A SIMPLE TALE

TALKING of anti-Semitism one of those mornings, Ferrand said in his good French: "Yes, monsieur, plenty of those gentlemen in these days esteem themselves Christian, but I have only once met a Christian who esteemed himself a Jew. C'était tres drôle—je vais vous conter cela.

"It was one autumn in London, and, the season being over, I was naturally in poverty, inhabiting a palace in Westminster at fourpence the night. In the next bed to me that time there was an old gentleman, so thin that one might truly say he was made of air. English, Scotch, Irish, Welsh—I shall never learn to distinguish those little differences in your race—but I well think he was English. Very feeble, very frail, white as paper, with a long grey beard, and caves in the cheeks, and speaking always softly, as if to a woman. . . . For me it was an experience to see an individual so gentle in a palace like that. His bed and bowl of broth he gained in sweeping out the kennels of all those sorts of types who come to sleep there every night. There he spent all his day long, going out only at ten hours and a half every night, and returning at midnight less one quarter. Since I had not much to do, it was always a pleasure for me to talk with him; for, though he was certainly a little toqué," and Ferrand tapped his temple, "he had great charm of an old man, never thinking of himself no more than a fly that turns in dancing all day beneath a ceiling. If there was something he could do
for one of those specimens—to sew on a button, clean a pipe, catch beasts in their clothes, or sit to see they were not stolen, even to give up his place by the fire—he would always do it with his smile so white and gentle; and in his leisure he would read the Holy Book! He inspired in me a sort of affection—there are not too many old men so kind and gentle as that, even when they are 'crackey,' as you call it. Several times I have caught him in washing the feet of one of those sots, or bathing some black eye or other, such as they often catch—a man of a spiritual refinement really remarkable; in clothes also so refined that one sometimes saw his skin. Though he had never great thing to say, he heard you like an angel, and spoke evil of no one; but, seeing that he had no more vigour than a swallow, it piqued me much how he would go out like that every night in all the weathers at the same hour for so long a promenade of the streets. And when I interrogated him on this, he would only smile his smile of one not there, and did not seem to know very much of what I was talking. I said to myself: 'There is something here to see, if I am not mistaken. One of these good days I shall be your guardian angel while you fly the night.' For I am a connoisseur of strange things, monsieur, as you know; though, you may well imagine, being in the streets all day long between two boards of a sacred sandwich does not give you too strong a desire to flaneur in the evenings. Eh, bien! It was a night in late October that I at last pursued him. He was not difficult to follow, seeing he had no more guile than an egg; passing first at his walk of an old shadow into your St. James's Park along where your military types puff out their chests for the nursemaids to admire. Very slowly he went, leaning on a staff—une canne de
promenade such as I have never seen, nearly six feet high, with an end like a shepherd's crook or the handle of a sword, a thing truly to make the gamins laugh—even me it made to smile, though I am not too well accustomed to mock at age and poverty, to watch him march in leaning on that cane. I remember that night—very beautiful, the sky of a clear dark, the stars as bright as they can ever be in these towns of our high civilisation, and the leaf-shadows of the plane-trees, colour of grapes on the pavement, so that one had not the heart to put foot on them. One of those evenings when the spirit is light, and policemen a little dreamy and well-wishing. Well, as I tell you, my Old marched, never looking behind him, like a man who walks in sleep. By that big church—which, like all those places, had its air of coldness, far and ungrateful among us others, little human creatures who have built it—he passed, into the great Eaton Square, whose houses ought well to be inhabited by people very rich. There he crossed to lean him against the railings of the garden in the centre, very tranquil, his long white beard falling over hands joined on his staff, in awaiting what—I could not figure to myself at all. It was the hour when your high bourgeoisie return from the theatre in their carriages, whose manikins sit, the arms crossed, above horses fat as snails. And one would see through the window some lady berce doucement, with the face of one who has eaten too much and loved too little. And gentlemen passed me, marching for a mouthful of fresh air, très comme il faut, their concertina hats pushed up, and nothing at all in their eyes. I remarked my Old, who, making no movement, watched them all as they went by, till presently a carriage stopped at a house nearly opposite. At once, then, he began to cross the road quickly,
A SIMPLE TALE

carrying his great stick. I observed the lackey pulling the bell and opening the carriage door, and three people coming forth—a man, a woman, a young man. Very high bourgeoisie, some judge, knight, mayor—what do I know?—with his wife and son, mounting under the porch. My Old had come to the bottom of the steps, and spoke, in bending himself forward, as if supplicating. At once those three turned their faces, very astonished. Although I was very intrigued, I could not hear what he was saying, for, if I came nearer, I feared he would see me spying on him. Only the sound of his voice I heard, gentle as always; and his hand I saw wiping his forehead, as though he had carried something heavy from very far. Then the lady spoke to her husband, and went into the house, and the young son followed in lighting a cigarette. There rested only that good father of the family, with his grey whiskers and nose a little bent, carrying an expression as if my Old were making him ridiculous. He made a quick gesture, as though he said, 'Go!' then he too fled softly. The door was shut. At once the lackey mounted, the carriage drove away, and all was as if it had never been, except that my Old was standing there, quite still. But soon he came returning, carrying his staff as if it burdened him. And recoiling in a porch to see him pass I saw his visage full of dolour, of one overwhelmed with fatigue and grief; so that I felt my heart squeeze me. I must well confess, monsieur, I was a little shocked to see this old sainted father asking, as it seemed, for alms. That is a thing I myself have never done, not even in the greatest poverty—one is not like your 'gentlemen'—one does always some little thing for the money he receives, if it is only to show a drunken man where he lives. And
I returned in meditating deeply over this problem, which well seemed to me fit for the angels to examine; and knowing what time my Old was always re-entering, I took care to be in my bed before him. He came in as ever, treading softly so as not to wake us others, and his face had again its serenity, a little 'crackey.' As you may well have remarked, monsieur, I am not one of those individuals who let everything grow under the nose without pulling them up to see how they are made. For me the greatest pleasure is to lift the skirts of life, to unveil what there is under the surface of things which are not always what they seem, as says your good little poet. For that one must have philosophy, and a certain industry, lacking to all those gentlemen who think they alone are industrious because they sit in chairs and blow into the telephone all day, in filling their pockets with money. Myself, I coin knowledge of the heart—it is the only gold they cannot take from you. So that night I lay awake. I was not content with what I had seen; for I could not imagine why this old man, so unselfish, so like a saint in thinking ever of others, should go thus every night to beg, when he had always in this palace his bed, and that with which to keep his soul within his rags. Certainly we all have our vices, and gentlemen the most revered do, in secret, things they would cough to see others doing; but that business of begging seemed scarcely in his character of an old altruist—for in my experience, monsieur, beggars are not less egoist than millionaires. As I say, it piqued me much, and I resolved to follow him again. The second night was of the most different. There was a great wind, and white clouds flying in the moonlight. He commenced his pilgrimage in passing by your House of Commons, as if toward the river. I like much
that great river of yours. There is in its career something of very grand; it ought to know many things, although it is so silent, and gives to no one the secrets which are confided to it. He had for objective, it seemed, that long row of houses very respectable, which gives on the Embankment, before you arrive at Chelsea. It was painful to see the poor Old, bending almost double against that great wind coming from the west. Not too many carriages down here, and few people—a true wilderness, lighted by tall lamps which threw no shadows, so clear was the moon. He took his part soon, as of the other night, standing on the far side of the road, watching for the return of some lion to his den. And presently I saw one coming, accompanied by three lionesses, all taller than himself. This one was bearded, and carried spectacles—a real head of learning; walking, too, with the step of a man who knows his world. Some professor—I said to myself—with his harem. They gained their house at fifty paces from my Old; and, while this learned one was opening the door, the three ladies lifted their noses in looking at the moon. A little of aesthetic, a little of science—as always with that type there! At once I had perceived my Old coming across, blown by the wind like a grey stalk of thistle; and his face, with its expression of infinite pain as if carrying the sufferings of the world. At the moment they see him those three ladies drop their noses and fly within the house as if he were the pestilence, in crying, 'Henry!' And out comes my monsieur again, in his beard and spectacles. For me, I would freely have given my ears to hear, but I saw that this good Henry had his eye on me, and I did not budge, for fear to seem in conspiracy. I heard him only say: 'Impossible! Impossible! Go to the
proper place!' and he shut the door. My Old remained, with his long staff resting on a shoulder bent as if that stick were of lead. And presently he commenced to march again whence he had come, curved and trembling, the very shadow of a man, passing me, too, as if I were the air. That time also I regained my bed before him, in meditating very deeply, still more uncertain of the psychology of this affair, and resolved once again to follow him, saying to myself: 'This time I shall run all risks to hear.' There are two kinds of men in this world, monsieur—one who will not rest content till he has become master of all the toys that make a fat existence—in never looking to see of what they are made; and the other, for whom life is tobacco and a crust of bread, and liberty to take all to pieces, so that his spirit may feel good within him. Frankly, I am of that kind. I rest never till I have found out why this is that; for me mystery is the salt of life, and I must well eat of it. I put myself again, then, to following him the next night. This time he traversed those little dirty streets of your great Westminster where all is mixed in a true pudding of lords and poor wretches at two sous the dozen; of cats and policemen; kerosene flames, abbeys, and the odour of fried fish. Ah! truly it is frightful to see your low streets in London; that gives me a conviction of hopelessness such as I have never caught elsewhere; piquant, too, to find them so near to that great House which sets example of good government to all the world. There is an irony so ferocious there, monsieur, that one can well hear the good God of your bourgeois laugh in every wheel that rolls, and the cry of each cabbage that is sold; and see him smile in the smoky light of every flare, and in the candles of your cathedral, in saying to himself: 'I
have well made this world. Is there not variety here?—en voilà une bonne soupe! ’ This time, however, I attended my Old like his very shadow, and could hear him sighing as he marched, as if he also found the atmosphere of those streets too strong. But all of a sudden he turned a corner, and we were in the most quiet, most beautiful little street I have seen in all your London. It was of small, old houses, very regular, which made as if they inclined themselves in their two rows before a great church at the end, grey in the moonlight, like a mother. There was no one in the street, and no more cover than hair on the head of a pope. But I had some confidence now that my Old would not remark me standing there so close, since in these pilgrimages he seemed to remark nothing. Leaning on his staff, I tell you he had the air of an old bird in a desert, reposing on one leg by a dry pool, his soul looking for water. It gave me that notion one has sometimes in watching the rare spectacles of life—that sentiment which, according to me, pricks artists to their work. We had not stayed there too long before I saw a couple marching from the end of the street, and thought: ‘Here they come to their nest.’ Vigorous and gay they were, young married ones, eager to get home; one could see the white neck of the young wife, the white shirt of the young man, gleaming under their cloaks. I know them well, those young couples in great cities, without a care, taking all things, the world before them, très amoureux, without, as yet, children; jolly and pathetic, having life still to learn—which, believe me, monsieur, is a sad enough affair for nine rabbits out of ten. They stopped at the house next to where I stood; and, since my Old was coming fast as always to the feast, I put myself at once to the appear-
ance of ringing the bell of the house before me. This time I had well the chance of hearing. I could see, too, the faces of all three, because I have by now the habit of seeing out of the back hair. The pigeons were so anxious to get to their nest that my Old had only the time to speak, as they were in train to vanish. 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!' Monsieur, I have never seen a face so hopeless, so crippled with fatigue, yet so full of a gentle dignity as that of my Old while he spoke those words. It was as if something looked from his visage surpassing what belongs to us others, so mortal and so cynic as human life must well render all who dwell in this earthly paradise. He held his long staff upon one shoulder, and I had the idea, sinister enough that it was crushing his body of a spectre down into the pavement. I know not how the impression came, but it seemed to me that this devil of a stick had the nature of a heavy cross reposing on his shoulder; I had pain to prevent myself turning, to find if in truth 'I had them,' as your drunkards say. Then the young man called out: 'Here's a shilling for you, my friend!' But my Old did not budge, answering always: 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!' As you may well imagine, monsieur, we were all in the silence of astonishment, I pulling away at my bell next door, which was not ringing, seeing I took care it did not; and those two young people regarding my Old with eyes round as moons, out of their pigeon-house, which I could well see was prettily feathered. Their hearts were making seesaw, I could tell; for at that age one is still impressionable. Then the girl put herself to whispering, and her husband said those two words of your young 'gentlemen,' 'Awfully sorry!' and put out his hand, which held now a coin large as a saucer. But again
my Old only said: 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!'
And the young man drew back his hand quickly as if he
were ashamed, and saying again, 'Sorry!' he shut the
doors. I have heard many sighs in my time—they are
the good little accompaniments to the song we sing, we
others who are in poverty; but the sigh my Old pushed
then—how can I tell you?—had an accent as if it came
from Her, the faithful companion, who marches in
holding the hands of men and women so that they may
never make the grand mistake to imagine themselves
for a moment the good God. Yes, monsieur, it was as
if pushed by Suffering herself, that bird of the night,
ever tired of flying in this world where they talk always
of cutting her wings. Then I took my resolution, and,
coming gently from behind, said: 'My Old—what is
it? Can I do anything for you?' Without looking
at me, he spoke as to himself: 'I shall never find one
who will let me rest in his doorway. For my sin I shall
wander for ever!' At this moment, monsieur, there
came to me an inspiration so clear that I marvelled I
had not already had it a long time before. He thought
himself the Wandering Jew! I had well found it.
This was certainly his fixed idea, of a cracked old man!
And I said: 'My Jew, do you know this? In doing
what you do, you have become as Christ, in a world of
wandering Jews!' But he did not seem to hear me,
and only just as we arrived at our palace became again
that old gentle being, thinking never of himself.'

Behind the smoke of his cigarette a smile curled
Ferrand's red lips under his long nose a little on one
side.

"And, if you think of it, monsieur, it is well like that.
Provided there exists always that good man of a
Wandering Jew, he will certainly have become as Christ,
in all these centuries of being refused from door to door. Yes, yes, he must well have acquired charity the most profound that this world has ever seen, in watching the crushing virtue of others. All those gentry, of whom he asks night by night to let him rest in their doorways, they tell him where to go, how to ménager his life, even offer him money, as I had seen; but, to let him rest, to trust him in their houses—this strange old man—as a fellow, a brother voyager—that they will not; it is hardly in the character of good citizens in a Christian country. And, as I have indicated to you, this Old of mine, cracked as he was, thinking himself that Jew who refused rest to the good Christ, had become, in being refused for ever, the most Christ-like man I have ever encountered on this earth, which, according to me, is composed almost entirely of those who have themselves the character of the Wandering Jew."

Puffing out a sigh of smoke, Ferrand added: "I do not know whether he continued to pursue his idea, for I myself took the road next morning, and I have never seen him since."

1914.
THE CONSUMMATION

About 1889 there lived in London a man named Harrison, of an amiable and perverse disposition. One morning, at Charing Cross Station, a lady in whom he was interested said to him:

"But Mr. Harrison, why don't you write? You are just the person!"

Harrison saw that he was, and at the end of two years had produced eleven short stories, with two of which he was not particularly pleased, but as he naturally did not like to waste them, he put them with the others and sent them all to a publisher. In the course of time he received from the publisher a letter saying that for a certain consideration or commission he would be prepared to undertake the risk of publishing these stories upon Harrison's incurring all the expenses. This pleased Harrison, who, feeling that no time should be wasted in making his "work" public, wrote desiring the publisher to put the matter in hand. The publisher replied to this with an estimate and an agreement, to which Harrison responded with a cheque. The publisher answered at once with a polite letter, suggesting that for Harrison's advantage a certain additional sum should be spent on advertisements. Harrison saw the point of this directly, and replied with another cheque—knowing that between gentlemen there could be no question of money.

In due time the book appeared. It was called "In the Track of the Stars," by Cuthbert Harrison; and
within a fortnight Harrison began to receive reviews. He read them with an extraordinary pleasure, for they were full of discriminating flattery. One asked if he were a “Lancelot in disguise.” Two Liberal papers described the stories as masterpieces; one compared them to the best things in Poe and de Maupassant; and another called him a second Rudyard Kipling. He was greatly encouraged, but, being by nature modest, he merely wrote to the publisher inquiring what he thought of a second edition. His publisher replied with an estimate, mentioning casually that he had already sold about four hundred copies. Harrison referred to his cheque-book and saw that the first edition had been a thousand copies. He replied, therefore, that he would wait. He waited, and at the end of six months wrote again. The publisher replied that he had now sold four hundred and three copies, but that, as Mr. Harrison had at present an unknown name, he did not advise a second edition: there was no market for short stories. These had, however, been so well received that he recommended Mr. Harrison to write a long story. The book was without doubt a success, so far as a book of short stories could ever be a success. . . . He sent Harrison a small cheque, and a large number of reviews which Harrison had already received.

Harrison decided not to have a second edition, but to rest upon his succès d’estime. All his relations were extremely pleased, and almost immediately he started writing his long story. Now it happened that among Harrison’s friends was a man of genius, who sent Harrison a letter.

“I had no idea,” he said, “that you could write like this; of course, my dear fellow, the stories are not ‘done’; there is no doubt about it, they are not ‘done.’
THE CONSUMMATION

But you have plenty of time; you are young, and I see that you can do things. Come down here and let us have a talk about what you are at now."

- On receiving this Harrison wasted no time, but went down. The man of genius, over a jug of claret-cup, on a summer's afternoon, pointed out how the stories were not "done."

"They show a feeling for outside drama," said he, "but there is none of the real drama of psychology."

Harrison showed him his reviews. He left the man of genius on the following day with a certain sensation of soresness. In the course of a few weeks, however, the soresness wore off, and the words of the man of genius began to bear fruit, and at the end of two months Harrison wrote:

"You are quite right—the stories were not 'done.' I think, however, that I am now on the right path."

At the end of another year, after submitting it once or twice to the man of genius, he finished his second book, and called it "John Endacott." About this time he left off alluding to his "work" and began to call his writings "stuff."

He sent it to the publisher with the request that he would consider its publication on a royalty. In rather more than the ordinary course of time the publisher replied that in his opinion (a lay one) "John Endacott" didn't quite fulfil the remarkable promise of Mr. Harrison's first book; and, to show Harrison his perfect honesty, he enclosed an extract from the "reader's" opinion, which stated that Mr. Harrison had "fallen between the stools of art and the British public." Much against the publisher's personal feelings, therefore, the publisher considered that he could only
undertake the risk in the then bad condition of trade—if Mr. Harrison would guarantee the expenses.

Harrison hardened his heart, and replied that he was not prepared to guarantee the expenses. Upon which the publisher returned his manuscript, saying that in his opinion (a lay one) Mr. Harrison was taking the wrong turning, which he (the publisher) greatly regretted, for he had much appreciated the pleasant relations which had always existed between them.

Harrison sent the book to a younger publisher, who accepted it on a postponed royalty. It appeared.

At the end of three weeks Harrison began to receive reviews. They were mixed. One complained that there was not enough plot; another, fortunately by the same post, that there was too much plot. The general tendency was to regret that the author of "In the Track of the Stars" had not fulfilled the hopes raised by his first book, in which he had shown such promise of completely hitting the public taste. This might have depressed Harrison had he not received a letter from the man of genius couched in these terms:

"My dear fellow, I am more pleased than I can say. I am now more than ever convinced that you can do things."

Harrison at once began a third book.

Owing to the unfortunate postponement of his royalty he did not receive anything from his second book. The publisher sold three hundred copies. During the period (eighteen months) that he was writing his third book the man of genius introduced Harrison to a critic, with the words: "You may rely on his judgment; the beggar is infallible."

While to the critic he said: "I tell you, this fellow can do things."
Theconsummation

The critic was good to Harrison, who, as before said, was of an amiable disposition.

When he had finished his third book he dedicated it, to the man of genius and called it "Summer."

"My dear fellow," wrote the man of genius, when he received his copy, "it is good! There is no more to be said about it; it is good! I read it with indescribable pleasure."

On the same day Harrison received a letter from the critic which contained the following: "Yes, it's undoubtedly an advance. It's not quite Art, but it's a great advance!"

Harrison was considerably encouraged. The same publisher brought out the book, and sold quite two hundred copies; but he wrote rather dolefully to Harrison, saying that the public demand seemed "almost exhausted." Recognising the fact that comparisons are odious, Harrison refrained from comparing the sale of the book with that of "In the Track of the Stars," in which he had shown such promise of "completely hitting the public taste." Indeed, about this time he began to have dreams of abandoning the sources of his private income and living the true literary life. He had not many reviews, and began his fourth book.

He was two years writing this "work," which he called "A Lost Man," and dedicated to the critic. He sent a presentation copy to the man of genius, from whom he received an almost immediate reply:

"My dear fellow, it is amazing, really amazing how you progress! Who would ever imagine you were the same man that wrote 'In the Track of the Stars'? Yet I pique myself on the fact that even in your first book I spotted that you could do things. Ah!—I wish I could write like you! 'A Lost Man' is wonderfully good."
The man of genius was quite sincere in these remarks, which he wrote after perusing the first six chapters. He never indeed, actually finished reading the book—he felt so tired, as if Harrison had exhausted him—but he always alluded to it as “wonderfully good,” just as if he really had finished it.

Harrison sent another copy to the critic, who wrote a genuinely warm letter, saying that he, Harrison, had “achieved” it at last. “This,” he said, “is art. I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this . . . I crown you.”

Harrison at once commenced his fifth book.

He was more than three years upon this new “work,” and called it “A Pilgrimage.” There was a good deal of difficulty in getting it published. Two days after it appeared, however, the critic wrote to Harrison: “I cannot tell you,” he said, “how very good I think your new book. It is perhaps stronger than ‘A Lost Man,’ perhaps more original. If anything it is too——! I have not finished it yet, but I’ve written off at once to let you know.”

As a matter of fact, he never finished the book. He could not—it was too——! “It’s wonderfully good,” he said, however, to his wife, and he made her read it.

Meanwhile the man of genius wired saying: “Am going to write to you about your book. Positively am, but have lumbago and cannot hold pen.”

Harrison never received any letter, but the critic received one saying: “Can you read it? I can’t. Altogether over ‘done.’”

Harrison was elated. His new publisher was not. He wrote in a peevish strain, saying there was absolutely no sale. Mr. Harrison must take care what he was doing or he would exhaust his public, and enclosing a solitary
review, which said amongst other things: "This book may be very fine art, too fine altogether. We found it dull."

Harrison went abroad, and began his sixth book. He named it "The Consummation," and worked at it in hermit-like solitude; in it, for the first time, he satisfied himself. He wrote, as it were, with his heart's blood, with an almost bitter delight. And he often smiled to himself as he thought how with his first book he had so nearly hit the public taste; and how of his fourth, the critic had said: "This is art. I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this." How far away they seemed! Ah! this book was indeed the "consummation" devoutly to be wished.

In the course of time he returned to England and took a cottage at Hampstead, and there he finished the book. The day after it was finished he took the manuscript and, going to a secluded spot on the top of the Heath, lay down on the grass to read it quietly through. He read three chapters, and, putting the remainder down, sat with his head buried in his hands.

"Yes," he thought, "I have done it at last. It is good, wonderfully good!" and for two hours he sat like that, with his head in his hands. He had indeed exhausted his public. It was too good—he could not read it himself!

Returning to his cottage, he placed the manuscript in a drawer. He never wrote another word.

1904.
In these days no man of genius need starve. The following story of my friend Bruce may be taken as proof of this assertion. Nearly sixty when I first knew him, he must have written already some fifteen books, which had earned him the reputation of "a genius" with the few who know. He used to live in York Street, Adelphi, where he had two rooms up the very shaky staircase of a house chiefly remarkable for the fact that its front door seemed always open. I suppose there never was a writer more indifferent to what people thought of him. He profoundly neglected the Press—not with one of those neglects which grow on writers from reading reviews of their own works—he seemed never to read criticism, but with the basic neglect of an "original," a nomadic spirit, a stranger in modern civilisation, who would leave his attics for long months of wandering, and come back there to hibernate and write a book. He was a tall, thin man, with a face rather like Mark Twain's, black eye-brows which bristled and shot up, a bitten, drooping grey moustache, and fuzzy grey hair; but his eyes were like owl's eyes, piercing, melancholy, dark brown, and gave to his rugged face an extraordinary expression of a spirit remote from the flesh which had captured it. He was a bachelor, who seemed to avoid women; perhaps they had "learned" him that; for he must have been very attractive to them.

The year of which I write had been to my friend Bruce
the devil, monetarily speaking. With his passion for writing that for which his Age had no taste—what could he expect? His last book had been a complete frost. He had undergone, too, an operation which had cost him much money and left him very weak. When I went to see him that October, I found him stretched out on two chairs, smoking the Brazilian cigarettes which he affected—and which always affected me, so black and strong they were, in their yellow maize-leaf coverings. He had a writing-pad on his knee, and sheets of paper scattered all around. The room had a very meagre look. I had not seen him for a year and more, but he looked up at me as if I'd been in yesterday.

"Hallo!" he said; "I went into a thing they call a cinema last night. Have you ever been?"

"Ever been? Do you know how long the cinema has been going? Since about 1900."

"Well! What a thing! I'm writing a skit on it!"

"How—a skit?"

"Parody—wildest yarn you ever read."

He took up a sheet of paper and began chuckling to himself.

"My heroine," he said, "is an Octofoon. Her eyes swim, and her lovely bosom heaves. Everybody wants her, and she's more virtuous than words can say. The situations she doesn't succumb to would freeze your blood; they'd roast your marrow. She has a perfect devil of a brother, with whom she was brought up and who knows her deep dark secret and wants to trade her off to a millionaire who also has a deep dark secret. Altogether there are four deep dark secrets in my yarn. It's a corker."

"What a waste of your time!" I said.
"My time!" he answered fiercely. "What's the use of my time? Nobody buys my books."

"Who's attending you?"

"Doctors! They take your money, that's all. I've got no money. Don't talk about me!" And again he took up a sheet of manuscript and chuckled.

"Last night—at that place—they had—good God!—a race between a train and a motor-car. Well, I've got one between a train, a motor-car, a flying machine, and a horse."

I sat up.

"May I have a look at your skit," I said, "when you've finished it?"

"It is finished. Wrote it straight off. D'you think I could stop and then go on again with a thing like that?" He gathered the sheets and held them out to me. "Take the thing—it's amused me to do it. The heroine's secret is that she isn't an Octofoon at all; she's a De La Casse—purest Creole blood of the South; and her villainous brother isn't her brother; and the bad millionaire isn't a millionaire; and her penniless lover is. It's rich, I tell you!"

"Thanks," I said drily, and took the sheets.

I went away concerned about my friend, his illness, and his poverty, especially his poverty, for I saw no end to it.

After dinner that evening I began languidly to read his skit. I had not read two pages of the thirty-five before I started up, sat down again, and feverishly read on. Skit! By George! He had written a perfect scenario—or, rather, that which wanted the merest professional touching-up to be perfect. I was excited. It was a little gold-mine if properly handled. Any good company, I felt convinced, would catch at it. Yes!
But how to handle it? Bruce was such an unaccountable creature, such a wild old bird! Imagine his having only just realised the cinema! If I told him his skit was a serious film, he would say: “Good God!” and put it in the fire, priceless though it was. And yet, how could I market it without carte blanche, and how get carte blanche without giving my discovery away? I was deathly keen on getting some money for him; and this thing, properly worked, might almost make him independent. I felt as if I had a priceless museum piece which a single stumble might shatter to fragments. The tone of his voice when he spoke of the cinema—"What a thing!"—kept coming back to me. He was prickly proud, too—very difficult about money. Could I work it without telling him anything? I knew he never looked at a newspaper. But should I be justified in taking advantage of that—in getting the thing accepted and produced without his knowing? I revolved the question for hours, and went to see him again next day.

He was reading.

“Hallo! You again? What do you think of this theory—that the Egyptians derive from a Saharan civilisation?”

“I don’t think,” I said.

“It’s nonsense. This fellow——”

I interrupted him.

“Do you want that skit back, or can I keep it?”

“Skit? What skit?”

“The thing you gave me yesterday.”

“That? Light your fire with it. This fellow——”

“Yes,” I said; “I’ll light a fire with it. I see you’re busy.”

“Oh, no! I’m not,” he said. “I’ve nothing to
do. What’s the good of my writing? I earn less and less with every book that comes out. I’m dying of poverty.”

“That’s because you won’t consider the public.”

“How can I consider the public when I don’t know what they want?”

“Because you won’t take the trouble to find out. If I suggested a way to you of pleasing the public and making money, you’d kick me out of the room.”

And the words: “For instance, I’ve got a little gold-mine of yours in my pocket,” were on the tip of my tongue, but I choked them back. “Daren’t risk it!” I thought. “He’s given you the thing. Carte blanche—cartes serrées!”

I took the gold-mine away and promptly rough-shaped it for the film. It was perfectly easy, without any alteration of the story. Then I was faced with the temptation to put his name to it. The point was this: If I took it to a film company as an authorless scenario, I should only get authorless terms; whereas, if I put his name to it, with a little talking I could double the terms at least. The film public didn’t know his name, of course, but the inner literary public did, and it is wonderful how you can impress the market with the word “genius” judiciously used. It was too dangerous, however; and at last I hit on a middle course. I would take it to them with no name attached, but tell them it was by “a genius,” and suggest that they could make capital out of the incognito. I knew they would feel it was by a genius.

I took it to an excellent company next day, with a covering note saying: “The author, a man of recognised literary genius, for certain reasons prefers to remain unknown.” They took a fortnight in which
to rise, but they rose. They had to. The thing was too good in itself. For a week I played them over terms. Twice I delivered an ultimatum—twice they surrendered: they knew too well what they had got. I could have made a contract with £2,000 down which would have brought at least another £2,000 before the contract term closed; but I compounded for one that gave me £3,000 down, as likely to lead to less difficulty with Bruce. The terms were not a whit too good for what was really the “acme” of scenarios. If I could have been quite open, I could certainly have done better. Finally, however, I signed the contract, delivered the manuscript, and received a cheque for the price. I was elated, and at the same time knew that my troubles were just beginning. With Bruce’s feeling about the film, how the deuce should I get him to take the money? Could I go to his publishers, and conspire with them to trickle it out to him gradually as if it came from his books? That meant letting them into the secret; besides, he was too used to receiving practically nothing from his books; it would lead him to make an inquiry, and the secret was bound to come out. Could I get a lawyer to spring an inheritance on him? That would mean no end of lying and elaboration, even if a lawyer would consent. Should I send him the money in Bank of England notes, with the words: “From a’ lifelong admirer of your genius”? I was afraid he would suspect a trick, or stolen notes, and go to the police to trace them. Or should I just go, put the cheque on the table, and tell him the truth?

The question worried me terribly, for I didn’t feel entitled to consult others who knew him. It was the sort of thing that, if talked over, would certainly leak
out. It was not desirable, however, to delay cashing a big cheque like that. Besides, they had started on the production. It happened to be a slack time, with a dearth of good films, so that they were rushing it on. And in the meantime there was Bruce—starved of everything he wanted, unable to get away for want of money, depressed about his health and his future. And yet so completely had he always seemed to me different, strange, superior to this civilisation of ours, that the idea of going to him and saying simply: "This is yours, for the film you wrote," scared me. I could hear his: "I? Write for the cinema? What do you mean?"

When I came to think of it, I had surely taken an extravagant liberty in marketing the thing without consulting him. I felt he would never forgive that, and my feeling towards him was so affectionate, even reverential, that I simply hated the idea of being cast out of his affections. At last I hit on a way that by introducing my own interest might break my fall. I cashed the cheque, lodged the money at my bank, drew my own cheque on it for the full amount, and armed with that and the contract, went to see him.

He was lying on two chairs, smoking his Brazilians, and playing with a stray cat which had attached itself to him. He seemed rather less prickly than usual, and after beating about the bushes of his health and other matters, I began;

"I've got a confession to make, Bruce."

"Confession!" he said. "What confession?"

"You remember that skit on the film you wrote, and gave me, about six weeks ago?"

"No."

"Yes, you do—about an Octoroon."
He chuckled. "Oh! Ah! That!"
I took a deep breath, and went on:
"Well, I sold it; and the price of course belongs to you."
"What? Who'd print a thing like that?"
"It isn't printed. It's been made into a film—superfilm they call it."
His hand came to a pause on the cat's back, and he glared at me. I hastened on:
"I ought to have told you what I was doing, but you're so prickly, and you've got such confounded superior notions, I thought if I did, you'd be biting off your nose to spite your own face. The fact is, it made a marvellous scenario. Here's the contract, and here's a cheque on my bank for the price—£3,000. If you like to treat me as your agent, you owe me £300. I don't expect it, but I'm not proud, like you, and I shan't sneeze."
"Good God!" he said.
"Yes, I know. But it's all nonsense, Bruce. You can carry scruples to altogether too great length. Tainted source! Everything's tainted, if you come to that. The film's a quite justified expression of modern civilisation—a natural outcome of the Age. It gives amusement; it affords pleasure. It may be vulgar, it may be cheap, but we are vulgar, and we are cheap, and it's no use pretending we're not—not you, of course, Bruce, but people at large. A vulgar Age wants vulgar amusement, and if we can give it that amusement, we ought to; life's not too cheery, anyway."
The glare in his eyes was almost paralysing me, but I managed to stammer on:
"You live out of the world—you don't realise what humdrum people want; something to balance the
greyness, the—the banality of their lives. They want blood, thrill, sensation of all sorts. You didn’t mean to give it them, but you have, you’ve done them a benefit, whether you wish to or not, and the money’s yours, and you’ve got to take it.”

The cat suddenly jumped down; I waited for the storm to burst.

“I know,” I dashed on, “that you hate and despise the film—”

Suddenly his voice boomed out:

“Bosh! What are you talking about? Film! I go there every other night.”

It was my turn to say: “Good God!” And, ramming contract and cheque into his empty hand, I bolted, closely followed by the cat.

1923.
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She had been standing there on the pavement a quarter of an hour or so after her shilling’s worth of concert. Women of her profession are not supposed to have redeeming points, especially when—like May Belinski, as she now preferred to dub herself—they are German; but this woman certainly had music in her soul. She often gave herself these “music baths” when the Promenade Concerts were on, and had just spent half her total wealth in listening to some Mozart and a Beethoven symphony.

She was feeling almost elated, full of divine sound, and of the summer moonlight that was filling the whole dark town. Women “of a certain type” have, at all events, emotions—and what a comfort that is, even to themselves! To stand just there had become rather a habit of hers. One could seem to be waiting for somebody coming out of the concert, not yet over—which, of course, was precisely what she was doing. One need not forever be stealthily glancing and perpetually moving on in that peculiar way, which, while it satisfied the police and Mrs. Grundy, must not quite deceive others as to her business in life. She had only been “at it” long enough to have acquired a nervous dread of almost everything—not long enough to have passed through that dread to callousness. Some women take so much longer than others. And even for a woman “of a certain type” her position was exceptionally nerve-racking in war-time, going as she did by a false
name. Indeed, in all England there could hardly be a greater pariah than was this German woman of the night.

She idled outside a book-shop humming a little, pretending to read the titles of the books by moonlight, taking off and putting on one of her stained yellow gloves. Now and again she would move up as far as the posters outside the hall, scrutinising them as if interested in the future, then stroll back again. In her worn and discreet dark dress, and her small hat, she had nothing about her to rouse suspicion, unless it were the trail of violet powder she left on the moonlight.

For the moonlight this evening was almost solid, seeming with its cool still vibration to replace the very air; in it the war-time precautions against light seemed fantastic, like shading candles in a room still full of daylight. What lights there were had the effect of strokes and stipples of dim colour laid by a painter’s brush on a background of ghostly whitish-blue. The dream-like quality of the town was perhaps enhanced for her eyes by the veil she was wearing—in daytime no longer white. As the music died out of her, elation also ebbed. Somebody had passed her, speaking German, and she was overwhelmed by a rush of nostalgia. On this moonlit night by the banks of the Rhine—whence she came—the orchards would be heavy with apples; there would be murmurs and sweet scents; the old castle would stand out clear, high over the woods and the chalky-white river. There would be singing far away, and the churning of a distant steamer’s screw; and perhaps on the water a log raft still drifting down in the blue light. There would be German voices talking. And suddenly tears oozed up in her eyes, and crept down through the powder on her cheeks. She
raised her veil and dabbed at her face with a little, not-
too-clean handkerchief, screwed up in her yellow-gloved
hand. But the more she dabbed the more those treach-
erous tears ran. Then she became aware that a tall
young man in khaki was also standing before the shop-
window, not looking at the titles of the books, but
eyeing her askance. His face was fresh and open, with
a sort of kindly eagerness in his blue eyes. Mechanically
she drooped her wet lashes, raised them obliquely,
drooped them again, and uttered a little sob. . . .

This young man, captain in a certain regiment, and
discharged from hospital at six o'clock that evening, had
entered Queen's Hall at half-past seven. Still rather
brittle and sore from his wound, he had treated himself
to a seat in the grand circle, and there had sat, very still
and dreamy, the whole concert through. It had been
like eating after a long fast—something of the sensation
Polar explorers must experience when they return to their
first full meal. For he was of the New Army, and before
the war had actually believed in music, art, and all that
sort of thing. With a month's leave before him, he
could afford to feel that life was extraordinarily joyful,
his own experiences particularly wonderful; and, com-
ing out into the moonlight, he had taken what can only
be described as a great gulp of it, for he was a young man
with a sense of beauty. When one has been long in
the trenches, lain out wounded in a shell-hole twenty-
four hours, and spent three months in hospital, beauty
has such an edge of novelty, such a sharp sweetness, that
it almost gives pain. And London at night is very
beautiful. He strolled slowly towards the Circus, still
drawing the moonlight deep into his lungs, his cap
tilted up a little on his forehead in that moment of
unmilitary abandonment; and whether he stopped
before the book-shop window because the girl’s figure was in some sort a part of beauty, or because he saw that she was crying, he could not have made clear to anyone.

Then something—perhaps the scent of powder, perhaps the yellowg love, or the oblique flutter of the eyelids—told him that he was making what he would have called “a blooming error,” unless he wished for company, which had not been in his thoughts. But her sob affected him, and he said:

“What’s the matter?”

Again her eyelids fluttered sideways, and she stammered:

“Not’ing. The beautiful evening—that’s why!”

That a woman of what he now clearly saw to be “a certain type” should perceive what he himself had just been perceiving, struck him forcibly, and he said “Cheer up.”

She looked up again swiftly. “All right! But you are not lonelee like me.”

For one of that sort she looked somehow honest; her tear-streaked face was rather pretty, and he murmured:

“Well, let’s walk a bit and talk it over.”

They turned the corner and walked east, along streets empty and beautiful, with their dulled orange-glowing lamps, and here and there the glint of some blue or violet light. He found it queer and rather exciting—for an adventure of just this kind he had never had. And he said doubtfully:

“How did you get into this? Isn’t it an awfully hopeless life?”

“Ye-es, it ees——” her voice had a queer soft emphasis. “You are limping—haf you been wounded?”
“Just out of hospital.”

“The horrible war—all the misery is because of the war. When will it end?”

He looked at her, and said:

“I say—what nationality are you?”

“Rooshian.”

“Really! I never met a Russian girl.”

He was conscious that she looked at him, then very quickly down. And he said suddenly:

“Is it as bad as they make out?”

She slipped her yellow-gloved hand through his arm.

“Not when I haf anyone as nice as you; I never haf yet, though”; she smiled—and her smile was like her speech, slow, confiding. “You stopped because I was sad; others stop because I am gay. I am not fond of men at all. When you know, you are not fond of them.”

“Well! You hardly know them at their best, do you? You should see them at the front. By George! they’re simply splendid—officers and men, every blessed soul. There’s never been anything like it—just one long bit of jolly fine self-sacrifice; it’s perfectly amazing.”

Turning her blue-grey eyes on him, she answered:

“I expect you are not the last at that. You see in them what you haf in yourself, I think.”

“Oh! not a bit—you’re quite out. I assure you when we made the attack where I got wounded there wasn’t a single man in my regiment who wasn’t an absolute hero. The way they went in—never thinking of themselves—it was simply superb!”

Her teeth came down on her lower lip, and she answered in a queer voice: “It is the same too, perhaps, with—the enemy.”
"Oh, yes, I know that."
"Ah! You are not a mean man. How I hate mean men!"
"Oh! they're not mean really—they simply don't understand."
"Oh! you are a baby—a good baby, aren't you?"

He did not quite like being called a baby, and frowned; but was at once touched by the disconcer-tion in her powdered face. How quickly she was scared!

She said clingingly:
"But I li-ike you for it. It is so good to find a ni-ice man."

This was worse, and he said abruptly:
"About being lonely? Haven't you any Russian friends?"

"Rooshian! No! The town is so beeg! Haf you been in the concert?"
"Yes."
"I, too—I love music."
"I suppose all Russians do."

She looked up at his face again, and seemed to struggle to keep silent; then she said quietly:
"I go there always when I haf the money."
"What! Are you so on the rocks?"
"Well, I haf just one shilling now." And she laughed.

The sound of that little laugh upset him—she had a way of making him feel sorry for her every time she spoke.

They had come by now to a narrow square, east of Gower Street.
"This is where I lif," she said, "Come in!"

He had one long moment of violent hesitation, then
yielded to the soft tugging of her hand, and followed. The passage-hall was dimly lighted, and they went upstairs into a front room, where the curtains were drawn, and the gas turned very low. Opposite the window were other curtains dividing off the rest of the apartment. As soon as the door was shut she put up her face and kissed him—evidently formula. What a room! It’s green and beetroot colouring and the prevalence of cheap plush disagreeably affected him. Everything in it had that callous look of rooms which seem to be saying to their occupants: “You’re here to-day and you’ll be gone to-morrow.” Everything except one little plant in a common pot, of maidenhair fern, fresh and green, looking as if it had been watered within the hour; in this room it had just the same unexpected touchingness that peeped out of the girl’s matter-of-fact cynicism.

Taking off her hat she went towards the gas, but he said quickly:

“No, don’t turn it up; let’s have the window open and the moonlight in.” He had a sudden dread of seeing anything plainly—it was stuffy too, and, pulling the curtains apart, he threw up the window. The girl had come obediently from the hearth, and sat down opposite him, leaning her arm on the window-sill and her chin on her hand. The moonlight caught her cheek where she had just renewed the powder, and her fair crinkly hair; it caught the plush of the furniture, and his own khaki, giving them all a touch of unreality.

“What’s your name?” he said.

“May. Well, I call myself that. It’s no good asking yours.”

“You’re a distrustful little soul, aren’t you?”

“I haven’t reason to be, don’t you think?”
“Yes, I suppose you’re bound to think us all brutes?”

“Well, I haf a lot of reasons to be afraid all my time. I am dreadfully nervous now; I am not trusting anybody. I suppose you haf been killing lots of Germans.” He laughed.

“We never know, unless it happens to be hand to hand. I haven’t come in for that yet.”

“But you would be very glad if you had killed some?”

“Glad? I don’t think so. We’re all in the same boat so far as that’s concerned. We’re not glad to kill each other. We do our job—that’s all.”

“Oh! it is frightful. I expect I haf my broders killed.”

“Don’t you get any news ever?”

“News! No indeed, no news of anybody in my country. I might not haf a country; all that I ever knew is gone—fader, moder, sisters, broders, all—never any more I shall see them, I suppose, now. The war it breaks and breaks—it breaks hearts.” Her little teeth fastened again on her lower lip in that sort of pretty snarl. “Do you know what I was thinkin’ when you came up? I was thinkin’ of my native town and the river there in the moonlight. If I could see it again I would be glad. Were you ever home-seeking?”

“Yes, I have been—in the trenches; but one’s ashamed, with all the others.”

“Ah! ye-es!” It came from her with a hiss. “Ye-es! You are all comrades there. What is it like for me here, do you think, where everybody hates and despises me, and would catch me, and put me in prison, perhaps?”
He could see her breast heaving with a quick breathing painful to listen to. He leaned forward, patting her knee, and murmuring: "So sorry."

She said in a smothered voice:

"You are the first who has been kind to me for so long! I will tell you the truth—I am not Rooshian at all—I am German."

Hearing that half-choked confession, his thought was: "Does she really think we fight against women?"

And he said:

"My dear girl, who cares?"

Her eyes seemed to search right into him. She said slowly:

"Another man said that to me. But he was thinkin' of other things. You are a veree ni-ice boy. I am so glad I met you. You see the good in people, don't you? That is the first thing in the world—because there is really not much good in people, you know."

He said, smiling:

"You're a dreadful little cynic!" Then thought:

"Well—of course!"

"Cynee? How long do you think I would live if I was not a cynee? I should drown myself tomorrow. Perhaps there are good people, but, you see, I don't know them."

"I know lots."

She leaned forward eagerly.

"Well now—see, ni-ice boy—you haf never been in a hole, haf you?"

"I suppose not a real hole."

"No, I should think not, with your face. Well, suppose I am still a good girl, as I was once, you know, and you took me to some of your good people, and said:
'Here is a little German girl that has no work, and no money, and no friends.' Your good people they will say: 'Oh! how sad! A German girl!' and they will go and wash their hands.'

Silence fell on him. He saw his mother, his sister, others—good people, he would swear! And yet——! He heard their voices, frank and clear; and they seemed to be talking of the Germans. If only she were not German as well!

"You see!" he heard her say, and could only mutter:

"I'm sure there are people."

"No. They would not take a German, even if she was good. Besides, I don't want to be good any more——I am not a humbug—I have learned to be bad. Aren't you going to kess me, ni-ice boy?"

She put her face close to his. Her eyes troubled him, but he drew back. He thought she would be offended or persistent, but she was neither; just looked at him fixedly with a curious inquiring stare; and he leaned against the window, deeply disturbed. It was as if all clear and simple enthusiasm had been suddenly knocked endways; as if a certain splendour of life that he had felt and seen of late had been dipped in cloud. Out there at the front, over here in hospital, life had been seeming so—as it were—heroic; and yet it held such mean and murky depths as well! The voices if his men, whom he had come to love like brothers, crude burring voices, cheery in trouble, making nothing of it; the voices of doctors and nurses, patient, quiet, reassuring voices; even his own voice, infected by it all, kept sounding in his ears. All wonderful somehow, and simple; and nothing mean about it anywhere! And now so suddenly to have lighted upon this, and all that was behind it—this
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scared girl, this base, dark, thoughtless use of her. And the thought came to him: "I suppose my fellows wouldn't think twice about taking her on! Why, I'm not even certain of myself, if she insists!" And he turned his face and stared out at the moonlight. He heard her voice:

"Eesn't it light? No air-raid to-night. When the Zepps burned—what a horrible death! And all the people cheered—it is natural. Do you hate us veree much?"

He turned round and said sharply:

"Hate? I don't know."

"I don't hate even the English—I despise them. I despise my people too—perhaps more, because they began this war. Oh, yes! I know that. I despise all the peoples. Why haf they made the world so miserable—why haf they killed all our lives—hundreds and thousands and millions of lives—all for no'ting? They haf made a bad world—everybody hating, and looking for the worst everywhere. They haf made me bad, I know. I believe no more in anything. What is there to believe in? Is there a God? No! Once I was teaching little English children their prayers—isn't that funee? I was reading to them about Christ and love. I believed all those things. Now I believe not'ing at all—no one who is not a fool or liar can believe. I would like to work in a hospital; I would like to go and help poor boys like you. Because I am a German they would throw me out a hundred times, even if I was good. It is the same in Germany and France and Russia—everywhere. But do you think I will believe in love and Christ and a God and all that?—not I! I think we are animals—that's all! Oh! yes—you fancy it is because my life has spoiled me. It is not
that at all—that’s not the worst thing in life. These
man are not ni-ice, like you, but it’s their nature, and,”
she laughed, “they help me to live, which is something
for me, anyway. No, it is the men who think them-
selves great and good, and make the war with their
talk and their hate, killing us all—killing all the boys
like you, and keeping poor people in prison, and telling
us to go on hating; and all those dreadful cold-blooded
creatures who write in the papers—the same in my
country, just the same; it is because of all them that I
think we are only animals.”

He got up, acutely miserable. He could see her
following him with her eyes, and knew she was afraid
she had driven him away. She said coaxingly: “Don’t
mind me talking, ni-ice boy. I don’t know anyone to
talk to. If you don’t like it, I can be as quiet as a mouse.

He muttered:

“Oh! go on, talk away. I’m not obliged to believe
you, and I don’t.”

She was on her feet now, leaning against the wall, her
dark dress and white face just touched by the slanting
moonlight; and her voice came again, slow and soft
and bitter:

“Well, look here, ni-ice boy, what sort of a world is
it, where millions are being tortured—horribly tortured,
for no fault of theirs at all? A beautiful world, isn’t
it? ’Umbug! silly rot, as you boys call it. You say it
is all ‘comrade!’ and bravery out there at the front,
and people don’t think of themselves. Well, I don’t
think of myself veree much. What does it matter?
—I am lost now, anyway; but I think of my people at
home, how they suffer and grieve. I think of all the
poor people there and here who lose those they love,
and all the poor prisoners. Am I not to think of them?
And if I do, how am I to believe it a beautiful world, ni-ice boy?"

He stood very still, biting his lips.

"Look here! We haf one life each, and soon it is over. Well, I think that is lucky."

He said resentfully:

"No! there's more than that."

"Ah!" she went on softly, "you think the war is fought for the future; you are giving your lives for a better world, aren't you?"

"We must fight till we win," he said between his teeth.

"Till you win. My people think that too. All the peoples think that if they win the world will be better. But it will not, you know; it will be much worse anyway."

He turned away from her and caught up his cap; but her voice followed him.

"I don't care which wins, I despise them all—animals—animals! Ah! Don't go, ni-ice boy—I will be quiet now."

He took some notes from his tunic pocket, put them on the table, and went up to her.

"Good-night."

She said plaintively:

"Are you really going? Don't you like me enough?"

"Yes, I like you."

"It is because I am German, then?"

"No."

"Then why won't you stay?"

He wanted to answer: "Because you upset me so"; but he just shrugged his shoulders.

"Won't you kees me once?"
He bent, and put his lips to her forehead; but as he took them away she threw her head back, pressed her mouth to his and clung to him.

He sat down suddenly, and said:

"Don't! I don't want to feel a brute."

She laughed. "You are a funny boy, but you are versee good. Talk to me a little, then. No one talks to me. I would much rather talk, anyway. Tell me, haf you seen many German prisoners?"

He sighed—from relief, or was it from regret?

"A good many."

"Any from the Rhine?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Were they very sad?"

"Some were—some were quite glad to be taken."

"Did you ever see the Rhine? Isn't it beautiful? It will be wonderful to-night. The moonlight will be the same here as there; in Rooshia too, and France, everywhere; and the trees will look the same as here and people will meet under them and make love just as here. Oh! isn't it stupid, the war—as if it was not good to be alive."

He wanted to say: "You can't tell how good it is to be alive till you're facing death, because you don't live till then. And when a whole lot of you feel like that—and are ready to give their lives for each other, it's worth all the rest of life put together." But he couldn't get it out to this girl who believed in nothing.

"How were you wounded, ni-ice boy?"

"Attacking across open ground—four machine-gun bullets got me at one go off."

"Weren't you versee frightened when they ordered you to attack?" No, he had not been frightened just then! And he shook his head and laughed.
"It was great. We did laugh that morning. They got me much too soon, though—a swindle!"

She stared at him.

"You laughed?"

"Yes, and what do you think was the first thing I was conscious of next morning—my old colonel bending over me and giving me a squeeze of lemon. If you knew my colonel, you'd still believe in things. There is something, you know, behind all this evil. After all, you can only die once, and if it's for your country all the better."

Her face, with intent eyes just touched with dark, had in the moonlight a most strange, other-world look. Her lips moved:

"No, I believe in nothing. My heart is dead."

"You think so, but it isn't, you know, or you wouldn't have been crying when I met you."

"If it were not dead, do you think I could live my life—walking the streets every night pretending to like strange men—never hearing a kind word—never talking, for fear I will be known for a German. Soon I shall take to drinking, then I shall be 'kaput' very quick. You see, I am practical; I see things clear. To-night I am a little emotional, the moon is funny, you know. But I live for myself only now. I don't care for anything or anybody."

"All the same, just now you were pitying your people and prisoners, and that."

"Yes, because they suffer. Those who suffer are like me—I pity myself, that's all; I am different from your English-women. I see what I am doing; I do not let my mind become a turnip just because I am no longer moral."

"Nor your heart either."
“Ni-ice boy, you are veree obstinate. But all that about love is 'umbug. We love ourselves, nothing more.”

Again, at that intense soft bitterness in her voice, he felt stifled and got up, leaning on the window sill. The air out there was free from the smell of dust and stale perfume. He felt her fingers slip between his own, and stay unmoving. If she was so hard and cynical, why should he pity her? Yet he did. The touch of that hand within his own roused his protective instinct. She had poured out her heart to him—a perfect stranger! He pressed it a little, and felt her fingers crisp in answer. Poor little devil! This was a friendlier moment than she had known for years! And after all, fellow-feeling was bigger than principalities and powers! Fellow-feeling was all pervading as this moonlight, which she had said would be the same in Germany—as this white ghostly glamour wrapping the trees, making the orange lamps so quaint and decoratively useless out in the narrow square, where emptiness and silence reigned. He looked round into her face—in spite of kohl and powder, and the red salve on her lips, it had a queer, unholy, touching beauty. And he had suddenly the strangest feeling, as if they stood there—the two of them—proving that kindness, and human fellowship were stronger than lust, stronger than hate; proving it against meanness and brutality, and the sudden shouting of newspaper boys in some neighbouring streets, whose cries, passionately vehement, clashed into each other, and obscured the words—what was it they were calling? His head went up to listen; He felt her hand rigid within his arm—she too was listening. The cries came nearer, hoarser, more shrill and clamorous; the empty moonlight seemed of a
sudden crowded with figures, footsteps, voices, and a fierce distant cheering. "Great victory—great victory! Official! British! Severe defeat of the 'Ums! Many thousand prisoners!" So it sped by, intoxicating, filling him with a fearful joy; and leaning far out, he waved his cap and cheered like a madman; and the whole night seemed to him to flutter and vibrate and answer. Then he turned to rush down into the street, struck against something soft, and recoiled. The girl! She stood with hands clenched, her face convulsed, panting, and even in the madness of his joy he felt for her. To hear this—in the midst of enemies! All confused with the desire to do something, he stooped to take her hand; and the dusty reek of the tablecloth clung to his nostrils. She snatched away her fingers, swept up the notes he had put down, and held them out to him.

"Take them—I will not haf your English money—take them." And suddenly she tore them across twice, three times, let the bits flutter to the floor, and turned her back to him. He stood looking at her leaning against the plush-covered table which smelled of dust, her head down, a dark figure in a dark room with the moonlight sharpening her outline—hardly a moment he stayed, then made for the door. . . .

When he was gone, she still stood there, her chin on her breast—she who cared for nothing, believed in nothing—with the sound in her ears of cheering, of hurrying feet, and voices; stood in the centre of a pattern made by fragments of the torn-up notes, staring out into the moonlight, seeing, not this hated room and the hated square outside, but a German orchard, and herself, a little girl, plucking apples, a big dog beside her; a hundred other pictures, too, such
as the drowning see. Her heart swelled; she sank down on the floor, laid her forehead on the dusty carpet, and pressed her body to it.

She who did not care—who despised all peoples, even her own—began, mechanically, to sweep together the scattered fragments of the notes, assembling them with the dust into a little pile, as of fallen leaves, and dabbling in it with her fingers, while the tears ran down her cheeks. For her country she had torn them, her country in defeat! She, who had just one shilling in this great town of enemies, who wrung her stealthy living out of the embraces of her foes! And suddenly in the moonlight she sat up and began to sing with all her might—"Die Wacht am Rhein."

1916.
VIRTUE

HAROLD MELLESH, minor clerk in an Accident Assurance Society, having occasion to be present at a certain Police Court to give evidence in the matter of a smashed car, stood riveted by manifestations of the law entirely new to him. His eyes, blue and rather like those of a baby, were opened very widely, his ingenuous forehead wrinkled, his curly hair was moving on his scalp, his fists involuntarily clenching his straw hat. He had seen four ladies of the town dealt with—three "jugged," and one fined—before his sensations reached their climax. Perhaps she was prettier than the others, certainly younger, and she was crying.

"First time you've been here—two pounds, and ten shillings costs."

"But I haven't any money, sir."

"Very well—fourteen days."

Tears streaking the remains of powder—a queer little sound, and the sensations within young Mellesh simmered like a kettle coming to the boil. He touched a blue sleeve in front of him.

"Here," he said, "I'll pay her fine."

He felt the glance of the policeman running over him like a chilly insect.

"Friend of yours?"

"No."

"I shouldn't, then. She'll be here again within the month."

The girl was passing, he saw the swallowing movement of her throat and said with desperation:
"I don't care. I'll pay it."

The policeman's glance crept about him clammyly.

"Come with me, then."

Young Mellesh followed him out.

"Here," said his policeman to the one in charge of the girl, "this gentleman'll pay the fine."

Conscious of a confusion of glances, of his own cheeks reddening furiously, young Mellesh brought out his money—just two pounds fifteen; and, handing over the two pounds ten, he thought: "My hat! What would Alice say?"

He heard the girl's gasped out: "Ow! Thank you!" his policeman's muttered: "Waste o' money! Still, it was a kind action," and passed out into the street. Now that his feelings had given off that two pound ten's worth of steam he felt chilly and dazed, as if virtue had gone out of him. A voice behind him said:

"Thank you ever so much—it was kind of you."

Raising his straw hat he stood uncomfortably to let her pass.

She pushed a card into his hand. "Any time you're passing, I'll be glad to see you; I'm very grateful."

"Not at all!" With a smile, confused like her own, he turned off towards his office.

All day, among his accidents, he felt uncertain. Had he been a fool; had he been a hero? Sometimes he thought: "What brutes they are to those girls!" and sometimes: "Don't know; suppose they must do something about it." And he avoided considering how to explain the absence of two pounds ten shillings on which Alice had been reckoning. His soul was simple like the expression on his face.

He reached home at the usual hour—six-thirty.
His home was grey and small and had a little bit of green up Chalk Farm way, where the Tube made all things possible.

His wife, who had just put their baby daughter to bed, was sitting in the parlour darning his socks. She looked up—surely her forehead was rather like a knee!

"You wear your socks properly, Harold," she said; "it's all I can do to mend this pair." Her eyes were china-blue, round like saucers; her voice had the monotony of one brought up to minimise emotion. A farmer's daughter, young Mellesh had become engaged to her during a holiday in Somerset. Pale himself, from office and the heat, he thought how pale she looked.

"The heat's dreadful, isn't it?" she said. "Sometimes I wish we'd never had baby. It does tie you in the evenings. I am looking forward to Whitsuntide, that I am."

Young Mellesh, tall and straggly, bent over and kissed her forehead. How on earth to let her know that he had "blewed" their holiday? He was realising that he had done an awful thing. Perhaps—oh! surely she would understand how he couldn't sit and see that girl "jugged" before his eyes for want of it! But not until the end of their small supper did he say abruptly:

"I got quite upset this morning, Alice. Had to go down to the Police Court about that car smash I told you of, and afterwards I saw them run in a lot of those Piccadilly girls. It fair sickened me to see the way they treat them."

His wife looked up; her face was childlike.

"Why, what do they do to them?"

"Quod them for speakin' to men in the street."

"I s'pose they're up to no good."
Irritated by the matter-of-factness in her voice, he went on:

"They speak to 'em as if they were dirt."
"Well, aren't they?"
"They may be a loose lot, but so are men."
"Men wouldn't be so loose if they weren't there."
"I suppose it's what you call a vicious circle"; and, pleased with his play on words, he added: "One or two of them were pretty."

His wife smiled; her smile had a natural teasing quality.
"They treat them better, I suppose?"
That was jolly cynical! and he blurted out:
"One, quite young, never there before, they gave her a fortnight just because she hadn't any money—I couldn't stick it; I paid her fine."

There was sweat on his forehead. His wife's face had gone quite pink.
"You paid? How much?"

He was on the point of saying: "Ten shillings." But something in his soul revolted. "Regular pill—two pound ten"; and he thought glumly: "Oh! what a fool I've been!"

He did wish Alice wouldn't open her mouth like that, when nothing was coming out—made her look so silly! Her face puckered suddenly, then became quite blank; he was moved as if he had hit or pinched her.

"Awfully sorry, Alice," he muttered. "Never meant to—she—she cried."
"Course she cried! You fool, Harold!"

He got up, very much disturbed.
"Well, and what would you have done?"
“Me? Let her stew in her own juice, of course. It wasn’t your affair.”

She too had risen. He thrust his fingers through his hair. The girl’s face, tear-streaked, confusedly pretty, had come up before him, her soft common grateful voice tickled his ears again. His wife turned her back. So! he was in for a fit of sulks. Well! No doubt he had deserved it.

“I daresay I was a fool,” he muttered, “but I did think you’d understand how I felt when I saw her cry. Suppose it had been you!” From the toss of her head, he knew he had said something pretty fatal.

“Oh! So that’s what you think of me!”

He grasped her shoulder.

“Of course I don’t, Alice, don’t be so silly!”

She shook off his hand.

“Whose money was it? Now baby and me’ll get no holiday. And all because you see a slut crying.”

Before he could answer she was gone. He had an awful sense of having outraged justice. Given away her holiday—given his wife’s holiday to a girl of the streets! Still, it was his own holiday, too; besides, he earned the money! He’d never wanted to give it to the girl; hadn’t got anything for it! Suppose he’d put it into the offertory bag, would Alice have been in such a temper even if it was their holiday? He didn’t see much difference. He sat down with knees apart, and elbows planted on them, staring at the peonies on the Brussels carpet paid for on the hire system. And all those feelings that rise in people who live together, when they don’t agree, swirled in his curly head, and troubled his eyes, candid like a baby’s. If they would treat the wretched girls like dirt! If only she hadn’t cried! She hadn’t meant to cry; he could tell that
by the sound of it. And who was the magistrate—he didn’t look too like a saint; who was any man to treat her like that? Alice oughtn’t— No! But suddenly he saw Alice again bending over his socks—pale and tired with the heat—doing things for him or baby—and he had given away her holiday! No denying that! Compunction flooded him. He must go up and find her and try and make his peace—he would pawn his bicycle—she should have her holiday—oh! yes!

He opened the door and listened. The little house was ominously quiet—only the outside evening sounds from buses passing in the main road, from children playing on the doorsteps of the side street, from a man with a barrow of bananas. She must be up in the bedroom with baby! He mounted the steep white-washed stairway. It wanted a carpet, and fresh paint; ah! and a lot of other things Alice wanted—you couldn’t have everything at once on four pound ten a week—with the price of living what it was. But she ought to have remembered there were things he wanted too—yes, precious bad, and never thought of getting. The door of their bedroom was locked; he rattled the handle. She opened suddenly, and stood facing him on the little landing.

“I don’t want you up here.”

“Look here, Alice—this is rotten.”

She closed the door behind her.

“It is! You go down again, I don’t want you. Think I believe that about crying! I’d be ashamed, if I were you!”

Ashamed! He might have been too soft, but why ashamed?

“Think I don’t know what men are like? You can
just go to your rotten girl, if she’s so pretty!” She stood hard and stiff against the door, with red spots in her cheeks. She almost made him feel a villain—such conviction in her body.

“Alice! Good Lord! You must be crazy! I’ve done nothing!”

“But you’d like to. Go along! I don’t want you!”

The stabbing stare of her blue eyes, the muffled energy of her voice, the bitterness about her mouth, all made a fellow feel—well, that he knew nothing about anything—coming from one’s wife like that! He leaned back against the wall.

“Well, I’m damned!” was all he could get out.

“D’you mean to say she didn’t ask you?”

The insides of his hands grew wet. The girl’s card in his pocket!

“Well, if you like to be a cat I can’t help it. What d’you take me for?”

“Giving your own child’s money to a dirty slut! You owed it—that’s the truth—or will. Go on with you; don’t stand there!”

He had a nasty longing to smite her on the mouth—it looked so bitter. “Well,” he said slowly, “now I understand.”

What was it that he understood? That she was all of a piece with something, with that Police Court, with the tone of the men’s voices, with something unsparing, hard and righteous, which came down sharp on people?

“I thought—I think you might——” he stammered.

“Ugh!” The sound exasperated him so, that he turned to go downstairs.

“You whited sepulchre!”
The door clicked before he could answer the odd insult; he heard the key turned. "Idiotic! The little landing seemed too small to hold his feelings. Would he ever have said a word to Alice, if he had done it? Why! He had never even thought of doing anything!

Giddy from chagrin he ran downstairs, and, clawing his straw hat from the rack, went out. The streets were malodorous from London fog, fried fish, petrol, hot dirty people; he strode along troubled, his eyes very rueful. So this was what he was really married to—this—this! It was like being married to that Police Court! It wasn’t human—no, it wasn’t—to be so suspicious and virtuous as all that! What was the use of being decent and straight, if this was all you got for it? Someone touched him on the shoulder.

"Mister, you’re all white behind; let me brush you."

He stood still confusedly, while a stout fair man smote his back up and down with a large flat hand. Whited sepulchre! A bubble of rage rose to his lips. All right! She should see! He felt for the girl’s card, and was suddenly amazed to find that he had no need to look at it—he remembered the address. Not far off, on the other side of the Euston Road! That was funny—had he been looking at it without realising? They said you had a subconscious mind. Well, what about it? No, it was his conscious mind that was going to serve Alice out! He had reached the Euston Road. Crossing it, he began to feel a queer pleasurable weakness in the legs. By this he knew that he was going to do wrong. He was not going to visit the girl just to serve his wife out, but because the prospect was—! That was bad—bad: it would put Alice in the right! He stood still at the corner of a narrow square, with a strip of garden, and railings round it. He leaned
against those railings, his eyes searching the trees. He had always been quite straight with his wife—it was she who had put the idea into his head. And yet his legs being pleasurably weak seemed in an odd way to excuse her. It was like his doubt whether they hadn’t to do something about it at the Police Court. Barring Alice—barring the Police Court—where would he—would any man be? Without virtue, entirely without virtue. A pigeon in the garden cooed. “Any time you’re passing, I’ll be glad to see you.” It had sounded genuine—really grateful. And the girl had looked—not worse than anybody else! If Alice had been sympathetic about it he would never have thought of the girl again; that is—well—! The doubt set his legs in motion. He was a married man, and that was all about it. But he looked across at the numbers on the houses. Twenty-seven! Yes, there it was! A bloom of lilac brushed his face. The scent jerked him suddenly back to the farm in Somerset, and he and Alice courting. Alice—not the Alice on the landing! He scrutinised the shabby house, and suddenly went hot all over. Suppose he went in there—what would that girl think? That he had paid her fine because—! But that wasn’t it at all—oh! no—he wasn’t a squirt like that! He turned his face away, and walked on fast and far.

The signs were lit above the theatres; traffic was scanty, the streets a long dawdle of what vehicles and humans were about. He came to Leicester Square and sat down on a bench. The lights all round him brightened slowly under the dusk—theatre lights, street lamps. And the pity of things smote him, sitting there. So much of everything; and one got so little of anything! Adding figures up all day, going home
to Alice—that was life! Well; it wasn’t so bad when Alice was nice to him. But—Crikey!—What one missed! That book about the South Sea Islands—places, peoples, sights, sounds, scents, all over the world! Four pounds ten a week, a wife, a baby! Well, you couldn’t have things both ways—but had he got them either way? Not with the Alice on the landing!

Ah! Well! Poor Alice; jolly hard on her to miss her holiday! But she might have given him the chance to tell her that he would pawn his bicycle. Or was it all a bad dream? Had he ever really been in that Police Court, seen them herding those girls to prison—girls who did what they did because—well, like himself, they had missed too much. They’d catch a fresh lot to-night. What a fool he’d been to pay that fine!

“Glad I didn’t go into that girl’s house, anyway,” he thought. “I would have felt a scum!” The only decent thing about it all had been her look when she said: “Ow! thank you!” That gave him a little feeling of warmth even now; and then—it, too, chilled away. Nothing for it! When he had done sitting there, he must go home! If Alice had thought him a wrong-un before, what would she think when he returned? Well, there it was! The milk was spilt! But he did wish she hadn’t got such a virtue on her.

The sky deepened and darkened, the lights stared white; the Square Garden with its flower-beds seemed all cut out and stiff, like scenery on a stage. Must go back and “stick” it! No good to worry!

He got up from the bench and gave himself a shake. His eyes, turned towards the lights of the Alhambra, were round, candid, decent, like the eyes of a baby.

1922.
THE NEIGHBOURS

In the remote country, Nature, at first sight so serene, so simple, will soon intrude on her observer a strange discomfort; a feeling that some familiar spirit haunts the old lanes, rocks, wasteland, and trees, and has the power to twist all living things around into some special shape befitting its genius.

When moonlight floods the patch of moorland about the centre of the triangle between the little towns of Hartland, Torrington, and Holsworthy, a pagan spirit steals forth through the wan gorse; gliding round the stems of the lonely, gibbet-like fir trees, peeping out amongst the reeds of the white marsh. That spirit has the eyes of a borderer, who perceives in every man a possible foe. And, in fact, this high corner of the land has remained border to this day, where the masterful, acquisitive invader from the North dwells side by side with the unstable, proud, quick-blooded Celt-Iberian.

In two cottages crowning some fallow land two families used to live side by side. That long white dwelling seemed all one, till the eye, peering through the sweet-briar which smothered the right-hand half, perceived the rude, weather-beaten presentment of a Running Horse, denoting the presence of intoxicating liquors; and in a window of the left-hand half, that strange conglomeration of edibles and shoe-leather which proclaims the one shop of a primitive hamlet.

These married couples were by name Sandford at
the eastern and Leman at the western end; and he who
saw them for the first time thought: "What splendid-
looking people!"

They were all four above the average height, and all,
four as straight as darts. The innkeeper, Sandford,
was a massive man, stolid, grave, light-eyed, with big
fair moustaches, who might have stepped straight out
of some Norseman's galley. Leman was lean and lathy,
a regular Celt, with an amiable, shadowy, humorous
face. The two women were as different as the men.
Mrs. Sandford's fair, almost transparent cheeks coloured
easily, her eyes were grey, her hair pale brown; Mrs.
Leman's hair was of a lustreless jet-black, her eyes
the colour of a peaty stream, and her cheeks had the
close creamy texture of old ivory.

Those accustomed to their appearance soon noted
the qualifications of their splendour. In Sandford,
whom neither sun nor wind ever tanned, there was
a look as if nothing would ever turn him from acquisi-
tion of what he had set his heart on; his eyes had the
idealism of the worshipper of property, ever marching
towards a heaven of great possessions. Followed by
his cowering spaniel, he walked to his fields (for he
farmed as well as kept the inn) with a tread that seemed
to shake the lanes, disengaging an air of such heavy
and complete insulation that even the birds were still.
He rarely spoke. He was not popular. He was
feared—no one quite knew why.

On Mrs. Sandford, for all her pink and white, some-
times girlish look, he had set the mark of his slow,
heavy domination. Her voice was seldom heard.
Once in a while, however, her reserve would yield to
garrulity, as of water flowing through a broken dam.
In these outbursts she usually spoke of her neighbours,
the Lemans, deploiring the state of their marital relations. "A woman," she would say, "must give way to a man sometimes; I've had to give way to Sandford myself, I have." Her lips, from long compression, had become thin as the edge of a teacup; all her character seemed to have been driven down below the surface of her long, china-white face. She had not broken, but she had chipped; her edges had become jagged, sharp. The consciousness that she herself had been beaten to the earth seemed to inspire in her that waspish feeling towards Mrs. Leman—"a woman with a proud temper," as she would say in her almost lady-like voice; "a woman who's never bowed down to a man—that's what she'll tell you herself. 'Tisn't the drink that makes Leman behave so mad, 'tis because she won't give way to him. We're glad to sell drink to anyone we can, of course; but 'tisn't that what's makin' Leman so queer. 'Tis her."

Leman, whose long figure was often to be seen seated on the wooden bench of his neighbour's stone-flagged little inn, had, indeed, begun to have the soaked look and scent of a man never quite drunk, and hardly ever sober. He spoke slowly, his tongue seemed thickening, he no longer worked; his humorous, amiable face had grown hangdog and clouded. All the village knew of his passionate outbreaks and bursts of desperate weeping; and of two occasions when Sandford had been compelled to wrest a razor from him. People took a morbid interest in this rapid deterioration, speaking of it with misgiving and relish, unanimous in their opinion that—summat'd'appen about that; the drink wer duin' for George Leman, that it wer, prosperly!

But Sandford—that blond, ashy-looking Teuton—was not easy of approach, and no one cared to remon-
strate with him; his taciturnity was too impressive, too impenetrable. Mrs. Leman, too, never complained. To see this black-haired woman, with her stoical, alluring face, come out for a breath of air, and stand in the sunlight, her baby in her arms, was to have looked on a very woman of the Britons. In conquering races the men, they say, are superior to the women; in conquered races, the women to the men. She was certainly superior to Leman. That woman might be bent and mangled, she could not be broken; her pride was too simple, too much a physical part of her. No one ever saw a word pass between her and Sandford. It was almost as if the old racial feelings of this borderland were pursuing in these two their unending conflict. For there they lived, side by side under the long, thatched roof, this great primitive, invading male, and that black-haired, lithe-limbed woman of older race, avoiding each other, never speaking—as much too much for their own mates as they were, perhaps, worthy of each other.

In this lonely parish, houses stood far apart, yet news travelled down the May-scented lanes and over the whin-covered moor with a strange speed; blown perhaps by the west wind, whispered by the pagan genius of the place in his wanderings, or conveyed by small boys on large farm horses.

On Whit-Monday it was known that Leman had been drinking all Sunday; for he had been heard on Sunday night shouting out that his wife had robbed him, and that her children were not his. All next day he was seen sitting in the bar of the inn soaking steadily. Yet on Tuesday morning Mrs. Leman was serving in her shop as usual—a really noble figure, with that lustreless black hair of hers—very silent, and ever sweetening her
eyes to her customers. Mrs. Sandford, in one of her bursts of garrulity, complained bitterly of the way her neighbours had “gone on” the night before. But unmoved, ashy, stolid as ever, Sandford worked in the most stony of his fields.

That hot, magnificent day wore to its end; a night of extraordinary beauty fell. In the gold moonlight the shadows of the lime-tree leaves lay, blacker than any velvet, piled one on the other at the foot of the little green. It was very warm. A cuckoo called on till nearly midnight. A great number of little moths were out; and the two broad meadows which fell away from the hamlet down to the stream were clothed in a glamorous haze of their own moonlit buttercups. Where that marvellous moonlight spread out across the moor it was all pale witchery; only the three pine-trees had strength to resist the wan gold of their fair visitor, and brooded over the scene like the ghosts of three great gallows. The long white dwelling of “the neighbours,” bathed in that vibrating glow, seemed to be exuding a refulgence of its own. Beyond the stream a night-jar hunted, whose fluttering harsh call tore the garment of the scent-laden still air. It was long before sleep folded her wings.

A little past twelve o’clock there was the sound of a double shot. By five o’clock the next morning the news had already travelled far; and before seven quite a concourse had gathered to watch two mounted constables take Leman on Sandford’s pony to Bideford Gaol. The dead bodies of Sandford and Mrs. Leman lay—so report ran—in the locked bedroom at Leman’s end of the neighbours’ house. Mrs. Sandford, in a state of collapse, was being nursed at a neighbouring cottage. The Leman children had been taken to the
Rectory. Alone of the dwellers in those two cottages, Sandford’s spaniel sat in a gleam of early sunlight under the eastern porch, with her nose fixed to the crack beneath the door.

It was vaguely known that Leman had “done for ’em”; of the how, the why, the when, all was conjecture. Nor was it till the assizes that the story of that night was made plain, from Leman’s own evidence, read from a dirty piece of paper:

“I, George Leman, make this confession—so help me God! When I came up to bed that evening, I was far gone in liquor and so had been for two days off and on, which Sandford knows. My wife was in bed. I went up, and I said to her: ‘Get up!’ I said; ‘do what I tell you for once!’ ‘I will not!’ she said. So I pulled the bedclothes off her. When I saw her all white like that, with her black hair, it turned me queer, and I ran downstairs and got my gun, and loaded it. When I came upstairs again, she was against the door. I pushed, and she pushed back. She didn’t call out, or say one word—but pushed; she was never one to be afraid. I was the stronger, and I pushed-in the door. She stood up against the bed, defying me with her mouth tight shut, the way she had; and I put up my gun to shoot her. It was then that Sandford came running up the stairs and knocked the gun out of my hand with his stick. He hit me a blow over the heart with his fist, and I fell down against the wall and couldn’t move. And he said: ‘Keep quiet!’ he said, ‘you dog!’ Then he looked at her. ‘And as for you,’ he said, ‘you bring it on yourself! You can’t bow down, can’t you? I’ll bow you down for once!’ And he took and raised his stick. But he didn’t strike her; he just looked at her in her nightdress, which was torn at
the shoulders, and her black hair ragged. She never said a word, but smiled at him. Then he caught hold of her by the arms, and they stood there. I saw her eyes; they were black as two sloes. He seemed to go all weak of a sudden, and white as the wall. It was like as they were struggling which was the better of them, meaning to come on to one another at the end. I saw what was in them as clear as I see this paper. I got up and crept round, and I took the gun and pointed it, and pulled the triggers one after the other, and they fell dead, first him, then her; they fell quietly, neither of them made a noise. I went out and lay down on the grass. They found me there when they came to take me. This is all I have to write, but it is true that I was far gone in liquor, which I had of him...."

1909.