street, and was gratefully declined, as was also the request from a neighbouring shopkeeper that we should inspect the celebrated six-and-sixpenny Derby blouse. But these were not all the inducements to go. A kind friend, who resides close to the Downs, actually offered us a bed before and after the race. Placards of “superior four-horse coaches to Epsom” stared at us from every office in London; all the railways, annihilating every idea of space, endeavoured, we know not how, to prove that some of their stations were near the course—we are not certain whether we were not told that the Eastern Counties was the best line to take; and all the world seemed wrapped up in the idea that the Queen would grace the course—which not proving true, was a remarkable instance of the Derby and the boax taking place on the same day. We believe the joke to be original; if not, we humbly crave pardon for having introduced it.

To be candid, the plain truth of the matter was, we could not afford the trip. The season had been, up to the period in question, comparatively very expensive, and much more gaiety was yet to follow, which would make a great diminution in our exchequer, although we inhabit chambers on the fifth floor in a cheap inn (of court), and contrive occasionally, by dint of extreme caution, to make the same pair of white trousers appear two consecutive days in Regent Street. But our darling boots—the especial favourites with the bronze morocco tops and patent feet—had begun to evince the first symptoms of decline in the soles, brought on by over-waltzing. Moreover, the invincible stock, with the tiny bouquets embroidered thereon, seemed to have fallen out with our chin, unfortunately “like a stubble land at harvest-home,” and was also on the decay; and a new black waistcoat of plain satin had been shot by some champagne, and tastefully ornamented with red spots, more palpable than pleasing, which rendered another absolutely necessary. We argued with ourselves a long time, which controversy is always
an obstinate one; and at last, reflecting that the money which we should kick down at the Derby would go a great way towards replacing these things, if it did not actually cover the expense, we decided not to go.

The instant we had come to this determination we assumed a calm resignation, which was almost supernatural, when the sacrifice which we had made is considered. This lasted until the evening before the day, and then our first discomforts began. We gradually became restless and uneasy, feeling as satisfied as a person who, upon principle alone, has given up attending a pleasant evening party “to go to bed early”, and consequently lies awake until four in the morning, picturing to himself all the time what is going on at the reunion in question and listening to chimerical cornets-à-piston playing imaginary quadrilles, until every article on his wash-hand-stand appears to be having a dance to itself in derision.

We went to the theatre to help out the evening; and when it was over, not feeling tired, we entered one of the night-taverns to supper. It was Evans’, and the room was crowded with sporting men—the two names “Coldrenick” and “Attila” perpetually ringing in our ears. This reminded us too keenly of our position, so we rushed away to the Cyder Cellars: here the same subject formed the only topic of conversation. It was the same at the Albion and the Coal-Hole—for in our nervous irritability we took supper at all—we do not think we ever bolted so many poached eggs in our life; and finally, when we dropped into the Wrekin, where the usual talk is unmixedly theatrical, we found the same two names still echoing in every corner of the room. We now gave up all ideas of distraction, and went moodily home to bed.

We are not an early riser; but on the Wednesday morning a villainous clock that hangs in our room, whose alarum has obstinately refused to ring for many months, went off by itself at five in the morning, and roused us from a troubled slumber. In our anger we seized a boot that was within reach, and with a good aim entirely stopped its proceedings—it will never ring more. Going to sleep again was out of the question. The morning was most lovely, and the bustle all over the house, even at that early hour, proved that the happy men who were going to Epsom had already commenced their preparations. Anon came an unwonted clatter of vehicles in the thoroughfare below; every instant a fresh pair of legs bounded up alternate
stairs; and once in every ten minutes a knock was given at our door by one or other of the floors, to borrow a corkscrew, a clothes-brush, a wicker-covered tumbler, a pepper-caster, or something of the kind. These annoyances were brought to a climax at seven o'clock by the intrusion of a wretched boy, who insisted upon leaving a raised part, which, he said, we had ordered and paid for the day before at some pie-builder's in the Strand. We sent a boot-jack after him downstairs in extreme wrath; forgetting at the moment that our own name being by no means exclusive or uncommon, there was a man on the ground-floor who revelled in the same felicitous cognomination.

That universal eccaleobion, the sun, had been hatching the countless events of the day into action for some hours—in plain terms, it was about ten o'clock—when we finished breakfast. By that time our neighbours had all departed, and a sense of overwhelming wretchedness stole over us. Robinson Crusoe on his uninhabited island, and the Ancient Mariner who shot the Albatross, in his lonely boat—Jacques Balmat, when he got to the top of Mont Blanc—and Sinbad the Sailor, when he got to the bottom of the Diamond Valley—Mr. Green, the aeronaut, up in a balloon at an altitude of twelve thousand feet—and Mr. Deane, the diver, amidst the sea-bound relics of the Royal George—Elizabeth Woodcock, when she was frozen in the snow—the only Sunday occupant of a Bow Street cell, having failed to obtain bail—a Gresham lecturer—the last man of the season—may all have their peculiar idea of solitude, but they were cheerful to our own loneliness. We were the left-behind of a pilgrim caravan—the locomotive oasis of a vast desert!

After walking up and down our room for about half an hour, in the manner of a caged panther at the Surrey Zoological Gardens during the fireworks from St. Angelo, we determined to sally forth into the streets; and, mechanically following the sun, we bent our steps towards the West. Several carriages on their way to Epsom passed us; we imagined their inmates looked upon us with pitying eyes, and perceived that we were completely within the rules of our own ill-temper. We felt almost ashamed of being seen, and we sought the retirement of by-courts and passages.

At the Regent Circus all was life and gaiety. The thoroughfare was literally blocked up with carriages about to start,
on nearly all of which we recognized an acquaintance, who bawled out in a satirical and insulting manner, “I suppose we shall see you on the Downs.” One even pushed his cruelty so far as to inform us that we should find lobster-salad after the race at their drag on the hill. They went off and others arrived. We scarcely thought there were so many vehicles and horses in London as, until half-past twelve, collected between the County Fire Office and Carlton Chambers. At length the very last turn-out rolled away down Regent Street; it seemed to be the tie that bound us to the world. “The last links were broken”; and when we had followed it with our eyes until it diminished in the distance, and turned round the corner of Pall Mall, we could have cried for very despondency.

The Quadrant was deserted as we strolled up it. Here and there two or three persons in thick boots and badly cut strapless trousers, carrying dropical umbrellas, were staring in at the shops; but these, and others of the same uninteresting class, constituted the sole occupants of the colonnade. We turned sulkily into one of the billiard-rooms for distraction. There was no clicking of balls as we ascended the stairs; the public salle was unoccupied, the marker amusing himself, as markers always do, with countless endeavours to perpetrate impossible cannons. Our apparition did not interfere with his pastime. It was evident that he thought nothing of a man who could coolly walk into a billiard-room at the same instant that the horses were exercising in the Warren—that we could be nobody worth caring for, or we should not be in London. He regarded us for a minute with a glance of mingled contempt and unconcern, then whistled part of “Deb con te”, out of tune, made a red hazard, drank some beer from a pewter pot that stood on the mantelpiece, and continued his sport.

The trottoir of Regent Street was equally lonely. It presented nothing but a line of unrelieved hot pavement which blinded you to look at; over which, at certain intervals, a few individuals were endeavouring to strut their little hour in the absence of the usual dashing flaneurs, like the German company attempting Norma upon the stage, and with the same scenery and appointments that had whilom been graced by Adelaide Kemble and her vocal contemporaries.

We had heard a great deal about Catlin’s American Indians—the Mandans, Ojibbeways, Stumickosucks, and other
euphonical tribes, and we determined upon paying them a visit at the Egyptian Hall, to carry on time. But the same unpleasantry pursued us—the exhibition had closed the day before, and there was nothing to be seen but a diagram of the Missour Leviathan, and a notice that the room was to be let. As we turned away in sorrow, a Kew Bridge omnibus passed. Lucky idea! We had a pretty cousin at a young ladies' establishment at Turnham Green, and we would pay her a visit. *C'est si gentil—d'avoir une belle cousine*, as Paul de Kock says: and, besides, perhaps we might see some of the other girls—who could tell? We hailed the omnibus, and, after waiting at the White Horse Cellar until we had inspected all the perambulating manufactures there offered for sale, we proceeded on our journey, and were finally put down at the seminary.

After knocking twice at the door, hearing a bell ring inside, and seeing divers heads *en papillote* bob up over the front blinds, and then bob down again with most extraordinary celerity, we were allowed to enter, and were shown into a room that was the perfect picture of a school-parlour. There was a cabinet piano (not for the pupils), and a pair of globes; some chalk copies of French heads; a vase of dead flowers, in greenish water, on the table; and some worsted ones in a paper-basket on the chiffonier, planted in a bung wrapped round with frizzled green paper; straw spill-cases on the mantelpiece, and pasteboard card-racks at the sides, adorned with little square views of gentlemen's seats cut out of the last year's pocket-books and stuck on with gum. These things, together with a small table, on which were displayed a stuffed bird, two blown-glass ships, a guitar pin-cushion, and a pen-wiper made of little round bits of coloured cloth, with a transfer card-case, completed the garniture of the room—not to omit two grape-jars, painted green, and covered with birds cut from chintz bed-furniture. The mistress chanced to be engaged for a few minutes—schoolmistresses always are when you call—during which time we inspected the curiosities of the room; listened to the jingling of the practising-piano through the wall, pitied the teacher, and then began to think what a godsend Bristol-board, perforated cards, and coloured floss-silk must have been to young ladies' establishments, until the mistress herself entered. Accumulation of despair! We were informed that, pursuant to agreement, some friends had called for our cousin that very morning about ten o'clock, to take her
to Epsom! We made a most ungainly congé to the lady, and, quitting the house, savagely stopped an omnibus on the high-road, and, violently forcing our way into the interior, travelled back to London. We then wandered—we cannot tell how, to Hungerford Market; and, having looked at all the shrimps and periwinkles until we knew them by heart, we inspected the preparations for the footbridge, and then made a fourpenny tour to Vauxhall in the Lightning steamboat, returning in the Thunder by way of variety.

At last we found we were in the neighbourhood of some acquaintances who had been looking somewhat cold upon us lately, because we had not called to pay our respects so often as we might have done. Lucky idea again! We would endeavour to wipe off the stain upon our character. We knocked at the door and awaited an answer. Two maid-servants looked out from the open window of a drawing-room next door; a parrot swore at us from across the road; and a head elevated itself from the area, and gazing at us for a moment disappeared again. It was quite plain that we were an object of curiosity in the street. But the knock remained unanswered, and we attacked the lion's head again, with an accompanying tug at the bell. After another delay an untidy woman opened the door about six inches, just enough to show us that the chain was up, and peering from the aperture inquired what we wanted. On answering the question by another—whether the mistress of the house was at home?—we learnt that the whole party had "gone to Epsom," servants and all, and that she, the cook, was the only one left in the house. We insinuated a card between the door and the post (which the woman received between her finger and thumb enveloped in her apron), and rushed despairingly away.

The longest day, however, will come to an end; and evening at length arrived. We sauntered over to Kennington turnpike to see the crowds return; and after waiting there an hour, a carriage full of friends drew up close to where we were standing, its progress being interrupted by the ticket-nuisance at the gate. There was a vacant place in the rumble, which, upon the invitation of the owner, we took possession of, heartily glad to have someone to speak to. We had barely taken our seat when another carriage drew up close to us—it was that of the people upon whom we had called during the day. One of the handsome girls of the family inquired how
we had liked the race. We were ashamed at the moment to confess that we had not been; and, not thinking that we had called at the house, we told her it was charmingly run. These good folks have since sent out invitations for an evening party, and we are not asked; we think they received our card on their return, and having imagined that we got somebody else to leave it, knowing that there was no chance of finding them at home.

Our other friends, on whose carriage we were, had all been winners, and were returning home in high spirits to a capital supper, to which they were good enough to request our company. But we steadfastly refused, and got down at Waterloo Bridge, feeling no inclination to join a party where all the conversation would necessarily turn upon an event which we knew nothing about. A comfortable repast in our own chambers did not put us in better humour, and we retired to bed at an early hour, after the dullest day we ever remember to have spent; inwardly resolving never again to miss seeing the Derby run, even if we were compelled by circumstances to travel thither on the top of a ginger-beer cart.
UKRIDGE'S ACCIDENT SYNDICATE

P. G. WODEHOUSE

S.C.H.
The creator of Psmith, Ukridge and above all the inimitable Jeeves needs no introduction. The name of P. G. Wodehouse spells loud and prolonged laughter throughout the English-speaking world. Here is one of the best tales from the great Ukridge saga.
UKRIDGE'S ACCIDENT SYNDICATE

"HALF a minute, laddie," said Ukridge. And, gripping my arm, he brought me to a halt on the outskirts of the little crowd which had collected about the church door.

It was a crowd such as may be seen any morning during the London mating-season outside any of the churches which nestle in the quiet squares between Hyde Park and the King's Road, Chelsea.

It consisted of five women of cook-like aspect, four nursemaids, half a dozen men of the non-producing class who had torn themselves away for the moment from their normal task of propping up the wall of the "Bunch of Grapes" public-house on the corner, a costermonger with a barrow of vegetables, divers small boys, eleven dogs, and two or three purposeful-looking young fellows with cameras slung over their shoulders. It was plain that a wedding was in progress— and, arguing from the presence of the camera-men and the line of smart motor-cars along the kerb, a fairly fashionable wedding. What was not plain—to me—was why Ukridge, sternest of bachelors, had desired to add himself to the spectators.

"What," I inquired, "is the thought behind this? Why are we interrupting our walk to attend the obsequies of some perfect stranger?"

Ukridge did not reply for a moment. He seemed plunged in thought. Then he uttered a hollow, mirthless laugh—a dreadful sound like the last gargle of a dying moose.

"Perfect stranger, my number eleven foot!" he responded, in his coarse way. "Do you know who it is who's getting hitched up in there?"

"Who?"

"Teddy Weeks."

And five years rolled away.

It was at Barolini's Italian restaurant in Beak Street that Ukridge evolved his great scheme. Barolini's was a favourite resort of our little group of earnest strugglers in the days when the philanthropic restaurateurs of Soho used to supply four courses and coffee for a shilling and sixpence; and there were present that night, besides Ukridge and myself, the following men-about-town: Teddy Weeks, the actor, fresh from a six weeks’ tour with the Number Three Only a Shop-Girl Company; Victor Beamish, the artist, the man who drew that picture of the O-So-Eesi Piano-Player in the advertisement pages of the Piccadilly Magazine; Bertram Fox, author of Ashes of Remorse, and other unproduced motion-picture scenarios; and Robert Dunhill, who, being employed at a salary of eighty pounds per annum by the New Asiatic Bank, represented the sober, hard-headed commercial element.

As usual, Teddy Weeks had collared the conversation, and was telling us once again how good he was and how hardly treated by a malignant fate.

There is no need to describe Teddy Weeks. Under another and a more euphonious name he has long since made his personal appearance, dreadfully familiar to all who read the illustrated weekly papers. He was then, as now, a sickeningly handsome young man, possessing precisely the same melting eyes, mobile mouth, and corrugated hair so esteemed by the theatre-going public today. And yet, at this period of his career, he was wasting himself on minor touring companies of the kind which open at Barrow-in-Furness and jump to Bootle for the second half of the week. He attributed this, as Ukridge was so apt to attribute his own difficulties, to lack of capital.

"I have everything," he said querulously, emphasizing his remarks with a coffee-spoon. "Looks, talent, personality, a beautiful speaking-voice—everything. All I need is a chance. And I can't get that because I have no clothes fit to wear. These managers are all the same, they never look below the surface, they never bother to find out if a man has genius. All they go by are his clothes. If I could afford to buy a couple of suits from a Cork Street tailor, if I could have my boots made to order by Moykoff instead of getting them ready-made and second-hand at Moses Brothers', if I could once contrive to own a decent hat, a really good pair of spats, and a gold
cigarette-case, all at the same time, I could walk into any manager’s office in London and sign up for a West-end production tomorrow.”

It was at this point that Freddie Lunt came in. Freddie, like Robert Dunhill, was a financial magnate in the making and an assiduous frequenter of Barolini’s; and it suddenly occurred to us that a considerable time had passed since we had last seen him in the place. We inquired the reason for this aloofness.

“I’ve been in bed,” said Freddie, “for over a fortnight.”

The statement incurred Ukridge’s stern disapproval. That great man made a practice of never rising before noon, and on one occasion, when a carelessly thrown match had burned a hole in his only pair of trousers, had gone so far as to remain between the sheets for forty-eight hours; but sloth on so majestic a scale as this shocked him.

“Lazy young devil,” he commented severely. “Letting the golden hours of youth slip by like that when you ought to have been bustling about and making a name for yourself.”

Freddie protested himself wronged by the imputation.

“I had an accident,” he explained. “Fell off my bicycle and sprained an ankle.”

“Tough luck,” was our verdict.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Freddie. “It wasn’t bad fun getting a rest. And of course there was the fiver.”

“What fiver?”

“I got a fiver from the Weekly Cyclist for getting my ankle sprained.”

“You—what?” cried Ukridge, profoundly stirred—as ever—by a tale of easy money. “Do you mean to sit there and tell me that some dashed paper paid you five quid simply because you sprained your ankle? Pull yourself together, old horse. Things like that don’t happen.”

“It’s quite true.”

“Can you show me the fiver?”

“No; because if I did you would try to borrow it.”

Ukridge ignored this slur in dignified silence.

“Would they pay a fiver to anyone who sprained his ankle?” he asked, sticking to the main point.

“Yes. If he was a subscriber.”

“I knew there was a catch in it,” said Ukridge moodily.

“Lots of weekly papers are starting this wheeze,” proceeded
Freddie. "You pay a year’s subscription and that entitles you to accident insurance."

We were interested. This was in the days before every daily paper in London was competing madly against its rivals in the matter of insurance and offering princely bribes to the citizens to make a fortune by breaking their necks. Nowadays papers are paying as high as two thousand pounds for a genuine corpse and five pounds a week for a mere dislocated spine; but at that time the idea was new and it had an attractive appeal.

"How many of these rags are doing this?" asked Ukridge. You could tell from the gleam in his eyes that that great brain was whirring like a dynamo. "As many as ten?"

"Yes, I should think so. Quite ten."

"Then a fellow who subscribed to them all and then sprained his ankle would get fifty quid?" said Ukridge, reasoning acutely.

"More if the injury was more serious," said Freddie, the expert. "They have a regular tariff. So much for a broken arm, so much for a broken leg, and so forth."

Ukridge’s collar leaped off its stud and his pince-nez wobbled drunkenly as he turned to us.

"How much money can you blokes raise?" he demanded.

"What do you want it for?" asked Robert Dunhill, with a banker’s caution.

"My dear old horse, can’t you see? Why, my gosh, I’ve got the idea of the century. Upon my Sam, this is the giltest-edged scheme that was ever hatched. We’ll get together enough money and take out a year’s subscription for every one of these dashed papers."

"What’s the good of that?" said Dunhill, coldly unenthusiastic.

They train bank clerks to stifle emotion, so that they will be able to refuse overdrafts when they become managers. "The odds are we should none of us have an accident of any kind, and then the money would be chucked away."

"Good heavens, ass," snorted Ukridge, "you don’t suppose I’m suggesting that we should leave it to chance, do you? Listen! Here’s the scheme: We take out subscriptions for all these papers, then we draw lots, and the fellow who gets the fatal card or whatever it is goes out and breaks his leg and
draws the loot, and we split it up between us and live on it in luxury. It ought to run into hundreds of pounds.”

A long silence followed. Then Dunhill spoke again. His was a solid rather than a nimble mind.

“Suppose he couldn’t break his leg?”

“My gosh!” cried Ukridge, exasperated. “Here we are in the twentieth century, with every resource of modern civilization at our disposal, with opportunities for getting our legs broken opening about us on every side—and you ask a silly question like that! Of course he could break his leg. Any ass can break a leg. It’s a little hard! We’re all infernally broke—personally, unless Freddie can lend me a bit of that fiver till Saturday, I’m going to have a difficult job pulling through. We all need money like the dickens, and yet, when I point out this marvellous scheme for collecting a bit, instead of fawning on me for my ready intelligence you sit and make objections. It isn’t the right spirit. It isn’t the spirit that wins.”

“If you’re as hard up as that,” objected Dunhill, “how are you going to put in your share of the pool?”

A pained, almost a stunned, look came into Ukridge’s eyes. He gazed at Dunhill through his lop-sided pince-nez as one who speculates as to whether his hearing has deceived him.

“Me?” he cried. “Me? I like that! Upon my Sam, that’s rich! Why, damme, if there’s any justice in the world, if there’s a spark of decency and good feeling in your bally bosoms, I should think you would let me in free for suggesting the idea. It’s a little hard! I supply the brains and you want me to cough up cash as well. My gosh, I didn’t expect this. This hurts me, by George! If anybody had told me that an old pal would——”

“Oh, all right,” said Robert Dunhill. “All right, all right, all right. But I’ll tell you one thing. If you draw the lot it’ll be the happiest day of my life.”

“I shan’t,” said Ukridge. “Something tells me that I shan’t.”

Nor did he. When, in a solemn silence broken only by the sound of a distant waiter quarrelling with the cook down a speaking-tube, we had completed the drawing, the man of destiny was Teddy Weeks.

I suppose that even in the springtime of Youth, when
broken limbs seem a lighter matter than they become later in life, it can never be an unmixedly agreeable thing to have to go out into the public highways and try to make an accident happen to one. In such circumstances the reflection that you are thereby benefiting your friends brings but slight balm. To Teddy Weeks it appeared to bring no balm at all. That he was experiencing a certain disinclination to sacrifice himself for the public good became more and more evident as the days went by and found him still intact. Ukridge, when he called upon me to discuss the matter, was visibly perturbed. He sank into a chair beside the table at which I was beginning my modest morning meal, and, having drunk half my coffee, sighed deeply.

"Upon my Sam," he moaned, "it’s a little disheartening. I strain my brain to think up schemes for getting us all a bit of money just at the moment when we are all needing it most, and when I hit on what is probably the simplest and yet ripest notion of our time, this blighter Weeks goes and lets me down by shirking his plain duty. It’s just my luck that a fellow like that should have drawn the lot. And the worst of it is, laddie, that, now we’ve started with him, we’ve got to keep on. We can’t possibly raise enough money to pay yearly subscriptions for anybody else. It’s Weeks or nobody."

"I suppose we must give him time."

"That’s what he says," grunted Ukridge morosely, helping himself to toast. "He says he doesn’t know how to start about it. To listen to him, you’d think that going and having a trifling accident was the sort of delicate and intricate job that required years of study and special preparation. Why, a child of six could do it on his head at five minutes’ notice. The man’s so infernally particular. You make helpful suggestions, and instead of accepting them in a broad, reasonable spirit of co-operation he comes back at you every time with some frivolous objection. He’s so dashed fastidious. When we were out last night, we came on a couple of navvies scapping. Good hefty fellows, either of them capable of putting him in hospital for a month. I told him to jump in and start separating them, and he said no; it was a private dispute which was none of his business, and he didn’t feel justified in interfering. Finicky, I call it. I tell you, laddie, this blighter is a broken reed. He has got cold feet. We did wrong to let
him into the drawing at all. We might have known that a fellow like that would never give results. No conscience. No sense of esprit de corps. No notion of putting himself out to the most trifling extent for the benefit of the community. Haven't you any more marmalade, laddie?"

"I have not."

"Then I'll be going," said Ukridge moodily. "I suppose," he added, pausing at the door, "you couldn't lend me five bob?"

"How did you guess?"

"Then I'll tell you what," said Ukridge, ever fair and reasonable; "you can stand me dinner tonight." He seemed cheered up for the moment by this happy compromise, but gloom descended on him again. His face clouded. "When I think," he said, "of all the money that's locked up in that poor faint-hearted fish, just waiting to be released, I could sob. Sob, laddie, like a little child. I never liked that man—he has a bad eye and waves his hair. Never trust a man who waves his hair, old horse."

Ukridge's pessimism was not confined to himself. By the end of a fortnight, nothing having happened to Teddy Weeks worse than a slight cold which he shook off in a couple of days, the general consensus of opinion among his apprehensive colleagues in the Syndicate was that the situation had become desperate. There were no signs whatever of any return on the vast capital which we had laid out, and meanwhile meals had to be bought, landladies paid, and a reasonable supply of tobacco acquired. It was a melancholy task in these circumstances to read one's paper of a morning.

All over the inhabited globe, so the well-informed sheet gave one to understand, every kind of accident was happening every day to practically everybody in existence except Teddy Weeks. Farmers in Minnesota were getting mixed up with reaping-machines; peasants in India were being bisected by crocodiles; iron girders from skyscrapers were falling hourly on the heads of citizens in every town from Philadelphia to San Francisco; and the only people who were not down with ptomaine poisoning were those who had walked over cliffs, driven motors into walls, tripped over manholes, or assumed on too slight evidence that the gun was not loaded. In a crippled world, it seemed, Teddy Weeks walked alone, whole and glowing with health. It was one of those grim, ironical,
hopeless, grey, despairful situations which the Russian novelists love to write about, and I could not find it in me to blame Ukridge for taking direct action in this crisis. My only regret was that bad luck caused so excellent a plan to miscarry.

My first intimation that he had been trying to hurry matters on came when he and I were walking along the King's Road one evening, and he drew me into Markham Square, a dismal backwater where he had once had rooms.

"What's the idea?" I asked, for I disliked the place.

"Teddy Weeks lives here," said Ukridge. "In my old rooms." I could not see that this lent any fascination to the place. Every day and in every way I was feeling sorrier and sorrier that I had been foolish enough to put money which I could ill spare into a venture which had all the earmarks of a wash-out, and my sentiments towards Teddy Weeks were cold and hostile.

"I want to inquire after him."

"Inquire after him? Why?"

"Well, the fact is, laddie, I have an idea that he has been bitten by a dog."

"What makes you think that?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Ukridge dreamily. "I've just got the idea. You know how one gets ideas."

The mere contemplation of this beautiful event was so inspiring that for a while it held me silent. In each of the ten journals in which we had invested, dog-bites were specifically recommended as things which every subscriber ought to have. They came about half-way up the list of lucrative accidents, inferior to a broken rib or a fractured fibula, but better value than an ingrowing toe-nail. I was gloating happily over the picture conjured up by Ukridge's words when an exclamation brought me back with a start to the realities of life. A revolting sight met my eyes. Down the street came ambling the familiar figure of Teddy Weeks, and one glance at his elegant person was enough to tell us that our hopes had been built on sand. Not even a toy Pomeranian had chewed this man.

"Hallo, you fellows!" said Teddy Weeks.

"Hallo!" we responded dully.

"Can't stop," said Teddy Weeks. "I've got to fetch a doctor."

"A doctor?"
“Yes. Poor Victor Beamish. He’s been bitten by a dog.”
Ukridge and I exchanged weary glances. It seemed as if Fate was going out of its way to have sport with us. What was the good of a dog biting Victor Beamish? What was the good of a hundred dogs biting Victor Beamish? A dog-bitten Victor Beamish had no market value whatever.

“You know that fierce brute that belongs to my landlady?” said Teddy Weeks. “The one that always dashes out into the area and barks at people who come to the front door?” I remembered. A large mongrel with wild eyes and flashing fangs, badly in need of a haircut. I had encountered it once in the street, when visiting Ukridge, and only the presence of the latter, who knew it well and to whom all dogs were as brothers, had saved me from the doom of Victor Beamish. “Somehow or other he got into my bedroom this evening. He was waiting there when I came home. I had brought Beamish back with me, and the animal pinned him by the leg the moment I opened the door.”

“Why didn’t he pin you?” asked Ukridge, aggrieved.
“Why didn’t he pin you?” demanded Ukridge again.

“Oh, I managed to climb on to the top of the wardrobe while he was biting Beamish,” said Teddy Weeks. “And then the landlady came and took him away. But I can’t stop here talking. I must go and get that doctor.”

We gazed after him in silence as he tripped down the street. We noted the careful manner in which he paused at the corner to eye the traffic before crossing the road, the wary way in which he drew back to allow a truck to rattle past.

“You heard that?” said Ukridge tensely. “He climbed on to the top of the wardrobe!”
“Yes.”
“And you saw the way he dodged that excellent truck?”
“Yes.”

“Something’s got to be done,” said Ukridge firmly. “The man has got to be awakened to a sense of his responsibilities.”

Next day a deputation waited on Teddy Weeks. Ukridge was our spokesman, and he came to the point with admirable directness.
"How about it?" asked Ukridge.
"How about what?" replied Teddy Weeks nervously, avoiding his accusing eye.
"When do we get action?"
"Oh, you mean that accident business?"
"Yes."
"I've been thinking about that," said Teddy Weeks.
Ukridge drew the mackintosh which he wore indoors and out of doors and in all weathers more closely around him. There was in the action something suggestive of a member of the Roman Senate about to denounce an enemy of the State. In just such a manner must Cicero have swished his toga as he took a deep breath preparatory to assailing Clodius. He toyed for a moment with the ginger-beer wire which held his pince-nez in place, and endeavoured without success to button his collar at the back. In moments of emotion Ukridge's collar always took on a sort of temperamental jumpiness which no stud could restrain.
"And about time you were thinking about it," he boomed sternly.

We shifted appreciatively in our seats, all except Victor Beamish, who had declined a chair and was standing by the mantelpiece. "Upon my Sam, it's about time you were thinking about it. Do you realize that we've invested an enormous sum of money in you on the distinct understanding that we could rely on you to do your duty and get immediate results? Are we to be forced to the conclusion that you are so yellow and few in the pod as to want to evade your honourable obligations? We thought better of you, Weeks. Upon my Sam, we thought better of you. We took you for a two-fisted, enterprising, big-souled, one hundred-per-cent he-man who would stand by his friends to the finish."

"Yes, but—"

"Any bloke with a sense of loyalty and an appreciation of what it means to the rest of us would have rushed out and found some means of fulfilling his duty long ago. You don't even grasp at the opportunities that come your way. Only yesterday I saw you draw back when a single step into the road would have had a truck bumping into you."

"Well, it's not so easy to let a truck bump into you."

"Nonsense. It only requires a little ordinary resolution. Use your imagination, man. Try to think that a child has
fallen down in the street—a little golden-haired child,” said Ukridge, deeply affected. “And a dashed great cab or something comes rolling up. The kid’s mother is standing on the pavement, helpless, her hands clasped in agony. ‘Dammit,’ she cries, ‘will no one save my darling?’ ‘Yes, by George,’ you shout, ‘I will.’ And out you jump and the thing’s over in half a second. I don’t know what you’re making such a fuss about.”

“Yes, but——” said Teddy Weeks.

“I’m told, what’s more, it isn’t a bit painful. A sort of dull shock, that’s all.”

“Who told you that?”

“I forget. Someone.”

“Well, you can tell him from me that he’s an ass,” said Teddy Weeks, with asperity.

“All right. If you object to being run over by a truck there are lots of other ways. But, upon my Sam, it’s pretty hopeless suggesting them. You seem to have no enterprise at all. Yesterday, after I went to all the trouble to put a dog in your room, a dog which would have done all the work for you—all that you had to do was stand still and let him use his own judgment—what happened? You climbed on to——”

Victor Beamish interrupted, speaking in a voice husky with emotion.

“Was it you who put that damned dog in the room?”

“Eh?” said Ukridge. “Why, yes. But we can have a good talk about all that later on,” he proceeded hastily. “The point at the moment is how the dickens we’re going to persuade this poor worm to collect our insurance money for us. Why, damme, I should have thought you would have——”

“All I can say——” began Victor Beamish heatedly.

“Yes, yes,” said Ukridge; “some other time. Must stick to business now, laddie. I was saying,” he resumed, “that I should have thought you would have been as keen as mustard to put the job through for your own sake. You’re always beefing that you haven’t any clothes to impress managers with. Think of all you can buy with your share of the swag once you have summoned up a little ordinary determination and seen the thing through. Think of the suits, the boots, the hats, the spats. You’re always talking
about your dashed career, and how all you need to land you in a West-end production is good clothes. Well, here’s your chance to get them.”

His eloquence was not wasted. A wistful look came into Teddy Weeks’s eye, such a look as must have come into the eye of Moses on the summit of Pisgah. He breathed heavily. You could see that the man was mentally walking along Cork Street, weighing the merits of one famous tailor against another.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he said suddenly. “It’s no use asking me to put this thing through in cold blood. I simply can’t do it. I haven’t the nerve. But if you fellows will give me a dinner tonight with lots of champagne I think it will key me up to it.”

A heavy silence fell upon the room. Champagne! The word was like a knell.

“How on earth are we going to afford champagne?” said Victor Beamish.

“Well, there it is,” said Teddy Weeks. “Take it or leave it.”

“Gentlemen,” said Ukridge, “it would seem that the company requires more capital. How about it, old horses? Let’s get together in a frank, business-like cards-on-the-table spirit, and see what can be done. I can raise ten bob.”

“What!” cried the entire assembled company, amazed.

“How?”

“I’ll pawn a banjo.”

“You haven’t got a banjo.”

“No, but George Tupper has, and I know where he keeps it.”

Started in this spirited way, the subscriptions came pouring in. I contributed a cigarette-case, Bertram Fox thought his landlady would let him owe for another week, Robert Dunhill had an uncle in Kensington who, he fancied, if tactfully approached, would be good for a quid, and Victor Beamish said that if the advertisement-manager of the O-So-Eesi Piano-Player was churlish enough to refuse an advance of five shillings against future work he misjudged him sadly. Within a few minutes, in short, the Lightning Drive had produced the impressive total of two pounds six shillings, and we asked Teddy Weeks if he thought that he could get adequately keyed up within the limits of that sum.

“I’ll try,” said Teddy Weeks.
So, not unmindful of the fact that that excellent hostelry supplied champagne at eight shillings the quart bottle, we fixed the meeting for seven o'clock at Barolini's.

Considered as a social affair, Teddy Weeks's keying-up dinner was not a success. Almost from the start I think we all found it trying. It was not so much the fact that he was drinking deeply at Barolini's eight-shilling champagne while we, from lack of funds, were compelled to confine ourselves to meager beverages; what really marred the pleasantness of the function was the extraordinary effect the stuff had on Teddy. What was actually in the champagne supplied to Barolini and purveyed by him to the public, such as were reckless enough to drink it, at eight shillings the bottle remains a secret between its maker and his Maker; but three glasses of it were enough to convert Teddy Weeks from a mild and rather oily young man into a truculent swashbuckler.

He quarrelled with us all. With the soup he was tilting at Victor Beamish's theories of Art; the fish found him ridiculing Bertram Fox's views on the future of the motion-picture; and by the time the leg of chicken with dandelion salad arrived—or, as some held, string salad; opinions varied on this point—the hell-brew had so wrought on him that he had begun to lecture Ukridge on this mis-spent life and was urging him in accents audible across the street to go out and get a job and thus acquire sufficient self-respect to enable him to look himself in the face in a mirror without wincing. Not, added Teddy Weeks with what we all thought uncalled-for offensiveness, that any amount of self-respect was likely to do that. Having said which, he called imperiously for another eight bobs' worth.

We gazed at one another wanly. However excellent the end towards which all this was tending, there was no denying that it was hard to bear. But policy kept us silent. We recognized that this was Teddy Weeks's evening and that he must be humoured. Victor Beamish said meekly that Teddy had cleared up a lot of points which had been troubling him for a long time. Bertram Fox agreed that there was much in what Teddy had said about the future of the close-up. And even Ukridge, though his haughty soul was seared to its foundations by the latter's personal remarks, promised to take his homily to heart and act upon it at the earliest possible moment.
"You'd better!" said Teddy Weeks belligerently, biting off the end of one of Barolini's best cigars. "And there's another thing—don't let me hear of your coming and sneaking people's socks again."

"Very well, laddie," said Ukridge humbly.

"If there is one person in the world that I despise," said Teddy, bellowing a red-eyed gaze on the offender, "it's a knock-seeer—a seek-snocker—a—well, you know what I mean."

We hastened to assure him that we knew what he meant, and he relapsed into a lengthy stupor, from which he emerged three-quarters of an hour later to announce that he didn't know what we intended to do, but that he was going. We said that we were going too, and we paid the bill and did so.

Teddy Weeks's indignation on discovering us gathered about him upon the pavement outside the restaurant was intense, and he expressed it freely. Among other things, he said—which was not true—that he had a reputation to keep up in Soho.

"It's all right, Teddy, old horse," said Ukridge soothingly. "We just thought you would like to have all your old pals round you when you did it."

"Did it? Did what?"

"Why, had the accident."

Teddy Weeks glared at him truculently. Then his mood seemed to change abruptly, and he burst into a loud and hearty laugh.

"Well, of all the silly ideas!" he cried amusedly. "I'm not going to have an accident. You don't suppose I ever seriously intended to have an accident, do you? It was just my fun."

Then, with another sudden change of mood, he seemed to become a victim to an acute unhappiness. He stroked Ukridge's arm affectionately, and a tear rolled down his cheek. "Just my fun," he repeated. "You don't mind my fun, do you?" he asked pleadingly. "You like my fun, don't you? All my fun. Never meant to have an accident at all. Just wanted dinner." The gay humour of it all overcame his sorrow once more. "Funniest thing ever heard," he said cordially. "Didn't want accident, wanted dinner. Dinner daxident, dinner dixident," he added, driving home his point. "Well, good night all," he said cheerily—and, stepping off the
kerb on to a banana-skin, was instantly knocked ten feet by a passing lorry.

"Two ribs and an arm," said the doctor five minutes later, superintending the removal proceedings. "Gently with that stretcher."

It was two weeks before we were informed by the authorities of Charing Cross Hospital that the patient was in a condition to receive visitors. A whip-round secured the price of a basket of fruit, and Ukridge and I were deputed by the shareholders to deliver it with their compliments and kind inquiries.

"Hallo!" we said in a hushed, bedside manner when finally admitted to his presence.

"Sit down, gentlemen," replied the invalid.

I must confess even in that first moment to having experienced a slight feeling of surprise. It was not like Teddy Weeks to call us gentlemen. Ukridge, however, seemed to notice nothing amiss.

"Well, well, well," he said buoyantly. "And how are you, laddie? We've brought you a few fragments of fruit."

"I am getting along capitaly," replied Teddy Weeks, still in that odd precise way which had made his opening words strike me as curious. "And I should like to say that in my opinion England has reason to be proud of the alertness and enterprise of her great journals. The excellence of their reading-matter, the ingenuity of their various competitions, and, above all, the go-ahead spirit which has resulted in this accident insurance scheme are beyond praise. Have you got that down?" he inquired.

Ukridge and I looked at each other. We had been told that Teddy was practically normal again, but this sounded like delirium.

"Have we got that down, old horse?" asked Ukridge gently.

Teddy Weeks seemed surprised.

"Aren't you reporters?"

"How do you mean, reporters?"

"I thought you had come from one of these weekly papers that have been paying me insurance money, to interview me," said Teddy Weeks.

Ukridge and I exchanged another glance. An uneasy
glance this time. I think that already a grim foreboding had begun to cast its shadow over us.

"Surely you remember me, Teddy, old horse?" said Ukridge anxiously.

Teddy Weeks knit his brow, concentrating painfully.

"Why, of course," he said at last. "You're Ukridge, aren't you?"

"That's right. Ukridge."

"Of course. Ukridge."

"Yes. Ukridge. Funny your forgetting me!"

"Yes," said Teddy Weeks. "It's the effect of the shock I got when that thing bowled me over. I must have been struck on the head, I suppose. It has had the effect of rendering my memory rather uncertain. The doctors here are very interested. They say it is a most unusual case. I can remember some things perfectly, but in some ways my memory is a complete blank."

"Oh, but I say, old horse," quavered Ukridge, "I suppose you haven't forgotten about that insurance, have you?"

"Oh no. I remember that."

Ukridge breathed a relieved sigh.

"I was a subscriber to a number of weekly papers," went on Teddy Weeks. "They are paying me insurance money now."

"Yes, yes, old horse," cried Ukridge. "But what I mean is you remember the Syndicate, don't you?"

Teddy Weeks raised his eyebrows.

"Syndicate? What Syndicate?"

"Why, when we all got together and put up the money to pay for the subscriptions to these papers and drew lots, to choose which of us should go out and have an accident and collect the money. And you drew it, don't you remember?"

Utter astonishment, and a shocked astonishment at that, spread itself over Teddy Weeks's countenance. The man seemed outraged.

"I certainly remember nothing of the kind," he said severely. "I cannot imagine myself for a moment consenting to become a party to what from your own account would appear to have been a criminal conspiracy to obtain money under false pretences from a number of weekly papers."

"But, laddie——"
“However,” said Teddy Weeks, “if there is any truth in this story, no doubt you have documentary evidence to support it.”

Ukridge looked at me. I looked at Ukridge. There was a long silence.

“Shift-ho, old horse?” said Ukridge sadly. “No use staying on here.”

“No,” I replied with equal gloom. “May as well go.”

“Glad to have seen you,” said Teddy Weeks, “and thanks for the fruit.”

The next time I saw the man he was coming out of a manager’s office in the Haymarket. He had on a new Homburg hat of a delicate pearl grey, spats to match, and a new blue flannel suit, beautifully cut, with an invisible red twill. He was looking jubilant, and as I passed him, he drew from his pocket a gold cigarette-case.

It was shortly after that, if you remember, that he made a big hit as the juvenile lead in that piece at the Apollo and started on his sensational career as a matinée idol.

Inside the church the organ had swelled into the familiar music of the Wedding March. A verger came out and opened the doors. The five cooks ceased their reminiscences of other and smarter weddings at which they had participated. The camera-men unshipped their cameras. The costermonger moved his barrow of vegetables a pace forward. A dishevelled and unshaven man at my side uttered a disapproving growl.

“Idle rich!” said the dishevelled man.

Out of the church came a beauteous being, leading attached to his arm another being, somewhat less beauteous.

There was no denying the spectacular effect of Teddy Weeks. He was handsomer than ever. His sleek hair, gorgeously waved, shone in the sun; his eyes were large and bright; his lissome frame, garbed in faultless morning-coat and trousers, was that of an Apollo. But his bride gave the impression that Teddy had married money. They paused in the doorway, and the camera-men became active and fussy.

“Have you got a shilling, laddie?” said Ukridge in a low, level voice.

“Why do you want a shilling?”

“Old horse,” said Ukridge tensely, “it is of the utmost vital importance that I have a shilling here and now.”

I passed it over. Ukridge turned to the dishevelled man,
and I perceived that he held in his hand a large rich tomato
of juicy and over-ripe appearance.

"Would you like to earn a bob?" Ukridge said.

"Would I!" replied the dishevelled man.

Ukridge sank his voice to a hoarse whisper.

The camera-men had finished their preparations. Teddy
Weeks, his head thrown back in that gallant way which has
endared him to so many female hearts, was exhibiting his
celebrated teeth. The cooks, in undertones, were making
adverse comments on the appearance of the bride.

"Now, please," said one of the camera-men.

Over the heads of the crowd, well and truly aimed, whizzed
a large juicy tomato. It burst like a shell full between Teddy
Weeks's expressive eyes, obliterating them in scarlet ruin. It
spattered Teddy Weeks's collar, it dripped on Teddy Weeks's
morning-coat. And the dishevelled man turned abruptly and
raced off down the street.

Ukridge grasped my arm. There was a look of deep
content in his eyes.

"Shift-ho?" said Ukridge.

Arm-in-arm we strolled off in the pleasant June sunshine.
THE PRINCE'S BIRTHDAY PRESENT

ANTHONY ARMSTRONG
ANTHONY ARMSTRONG (the pen-name of Captain A. A. Willis, R.E.) was a regular contributor to Punch for several years, and has written five historical romances, a number of humorous novels, and a series of thrillers. His play Ten Minute Alibi was recently produced with striking success.
THE PRINCE’S BIRTHDAY PRESENT

ONCE upon a time there was a King and he had a son who was very, very clever. In fact, he was so smart that the shopkeepers would only accept cash. And he had had to take to Patience because none of the courtiers would play cards with him.

Well, one day, when Prince Pointedface and his father were discussing affairs of State, there was a sort of flash, and a fairy appeared between them. They were not startled at all, because fairies had a habit of travelling about like that. The King merely changed the subject in a polite fashion and remarked that it was a fine day for appearing.

“Yes, very fine day for it,” agreed the fairy. “Let me see,” she went on, getting to business right away, “the Prince comes of age in a week’s time, doesn’t he?”

“He does!” answered the old King, who knew all about that; for his son had been making a good thing out of it for the last two months.

“Well,” said the fairy, turning to the young man, “I’ve got a birthday present for you now, as I did not attend the customary fairy gathering round your cradle.”

“Oh, that didn’t really matter!” said the Prince, in a self-satisfied tone. “The others gave me all the usual presents, Health, and Wealth, and Long Life, and Happiness—”

“Quite, quite,” interrupted the fairy. “I was down to have given you Good Looks. But if you’re satisfied—”

The Prince gave a start and glanced sideways at a mirror. He considered that remark a nasty dig.

“Well, of course,” he began, “if you’d like—”

“Oh, it’s too late to do anything about it now,” went on the fairy, scoring all along the line. “Much,” she added, looking more closely at him.

The old King coughed meaningly at this point. It seemed to him the conversation was taking rather a personal tone.
"Well, what are you going to give me?" demanded Prince Pointedface, changing the subject with some alacrity.
"I am going to grant you three wishes."
"Oh, that!" replied the Prince in a bored fashion—as if he had been offered a silver-plated toast-rack.
"Don't say 'that' like that!" said the fairy crossly. "It's a very nice present."
"Quite, quite. Very nice," again interrupted the King rather anxiously. "Say 'Thank you, my boy!"
"Can I wish for anything I like?" asked the Prince, becoming slightly interested.
"Anything."
"And you promise you'll grant it?"
"Of course," snapped the fairy, getting annoyed.
"You're sure you'll be able to?" continued Prince Pointedface suspiciously.

The fairy snorted indignantly—if fairies do that sort of thing. "Look here," she began. "You shan't have them if you're going——"
"Sorry, sorry! No offence," hurriedly apologized the Prince. "Well, my first wish is to have a Wunk."

The fairy, who had raised her wand in readiness, lowered it again.
"A what?" she said. "I don't think I quite caught it."
"A Wunk," said the Prince, who was a young man of original ideas.
"A Wunk?" repeated the fairy, taken aback. "Wunk! Wunk!" She paused thoughtfully. "Wunk! What's it like?"
"Well, that's what I've often wondered," replied the Prince amably.

"Wouldn't you prefer a guinea-pig, my boy?" put in the old King anxiously. "The stables are rather full at the moment——"
"No, I want a Wunk. I've never had one."
"Is there such a thing?" asked the fairy.
"I shouldn't think so," replied the Prince happily, "but there will be soon, won't there; because you promised you'd grant——"
"Oh, all right," replied the fairy testily, and, raising her wand once more, she shut her eyes. Then she opened them again.
"Would you mind repeating the word?" she asked.
“Wunk,” said the Prince.
“How do you spell it?”
“W-u-n-k.”
“Er—thanks,” said the fairy, and shut her eyes once more.
After some thought she waved her wand in a dubious fashion.
A thing like a six-legged porcupine with a rabbit’s head appeared in front of the King, who started violently.
“Bother! That’s not it,” said the fairy, and hastily abolished it.
“I’m sure a guinea-pig would be better,” quavered the King in a faint voice.
The fairy with wrinkled brow lifted her wand once more.
“It’s by no means easy,” she observed severely as she shut her eyes, only to open them again after a long pause and remark: “This really ought to count two wishes!”
The Prince merely laughed rather nastily, and the fairy, having given him a lofty stare, shut her eyes once more and waved her wand.
A creature, with the head of a pelican and the body of a sea-lion standing on the long legs of an ostrich, was suddenly between them.
The King, trembling violently, rang a bell for the Royal Valet and ordered a large beaker of wine.
“I think that’s a Wunk,” said the fairy with a sigh not unmixed with pride.
Prince Pointedface surveyed the apparition from every angle.
“I think it must be,” he admitted at last. “It certainly isn’t anything else.”
The fairy put a few finishing touches to the Wunk in the shape of a pair of eagle’s wings.
“Yes, I’m certain it’s a Wunk,” she said at last, “though I’ve never been asked for one before.”
“I hope, my boy,” put in the King severely—he was feeling better after the wine—“that you’ll look after its—er—feeding and so on yourself. By the way, what does it eat?”
“Er— What does it?” queried the Prince, turning to its creator.
“Don’t ask me!” snapped the fairy. “You wished for it!”
At this point the Wunk nearly solved the question by a nasty snap of its beak. Apparently Royal Valet was its favourite dish.
"I don’t think I like it!" said the Prince, drawing back a hurried pace. "In fact," he added, "I wish I hadn’t asked for it."

Like a flash the fairy waved her wand and the Wunk was not.

"You haven’t," she observed. "And that’s your second wish, by the way," she added malevolently. "Come on, now. Only one more." She was beginning to dislike Prince Pointedface.

"Oh, is that so?" said Prince Pointedface, who didn’t like being hustled.

"That is so."

"Sez you!"

"Sez me!" snapped the fairy. "Come on, hurry up!"

"And no more Wunks, my boy," added the King.

Prince Pointedface looked very cunning.

"Are you ready, then?" he said as the fairy poised her wand. "Well, then, I wish for three more wishes."

"Hey! That’s not fair," cried the King indignantly, as the fairy stood speechless with surprise.

"Oh, and why not?" coldly demanded the Prince.

"It’s not done, my boy. It’s never been done. Your grandfather and your great-grandfather would never have done such a thing; though they both had dealings with fairies. In fact, I myself once, when walking through a Magic Wood——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Prince, who had heard the one about the Magic Wood many times before.

"You—you can’t do that," flamed the fairy, finding her voice and losing her temper.

"Even apart from your promise," began Prince Pointedface in judicial tones, "which many would consider morally binding, I presume my action is quite legal? But shall we consult the Vizier?"

Choking with wrath, the fairy waved her wand.

"There!" she screeched, in too much of a temper to see the further possibilities of the business. "Now hurry up and have your next three wishes. But I’ll never give you a present again."

"Only two wishes," pleasantly corrected the Prince, who was thoroughly enjoying himself. "My third wish of this series will, of course, be for three more."
"My boy, my boy," said the King, horror and admiration
struggling together in his voice. "How you remind me of
your dear mother! Her idea of honesty was——"

"I think," interrupted the Prince to the practically
speechless fairy, "it was very nice of me not to have wished
for more than three. In fact, now I come to think of it, the
first of my new wishes will be for fifty more wishes to be
granted."

The fairy found her voice and said things about Prince
Pointedface that ought never to have been mentioned by a
lady. She stamped up and down and spoke so angrily and
rapidly that the old King, whose wife had only died a short
while before, timidly said, "Yes, m'dear," on at least two
occasions from sheer force of habit.

In the end the fairy with one last blast of venom cried:
"And have all the rest of the wishes you want—I promise
you'll get 'em all right—and may you enjoy them—but not
if I can help it, you mean little——"

The rest of the sentence, since she disappeared in an angry
puff of smoke, was finished in fairyland, where no doubt it
caused a bit of a sensation.

The King and his son were silent for some while after she
had gone. Silence, in fact, seemed rather nice. Then the
Prince, a bit shaken, said: "Well, you know, I rather wish I'd
consulted the Vizier before I did that!"

"But you did," replied the King. "You called him in just
before your third wish, and he told you it was quite possible
but inadvisable."

"Why, so I did," said the Prince in surprise. "I'd forgotten.
No, I hadn't. I say, Father: that was a wish and it was
granted."

"What was a wish, my boy?" asked the poor old King,
rather puzzled.

"My saying just now I wished I'd consulted the Vizier.
I can see I shall have to be careful." And he went out
thoughtfully.

Many times that day did the Prince realize he had to
be careful. For the fairy, it seemed, by way of revenge,
hung on his lightest word, and if it could be called a wish
granted it in as awkward a manner as possible. For instance,
when he mentioned quite casually at lunch, thinking of the
crops, that he wished it would rain—rain it did, a regular
downpour right inside the Banqueting Hall, and all the Court got wet through and most of the food was spoilt, before the astounded Prince realized what had happened and thought of turning it off. Everybody looked so angry about it that the Prince, much shaken, incautiously wished himself elsewhere; but, having omitted in his confusion to specify any destination, he at once found himself, still wearing his best clothes, in the worst part of the Royal Piggeries.

By the end of a couple of days the Court in general was unanimous in condemning the Prince's new gift; for they soon realized it affected them in no small measure. The stout Court Chamberlain, in particular, was very bitter, after finding himself translated from the Throne Room to a distant wood where the Prince was hunting, merely because His Highness had expressed a cheery desire that "that old pudding of a Court Chamberlain could be with them, as it might reduce his fat a bit". So swiftly did the fairy work that the Chamberlain arrived in time to hear nearly the whole of the Prince's remarks, which did not make for good feeling.

In addition to this liability to unexpected displacement occasioned by the Prince's ill-advised small talk, the courtiers found life in the Palace still more hazardous because of the presence of strange animals, which, like the Wunk, Prince Pointedface had created out of curiosity, and had forgotten to annihilate. In fact, a Blue-Rumped Gnurgle was at large in the maids' bedrooms for several days, till the Royal Housekeeper respectfully asked for the Prince to wish it elsewhere. The Prince, who was busy, sent it to one or two places where it wasn't in the least wanted, before he eventually demolished it. And then there was the Jellyhock, which the Prince manufactured to enliven family prayers.

The weather, too, developed an amazing variety owing to the incautious Prince Pointedface's conversational remarks on the subject, nor was it by any means confined to the outside of the Palace. As like as not a depression advancing over Iceland one minute would be in the drawing-room the next. One bold courtier ventured to complain about this, but on the Prince's remarking "I wish you'd shut up", he had shut up—in the manner of a concertina, and the Prince's first attempt at reconstruction, by wishing he'd open out again, could hardly be called a success. He got him right eventually, but the young man was never the same afterwards.
But the climax came when at a Royal Ball the Prince, in conversation with a young lady he had not met before and rather fancied, gallantly though inadvertently expressed a wish to see more of her. Since the ballroom was crowded at the time, there was rather a scandal, which was not helped by the Prince losing his head and expending several wishes in blankets and safety-pins before he finally translated the hysterical damsel to her bedroom. This incident led to the appointment of a Censor of the Royal Wish, whose business it was to follow Prince Pointedface everywhere and nudge him whenever he said “I wish . . .” so that he might fully consider every aspect of his intended remark.

Under this functionary’s guidance the Prince started an Account Book of Receipt and Expenditure of Wishes to ensure his keeping a balance in hand. It was a most interesting document, and began something like this:

**WISH ACCOUNT BOOK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>Debit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Fairy</td>
<td>To 1 Wunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Demobilization of above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; 3 more wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; 50 more wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Consultation with Vizier (antedated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Weather control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Inadvertent visit to Piggeries and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consequent new suit of clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Collar-stud forgotten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Attendance of Chamberlain during</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hunt and return ticket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Recruitment and disbandment of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assorted Fauna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Shutting up of courtier and subsequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Jellyhock at family prayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Removal of same (various destinations and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>final despatch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Good view of dance partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; One blanket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; One larger blanket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Safety-pins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Self</td>
<td>&quot; Further weather control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and so on.
What would eventually have happened in the Court no one knows. The old King said it was far more disorganizing than the last visit of his mother-in-law, who at the time was suffering from a spell which caused her to turn everything she touched into vanilla ice-cream. Nor did there appear any way out of it, since the Prince, in a moment of enthusiasm, one day had increased his capital to several millions.

But the end came at last, for the vindictive fairy was still on the watch. The Prince, after a very successful half-hour during which he got his favourite Patience out three times running, laughed triumphantly, and then rashly exclaimed, "I wish I could have that half-hour over again!"

And there the fairy had him. He had the half-hour over again complete in every detail, even down to his triumphant laugh and the rash exclamation, which in its turn started off a third similar half-hour, and that a fourth. . . .

They took him off after a while to a quiet room in a far wing of the Palace, and there he still is. The Court Mathematician has computed to the relief of all that his existing store of wishes will last him out.
HARRY GRAHAM was formerly an officer in the Coldstream Guards, and since retiring from the Army has made a great name for himself as a writer of light verse and humorous stories, including the inimitable *Ruthless Rhymes*. He has also written the lyrics for *The Maid of the Mountains* and other successful plays.
BIFFIN ON THE BASSOON

If there is one thing in the world that annoys me more than another, it is to be told that the English are an unmusical people.

I was dining with Reginald Biffin at the Grillroom Club, a few years ago, when he happened to express a somewhat unfavourable opinion of the music-loving qualities of my fellow-countrymen. That very afternoon, he said, he had attended a concert at which an admirable Russian tenor had sung no less than forty-eight songs by Brahms. The audience had consisted of only twenty-six persons. Seven of these were hospital nurses and had therefore in all probability not paid for their seats. He described the gathering as typically representative.

"Nonsense!" I protested indignantly. "You don't know what you're talking about. Give the British public the goods," I continued, "and you'll be surprised to see how they'll clamour for more!"

"I'll be surprised all right," he answered.

"Take Gilbert and Sullivan——" I began.

"Oh, Sullivan——" he interrupted scornfully.

"I know exactly what you're going to say," I told him. "You're going to say that Sullivan and Wagner are the two composers who appeal especially to the tone-deaf, to the unmusical."

"And to the musical, too," he protested.

"Of course. But that's not the point."

"Then what is the point?" he asked.

"I don't know now," I said. "You will interrupt so; I've forgotten where I was."

"You were trying to pretend that the British public is fond of music."

"Good music, yes."

"They somehow manage to survive fairly comfortably"
without it,” he suggested. “You don’t find them clamouring very loudly for National Opera, for a State Orchestra, for——”

“All the old arguments!” I groaned. “My dear chap, there are more amateur choral and orchestral societies in England today than——”

It was Biffin’s turn to interrupt.

“I was referring to good music,” he said. “I know, of course, that in the summer months our public parks are enriched by the presence of Council Bands playing the overture to ‘Poet and Peasant’ or ‘Zampa’. I am aware that no seaside esplanade is considered complete without a bandstand on which the Borough Orchestra’s performance of Tschaikovsky’s ‘1812’ drowns the roaring of the elements. I know——”

“You keep on saying that you know,” I chipped in, “but as a matter of fact, where music is concerned you know nothing.”

“I know nothing!” he repeated scornfully. “That’s very funny! Ha! Ha!” He gave a mirthless laugh.

“Well, what do you know?” I said.

“It would take me too long to tell you,” he replied. “But perhaps it may alter your views a bit to hear a rather remarkable story which deals with my musical experiences. Would you care to listen to it?”

“Whether I care to listen or no is a matter of minor importance,” I said. “You’re my host, you’re paying for the dinner, and you’re obviously determined that I shall. So I suppose I shall have to.”

“Charles,” he called to a passing waiter, “bring some more coffee.”

“That’s right,” I said. “We must keep awake at all costs. Now then,” I added, when our wants had been supplied, “fire away! And let’s get your rather remarkable story over before I think of a better one.”

You must know then (he began) that from earliest youth I have always been particularly musical. At the age of three I could play the treble part of “Chopsticks” with considerable accuracy. At six my rendering of “The Merry Peasant” suggested that as an infant prodigy I might take my place on any concert platform without fear of serious competition.

I’m not boasting when I say that as a child I was deservedly
recognized as being a bit of a genius. Musical talent is hereditary in our family. It's in the blood. My ancestors were all more or less music addicts. Why, I remember a picture we had in the dining-room at home of my grandmother playing the harp. Not a very good picture artistically, but of considerable interest from a psychological point of view. She had very beautiful arms, had my grandmother, and in those days young women didn't get the chances they now enjoy of displaying their attractions. The harp was a perfect godsend to girls with pretty wrists. I'm wandering from the point, I know, but what I mean to suggest is that if you could have seen my grandmother, as she was in that picture, plucking the strings with long white fingers, her left foot on the clutch (so to speak) and her right on the accelerator, working the gears for all she was worth, you'd realize at once where I got my talent from. But of course you never will see her now, because if she were alive today she'd be a hundred and twenty-five and her interest in the harp would probably have waned.

My father was musical, too. He had a remarkable voice, quite untrained of course, but very powerful. I used to hear him singing in his bath every morning. "So We'll Go No More a Roving!" and "Oh, That We Two Were Maying!" were his favourite songs, and the regular splashing of his sponge showed how admirable was his sense of rhythm.

The bathroom at home was renowned for the excellence of its acoustic properties. Sometimes when my father was giving a particularly lifelike performance of "The Death of Nelson" the whole house would shake with his vocal reverberations. The servants would come rushing upstairs with slop-pails, thinking that he was drowning himself or something. As a matter of fact, of course, he never was, and they would return to the basement, relieved, if perhaps slightly resentful.

My dear mother was not a singer, though she was very fond of humming to herself as she went about her household duties. Sounds of "There is a Green Hill Far Away" issuing from the linen cupboard—she was particularly devoted to hymns—would often reveal her exact whereabouts. "I don't know anything about music," she would say, "but I know what I like", and that summed up her whole attitude towards this particular branch of art.
She and my father started a sort of amateur glee-party, composed chiefly of the family, which met in the billiard-room once a week and practised part-songs. My two elder sisters sang soprano, and in those days I had a fine treble voice, verging on falsetto. It was always difficult to find a suitable tenor, my Uncle William (who tried to fill the part) labouring under the disability of never having learnt to read music. He sang exclusively by ear, but made up in enthusiasm for what he lacked of technical skill, often with very original results. Two male cousins sang bass more loudly than bass has ever probably been sung before, while a faint bee-like droning that issued from a corner by the window suggested that my mother was taking the alto part, and from the wild cries that rose from the sofa by the fire-place we knew that the sopranis were putting up a good fight against almost overwhelming odds.

We lived in Hampstead then, and at Christmas-time would often don black masks and go round to the various houses in the neighbourhood, singing carols and collecting money for charities. I must confess that this practice did not commend itself to all the local inhabitants. I remember the Cohens, next door, showing considerable annoyance at being aroused from sleep at 2 a.m. by the sounds of “Christians, Awake”! Again, when we sang “Noel! Noel!” further up the street, an old gentleman named Joel came rushing out in his night-shirt under the impression that he was being summoned.

Anyhow, I’ve told you enough to show that we were a decidedly musical family, and you’ll understand how it was that when I went to a public school I found it difficult to keep my talents as dark as I should have wished. At school, naturally, a boy is very apt to be kicked if he displays signs of playing the piano better than he plays football, and I did my best to hide my guilty secret from the other boys.

One morning, however, when I had brought my fag-master some buttered eggs that I had inadvertently dropped in the passage on the way—they were otherwise all right, and to outward appearance at any rate seemed quite normal—“Hey, young feller,” he said, giving me a playful kick on the shin, which from a youth of his eminence might be regarded as a mark of especial favour, “did I hear you playing the flute the other day?”

“No.” I was able quite truthfully to deny any connection
with that instrument. "It was only the penny whistle," I explained.

"The School Orchestra's short of players," he went on. "And I've promised old Posner"—Dr. Rollo Posner was our music-master—"to try and chevvy up a few recruits. You cut along to the Drill Hall at six o'clock tonight and report to Sergeant Basley, see?"

As I turned to go he gave me another flattering buffet. "Next time I have buttered eggs," he said, disentangling a few short carpet hairs from the dish, "remember, I prefer them bald!"

That evening, as instructed, I reported myself at the Drill Hall, where I found old Dr. Posner and Sergeant Basley, his second-in-command, inspecting an embarrassed group of small boys who, like myself, had been selected to swell the ranks of the Orchestral Society.

"Well, my boy," said Dr. Posner, when it became my turn to be examined, "how would you like to join the orchestra, eh?"

I replied that I thought perhaps it wouldn't be so jolly rotten.

"Ever played any instrument?" he asked.
"No, sir. Only the penny whistle."
"Ah, indeed. The penny whistle. And were you an accomplished performer upon that peculiar——"

"Oh no, sir," I protested. "I could manage 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow', and a bit of the 'Dead March'."

"A varied if not extensive repertory!"

He turned to Sergeant Basley.

"What do you think, Basley?"

"His mouth's not the right shape," said the Sergeant, shaking his head gloomily.

"For the clarionet, no," said Dr. Posner, "but what about the bassoon?"

"No harm in trying, sir."
"There doesn't seem to be anybody else."
"That's right, sir."

The music-master turned to me.

"Would you care to learn the bassoon?" he inquired.

"I'd rather play the drum, sir."

"Nonsense!" He laughed good-naturedly. "Besides, there's a waiting list for the drum a mile long already. No.
It's bassoon or nothing. That's settled then. Good evening. See you tomorrow at rehearsal."

Thus it came about that, under the supervision of Dr. Posner and the personal tuition of Sergeant Basley, I learnt to play that most curious and much-maligned instrument, the bassoon, and in due course took my place without discredit in the school orchestra.

Sergeant Basley was in some ways a man of mystery. The title of sergeant was his only by courtesy; as his long hair and round shoulders betokened, he had never seen military service. But he was a gallant little man and an exceptionally talented musician. There was practically no instrument that he could not master, and it was due to his untiring efforts that the orchestra was able to perform with considerable success at the end-of-term concerts to which the boys' parents looked forward with so much anxiety.

As Sergeant Basley explained it to me, the bassoon is not an instrument that any person would be likely to adopt wantonly, inadvisedly or indeed of his own free will. Bassoon playing is, in fact, as much an hereditary profession as is that of the miner, the undertaker, or the chimney-sweep. Bassoons are regarded as heirlooms, and handed down from father to son in the various families that have specialized for generations in this particular form of musical expression. Basley was, so he assured me, a bassoonist by birth rather than by adoption. His grandfather had played the bassoon in a famous military band in the early 'eighties. Tales of his father's prowess on this instrument were still being circulated at the Musicians' Club when King George came to the throne. He himself was destined to attain a very high reputation in the woodwind world. Indeed, his aid was anxiously solicited whenever any piece was to be performed necessitating solo work from that instrument which is still somewhat unjustly regarded as the buffoon of the orchestra.

It is doubtless true to say of the bassoon that one of its chief characteristics is the ability it possesses to provide comic relief. Sir Arthur Sullivan used it to good effect for this purpose, and even the modern music-hall comedian can still rely upon it to supply him with a certain laugh when all other methods fail. This is perhaps one of the reasons why bassoonists wear an expression of habitually furtive bonhomie, and are privileged to appear in public in black evening ties
on occasions when their colleagues are forced to wear white ones.

The great English poets themselves have been unable to invest the bassoon with any truly romantic spirit. When Coleridge’s wedding guest heard its loud tones, he could only beat his breast, a gesture that has never been regarded as a sign of real appreciation. And Tennyson, with that lack of worldly knowledge for which he was distinguished, naïvely suggested that, in conjunction with a violin and a flute—a truly remarkable trio—the bassoon could provide a band to which Maud and her guests might perform the peculiar feat of dancing “in tune”.

Under the admirable instruction of Sergeant Basley, I gradually acquired a certain proficiency as a bassoonist. The sounds that I emitted became daily less painfully goatlike, and a glorious hour arrived when I was given no less than sixteen solo bars in a symphony entitled “Harvesting Time”, composed by the great Dr. Posner himself, which was performed at the school concert with marked success.

“Harvesting Time” was in many respects a peculiar work. One movement, I remember, was devoted entirely to a portrayal of farmyard life, where the introduction of what was known as the “cow” motif on the bassoon was among the happier touches. Later on in the symphony my instrument was called upon to provide a suggestion of bees among the lime trees which was no less felicitous, and in the final Allegro movement I did some fine contrapuntal work round an old theme that Dr. Posner had stolen bodily from a traditional Nordic folk-song of the sixteenth century.

Dr. Posner was not ashamed of being a plagiarist. As he justly remarked, when we remember that three compositions so widely dissimilar as “Faust”, “Elijah”, and “Sonnie Boy” owe much of their popularity to a certain musical phrase common to all of them, we shall hardly blame the minor modern composers for their half-conscious borrowings.

“Harvesting Time” has not stood the test of time, and it must frankly be stated that Dr. Posner was never a great composer. It was rather as an expert on the celeste that he eventually gained a well-earned knighthood.

During rehearsals for the school concert, I became so enthusiastic a player that in the summer holidays I persuaded my father to make me a present of a secondhand bassoon
that I had noticed languishing in the window of a musical instrument shop in Wardour Street. My interest, alas, evaporated after I left school; the bassoon was relegated to a boxroom cupboard, and I might never have given it another thought had I not happened to run up against my old friend Sergeant Basley not long ago in Oxford Street.

I recognized him at once, for he had changed but little in twenty years, and was carrying a familiar black shiny instrument-case in which I knew his beloved bassoon to be reposing. He was hurrying along towards Langham Place, when I stopped him.

"You don't remember me, Sergeant Basley," I said. "And yet wasn't I your favourite pupil?"

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed, searching feverishly in his memory. A sudden gleam of recognition lit his eye.

"Fancy meeting you!" he said. "This is a surprise."

"It's a small world!"

"That's right!"

"Where are you rushing off to like this?" I asked.

"Rehearsal," he replied. "The Philmelodic's giving its last concert on Tuesday. You've probably read about it in the papers. Perhaps you're coming to it?"

"I wish I was. What are you giving? Not 'Harvesting Time', I hope."

"No," he laughed. "All the same it's a big 'do', I can tell you. We're playing the new symphony by Heinzelmacher."

"Something terribly modern, eh?"

"For the first time in England. The composer's come over from Dresden on purpose to conduct."

"No chance of my getting in, I suppose?"

"Funny you should say that," he replied. "By a bit of luck I happen to have a couple of complimentary seats in my pocket. I was thinking of giving them to my old mother, but I'd sooner you had them."

"No, no. Her need is greater than mine, I'm sure."

"Not a bit of it," said Basley. "She's stone deaf, to begin with, and hates music. She only comes because she likes to see me play."

"Are you sure you can spare them?"

"That's right."

He produced an envelope from his pocket.

"Here you are," he said. "Not the best places, I'm
afraid. At the side of the orchestra, just behind the double-basses. But you'll get a fine view of Herr Heinzmacher himself."

"If you insist," I said, grasping the tickets firmly before he should change his mind. "I'm frightfully obliged. Eight o'clock, I suppose? At the King's Hall."

"That's right."

"Thanks awfully. But I mustn't keep you from rehearsal."

"That's right. Old Heinzmacher's got a devil of a temper. Good-bye. See you Tuesday!"

He turned and scuttled off down the street.

I was naturally delighted at getting two free seats for a concert which, as I had read in the papers, was likely to prove one of the outstanding events of the London musical season. I cast about in my mind for a suitable companion with whom to share my good fortune, and it did not take me long to come to a decision.

Prominent in my thoughts for some time had been a girl—you probably know her—Florrie Hamlett by name, daughter of Admiral Hamlett—her mother was a Wynge, rather a formidable old trout, but Florrie couldn't help that. She and I—and by she I mean Florrie, of course, not the old trout of a mother—had been seeing a good deal of each other lately, though not nearly so much as I could have wished. I confess that I found her society strangely congenial, and she didn't seem to object very strongly to mine. You see, we were particularly well suited to one another. I mean, she was different from ordinary girls—frightfully good-looking, with a lovely figure and very fair hair, and yet what you might call serious-minded, almost a highbrow in fact. That is to say she occasionally read books, and would go to plays that weren't musical comedies, and was quite keen about art and music. Naturally, therefore, she seemed a bit alarming to most of the young men she met, who were content to admire her from a safe distance and left the field pretty open to anyone of her own mental calibre. Not that she wasn't extremely popular; she was, especially with her girl friends. She had been a bridesmaid oftener than any of her contemporaries. She was so accustomed to standing over the hot-water pipes in the aisles of churches, grasping bouquets of heavily scented lilies; she was so used to posing for press photographers in
draughty porches, that she was practically immune from the effects of heat, cold, or nausea. She and I, as I said before, were the very best of friends, and I must admit that I was only awaiting a favourable opportunity to convert that friendship into something more durable and satisfactory.

When I got home that evening I rang Florrie up on the telephone and explained the whole business to her. She was fortunately free on Tuesday evening, and expressed herself as delighted with the idea of dining somewhere with me, and going on afterwards to the Heinzmacher concert.

I was very anxious that the party should prove a success, but felt a bit worried over the question of choosing a suitable restaurant. You see, if one is taking a girl to a musical comedy, the obvious place to dine at is the Savoy or the Berkeley or somewhere like that. But before a concert of serious music it seems more appropriate to choose less fashionable and conventional surroundings. I knew of a little restaurant at the back of Oxford Street where the atmosphere was more in keeping with the spirit in which one attends classical concerts, and Florrie promised to meet me there at seven o'clock.

I engaged a small table in the window, and, five minutes before the appointed hour, I might have been seen sitting there, impatiently studying the menu. At Bonavento's the food is very nearly as good as at the Carlton or the Savoy; it is possibly the very same food, only not quite so fresh, and certainly, by the time one has paid for the numerous extras, it seems almost equally as expensive. In some ways it is perhaps not quite so attractive as the less Bohemian restaurants, and I took the precaution of removing the vase containing three faded chrysanthemums, the saucer of damp olives, and the ash-tray advertising a well-known mineral water with which the table was decorated.

It was not until twenty minutes past seven that the swing-door opened and Florrie came into the room. I was alarmed to notice that she was not alone, but was accompanied by her mother, old Lady Hamlett, a lady for whom I had always entertained an active dislike. As a rule I am extremely fond of old ladies, as they are of me. It's a saying in our family that dogs, governesses, and elderly ladies all regard me with an instinctive affection which is flattering to my vanity, though at times somewhat embarrassing. Lady Hamlett was
the single exception to this rule. Our common fondness for Florrie caused us to regard one another with mutual suspicion, and we were never really happy together. I was therefore conscious of a feeling of intense disappointment which I fear I may have betrayed by my expression, for Florrie hurriedly began to make excuses for her mother's presence.

"I hope you don't mind," she said, "but poor Mother was all alone tonight and had nowhere to go."

I suppressed a strong inclination to suggest that Lady Hamlett might quite profitably have gone to bed.

"Delighted, I'm sure," I answered rather grimly, for I knew that, so far as I was concerned, the evening was ruined.

"Mother's so fond of music," Florrie continued. "She was wondering whether it would be possible to squeeze her in somewhere."

Anyone who had given a fleeting glance at Lady Hamlett's ample proportions would realize that not even with a giant shoe-horn could one possibly squeeze her into any space covered by less than three ordinary stalls.

"I do hope I'm not being a great bore," said Lady Hamlett.

"How can you think that?" I protested, though I could conceive of no reason for thinking otherwise.

Dinner proceeded gloomily enough. Florrie was unusually silent and, in spite of many efforts to behave decently, I could not help sulking, while Lady Hamlett's conversation added little to the gaiety of the meal.

"Dear Mr. Enderby," she said—my name does not happen to be Enderby, as you know, but she can never remember names—"Dear Mr. Enderby"—I might mention that Enderby is an admirer of Florrie's whom I particularly dislike—"I had no idea that you made any pretence even of being musical."

Somehow the word "pretence" roused all my worst passions.

"I expect I'm just as musical as most people who go to concerts," I said.

"Nonsense," said Florrie, coming to her mother's aid. "You know quite well you don't know anything at all about it."

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked indignantly.

"Well, you don't play anything—the piano, for instance—"

"The piano is not the only instrument in the world," I said rather coldly.
“Good gracious! Do you meant to say that you do play something?”
“Certainly I do.”
“What can it be? Don’t tell me that you’ve got a secret vice; that you play the trombone in your bedroom? I couldn’t bear it!”
“You’re being very funny, I’m sure,” I said. “But I can’t see anything peculiarly amusing about a trombone. In any case I do not happen to perform upon that particular instrument.”
“Then what particular instrument do you happen to perform on?”
“If you want to know,” I replied, “I happen to play the bassoon.”
Florrie gave a shrill of girlish laughter. Her mother joined in with an irritating cackle that was particularly irritating.
“How too marvellous!” said Florrie.
“I really don’t see anything to laugh at,” I said. “You seem to have a very warped sense of humour.”
“But it’s wonderful,” she insisted. “You must look too frightfully funny, you and your bassoon. I’d give worlds to see you. Won’t you come to tea one night and play to me?”
“I shall do nothing of the sort,” I answered with growing annoyance.
“Not if I ask you to?”
“Not even if you went on your knees——”
“The chances of my ever assuming that attitude for such an absurd purpose are very remote!” Florrie, by this time, was herself becoming a trifle nettled.
“Then I think, as it’s just after eight o’clock, we’d better go to our concert. Or rather,” I added, “to your concert, for I doubt very much if I shall get in.”
“Oh, that’ll be all right,” said Florrie unkindly. “You’ve only got to tell them that you play the bassoon!”
I turned a withering glance in her direction and rose from the table to show that the meal was at an end.
We drove in silence to the King’s Hall, and I had barely paid the taxi when Lady Hamlett uttered an exclamation of annoyance.
“Oh, dear!” she said. “What do you think I’ve done?”
There was no folly that I did not imagine her capable of committing, but I refrained from saying so.

"If I haven't left my little bag in the restaurant!" she went on. She turned to me. "I wonder if you'd be so very kind—"

"Oh, certainly!" I interrupted her bitterly. "I shall be delighted to go back and fetch it. Here are the tickets." I gave the envelope to Florrie. "Perhaps if you could ask for Mr. Basley—he's one of the orchestra—and leave my name at the door, he might be able to find a place for me."

I left my companions to find their own way to their seats, picked up another taxi, drove back to Bonavento's and there with some difficulty found and identified Lady Hamlett's bag. By the time I had returned to the King's Hall, the concert had begun and I found the doors of the auditorium mercilessly closed against me during the performance of the first item on the programme.

There was nothing to be done save to possess my soul in patience, but as soon as the doors were re-opened I hastily made my way to the passage at the back of the orchestra and hailed an attendant.

"I'm late," I explained. "But perhaps Mr. Basley left word—"

"Basley? Quite right," said the man. "We've been expecting you. You're only just in time. Come along."

I was immensely relieved to think that Florrie had somehow managed to get me a seat, and quickly followed the attendant as he threaded his way through the orchestra.

"Here you are," he said, pointing to an empty chair.

I sat down as quietly as possible, for I realized that the performance was about to be resumed, and my entrance seemed already to have caused a slight disturbance.

Once settled in my seat I had leisure to look round, and was astonished to find that I seemed to be sitting in the very centre of the orchestra itself. I realized that this was so when I noticed that on either side of me sat a man holding a bassoon in his hand.

The one on my right turned and whispered something in my ear.

"What do you say?" I inquired.

"Deputizing, eh?"

"I beg your pardon?"
He leant across to his fellow bassoon player.

"Old Basley's funked it after all," he said. "I thought he would."

"Yes," replied the other. "Jerry put the wind up him properly at rehearsal!" Then he turned to me. "You nearly missed the bus!" he said.

I confess that I found these cryptic remarks somewhat puzzling, and was about to ask for enlightenment when the conductor—no less a person than the great Herr Heinzmacher himself—tapped on his desk. A tense silence fell upon the house. A thrill of expectancy was in the air. I sat up and prepared to enjoy myself.

Suddenly the player on my right jogged my elbow.

"Where's your instrument?" he asked in an agonized whisper. "Here," he added, as I made no reply to this incomprehensible question, "for God's sake take mine!"

He pushed a bassoon into my hand, turned to his colleague and uttered one word: "Balmy!"

I looked up and noticed that Herr Heinzmacher was gazing at me with a very peculiar and embarrassing expression on his face—an expression in which ferocity and astonishment seemed to be fighting for supremacy. He tapped his desk again, raised his baton, pointed it directly at me and made two passes in the air. The silence seemed to have grown more profound than ever, and I became conscious that the eyes of every member of the orchestra were concentrated upon me. The player on my left gave my leg an agonizing pinch and pointed to the music on a stand in front of me.

"Your stunt," he whispered. "Go to it!"

With a sensation of inexpressible alarm, I observed the words "Solo Obbligato" written in red ink across the top of the manuscript. Suddenly, like a man waking from a dream, I appreciated the full horror of my position. I realized that I was assumed to be deputizing for the absent Basley, and that upon me devolved the duty of playing the opening bars of the famous "Die Schöpfung" symphony which was now to be given for the first time in England.

Herr Heinzmacher had grown pale, a look of intolerable anxiety was in his eye, while large beads of perspiration bespangled his brow. He tapped his desk again in a desperate fashion and once more began to wave his baton at me with a passionate gesture of entreaty, while a faint echo of the
word “Schweinhund!” floated from his desk in my direction.

To say that my heart stood still would be but a mild way of expressing my sensations. At that moment, as I believe happens in the case of drowning men, all my past life seemed to flash across my mind. I saw the world in a grain of sand and Eternity in an hour. And of the many incidents that I recalled in that brief instant of time one memory stood out with extraordinary prominence. I was back again in the old school drill-hall; in imagination I saw before me the tall figure of Dr. Rollo Posner conducting his notorious “Harvesting Time”; once more I heard myself playing the “cow” motif.

Half-consciously I clasped and raised the bassoon with fingers grown suddenly familiar, and, like a lover who has too long been parted from his mate, closed my lips in ecstasy upon the reed.

Just at that second I chanced somehow to catch sight of Florrie and her egregious mother, out of the corner of my eye, as they sat apparently spellbound behind the double basses. A wave of indignation swept over me. “I’ll show them whether I can play!” I thought. “I’ll teach them to laugh at my beloved bassoon!” And before the conductor’s baton had reached its eighth beat I had come to a clear and rapid decision. I saw my duty plain before me, and in another moment I had taken a deep breath and with inflated cheeks was frenziedly playing as much as I could remember of the brief obligato that twenty years ago had excited so much comment from the parents of my little play-fellows at the school concert.

It is no exaggeration to say that on this occasion I played as I had never played before—indeed, as one inspired. Herr Heinzmacler’s expression of rage gave place to a look of fascinated perplexity. The veins on his neck stood out so prominently that at any moment he seemed to be in danger of exploding. He could still be heard muttering the strangest Teutonic oaths under his breath but he did not completely lose his self-control, and mechanically kept on beating time with a trembling baton.

At the back of the orchestra the worthy tympani-players had been laboriously counting the beats, awaiting their cue, and at the end of their sixteen bars’ rest they came in with a loud roll on the kettle-drums. In another moment the whole
band of musicians had taken up the tale, and the great "Die Schöpfung" symphony was safely launched upon its way.

The unaccustomed strain had proved almost too much for me. Shattered and exhausted I sank into my chair, buried my head in my hands, and allowed my neighbour to relieve me of his bassoon. Of the result of my efforts I was barely conscious, and yet a feeling of intense exhilaration upheld me, and I could see by the envious glances of my neighbours that mine had been no ordinary triumph.

Of the subsequent events of that evening I remember little. I recall vaguely that at the close of the symphony the ovation given to the composer was unique in its enthusiasm. Herr Heinzmacher was forced to take seven calls; the orchestra stood up no less than three times to acknowledge the applause, and on the last occasion the conductor stepped forward and shook me warmly by the hand. In the subsequent confusion I managed to creep away and escape from the building, and was soon back at home.

That night I slept like a tired child, woke late next morning, and, after a hearty breakfast, turned with interest to my daily paper to read the musical critic's notice of the performance. It read as follows:

The principal feature of last night's Philmelodic Concert at the King's Hall was the performance of Herr Heinzmacher's "Die Schöpfung"—familiarly known in Dresden as the Sauerkraut Symphony—conducted by the composer in person. Of the merits of Herr Heinzmacher as a conductor it is difficult to speak. His mannerisms are peculiar and his methods eccentric. The passionate intensity, the dramatic exuberance, with which he conducted the delicate opening phrases of his work, seemed out of all proportion to their content, and adversely affected the balance of an orchestra accustomed to the less ferocious methods of our native conductors. Later on, however, Herr Heinzmacher succeeded in demonstrating his complete control over a band of instrumentalists whom we may well regard as artistically and technically superior to any foreign orchestra. The woodwind was especially true and accurate in attack—the humorous bassoon obbligato, suggestive (as we read in the Synopsis) of the first appearance on earth of animal life in the shape of cattle, was handled with especial virtuosity by a player whose name was not given on our programme.

I sent out for an early edition of the Evening Post, and read a similarly laudatory criticism: