Daughter Of The Local Chemist

By

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The discussion arose in this way. I had proposed a match between our villain and the daughter of the local chemist, a singularly noble and pureminded girl, the humble but worthy friend of the heroine.

Brown had refused his consent on the ground of improbability. "What in thunder would induce him to marry her?" he asked.

"Love!" I replied; "love, that burns as brightly in the meanest villain's breast as in the proud heart of the good young man."

"Are you trying to be light and amusing," returned Brown, severely, "or are you supposed to be discussing the matter seriously? What attraction could such a girl have for such a man as Reuben Neil?"

"Every attraction," I retorted. "She is the exact moral contrast to himself. She is beautiful (if she's not beautiful enough, we can touch her up a bit), and, when the father dies, there will be the shop."

"Besides," I added, "it will make the thing seem more natural if everybody wonders what on earth could have been the reason for their marrying each other."

Brown wasted no further words on me, but turned to MacShaughnassy.

"Can you imagine our friend Reuben seized with a burning desire to marry Mary Holme?" he asked, with a smile.

"Of course I can," said MacShaughnassy; "I can imagine anything, and believe anything of anybody. It is only in novels that people act reasonably and in accordance with what might be expected of them. I knew an old seacaptain who used to read the Young Ladies' Journal in bed, and cry over it. I knew a bookmaker who always carried Browning's poems about with him in his pocket to study in the train. I have known a Harley Street doctor to develop at fortyeight a sudden and overmastering passion for switchbacks, and to spend every hour he could spare from his practice at one or other of the exhibitions, having threepen'orths one after the other. I have known a bookreviewer give oranges (not poisoned ones) to children. A man is not a character, he is a dozen characters, one of them prominent, the other eleven more or less undeveloped. I knew a man once, two of whose characters were of equal value, and the consequences were peculiar."

We begged him to relate the case to us, and he did so.

"He was a Balliol man," said MacShaughnassy, "and his Christian name was Joseph. He was a member of the 'Devonshire' at the time I knew him, and was, I think, the most superior person I have ever met. He sneered at the Saturday Review as the pet journal of the suburban literary club; and at the Athenæum as the trade organ of the unsuccessful writer. Thackeray, he considered, was fairly entitled to his position of favourite author to the cultured clerk; and Carlyle he regarded as the exponent of the earnest artisan. Living authors he never read, but this did not prevent his criticising them contemptuously. The only inhabitants of the nineteenth century that he ever praised were a few obscure French novelists, of whom nobody but himself had ever heard. He had his own opinion about God Almighty, and objected to Heaven on account of the strong Clapham contingent likely to be found in residence there. Humour made him sad, and sentiment made him ill. Art irritated him and science bored him. He despised his own family and disliked everybody else. For exercise he yawned, and his conversation was mainly confined to an occasional shrug.

"Nobody liked him, but everybody respected him. One felt grateful to him for his condescension in living at all.

"One summer, I was fishing over the Norfolk Broads, and on the Bank Holiday, thinking I would like to see the London 'Arry in his glory, I ran over to Yarmouth. Walking along the seafront in the evening, I suddenly found myself confronted by four remarkably choice specimens of the class. They were urging on their wild and erratic career arminarm. The one nearest the road was playing an unusually wheezy concertina, and the other three were bawling out the chorus of a musichall song, the heroine of which appeared to be 'Hemmer.'

"They spread themselves right across the pavement, compelling all the women and children they met to step into the roadway. I stood my ground on the kerb, and as they brushed by me something in the face of the one with the concertina struck me as familiar.

"I turned and followed them. They were evidently enjoying themselves immensely. To every girl they passed they yelled out, 'Oh, you little jam tart!' and every old lady they addressed as 'Mar.' The noisiest and the most vulgar of the four was the one with the concertina.

"I followed them on to the pier, and then, hurrying past, waited for them under a gaslamp. When the man with the concertina came into the light and I saw him clearly I started. From the face I could have sworn it was Joseph; but everything else about him

rendered such an assumption impossible. Putting aside the time and the place, and forgetting his behaviour, his companions, and his instrument, what remained was sufficient to make the suggestion absurd. Joseph was always clean shaven; this youth had a smudgy moustache and a pair of incipient red whiskers. He was dressed in the loudest check suit I have ever seen, off the stage. He wore patentleather boots with motherofpearl buttons, and a necktie that in an earlier age would have called down lightning out of Heaven. He had a lowcrowned billycock hat on his head, and a big evilsmelling cigar between his lips.

"Argue as I would, however, the face was the face of Joseph; and, moved by a curiosity I could not control, I kept near him, watching him.

"Once, for a little while, I missed him; but there was not much fear of losing that suit for long, and after a little looking about I struck it again. He was sitting at the end of the pier, where it was less crowded, with his arm round a girl's waist. I crept close. She was a jolly, redfaced girl, goodlooking enough, but common to the last degree. Her hat lay on the seat beside her, and her head was resting on his shoulder. She appeared to be fond of him, but he was evidently bored.

"'Don'tcher like me, Joe?' I heard her murmur.

"'Yas,' he replied, somewhat unconvincingly, 'o' course I likes yer.'

"She gave him an affectionate slap, but he did not respond, and a few minutes afterwards, muttering some excuse, he rose and left her, and I followed him as he made his way towards the refreshmentroom. At the door he met one of his pals.

"'Hullo!' was the question, 'wot 'a yer done wi' 'Liza?'

"'Oh, I carn't stand 'er,' was his reply; 'she gives me the bloomin' 'ump. You 'ave a turn with 'er.'

"His friend disappeared in the direction of 'Liza, and Joe pushed into the room, I keeping close behind him. Now that he was alone I was determined to speak to him. The longer I had studied his features the more resemblance I had found in them to those of my superior friend Joseph.

"He was leaning across the bar, clamouring for two of gin, when I tapped him on the shoulder. He turned his head, and the moment he saw me, his face went livid.

"'Mr. Joseph Smythe, I believe,' I said with a smile.

"'Who's Mr. Joseph Smythe?' he answered hoarsely; 'my name's Smith, I ain't no bloomin' Smythe. Who are you? I don't know yer.'

"As he spoke, my eyes rested upon a curious gold ring of Indian workmanship which he wore upon his left hand. There was no mistaking the ring, at all events: it had been passed round the club on more than one occasion as a unique curiosity. His eyes followed my gaze. He burst into tears, and pushing me before him into a quiet corner of the saloon, sat down facing me.

"'Don't give me away, old man,' he whimpered; 'for Gawd's sake, don't let on to any of the chaps 'ere that I'm a member of that blessed old waxwork show in Saint James's: they'd never speak to me agen. And keep yer mug shut about Oxford, there's a good sort. I wouldn't 'ave 'em know as 'ow I was one o' them college blokes for anythink.'

"I sat aghast. I had listened to hear him entreat me to keep 'Smith,' the rorty 'Arry, a secret from the acquaintances of 'Smythe,' the superior person. Here was 'Smith' in mortal terror lest his pals should hear of his identity with the aristocratic 'Smythe,' and discard him. His attitude puzzled me at the time, but, when I came to reflect, my wonder was at myself for having expected the opposite.

"'I carn't 'elp it,' he went on; 'I 'ave to live two lives. 'Arf my time I'm a stuckup prig, as orter be jolly well kicked'

"'At which times,' I interrupted, 'I have heard you express some extremely uncomplimentary opinions concerning 'Arries.'

"'I know,' he replied, in a voice betraying strong emotion; 'that's where it's so precious rough on me. When I'm a toff I despises myself, 'cos I knows that underneath my sneering phiz I'm a bloomin' 'Arry. When I'm an 'Arry, I 'ates myself 'cos I knows I'm a toff.'

"'Can't you decide which character you prefer, and stick to it?' I asked.

"'No,' he answered, 'I carn't. It's a rum thing, but whichever I am, sure as fate, 'bout the end of a month I begin to get sick o' myself.'

"'I can quite understand it,' I murmured; 'I should give way myself in a fortnight.'

"'I've been myself, now,' he continued, without noticing my remark, 'for somethin' like ten days. One mornin', in 'bout three weeks' time, I shall get up in my diggins in the

Mile End Road, and I shall look round the room, and at these clothes 'angin' over the bed, and at this yer concertina' (he gave it an affectionate squeeze), 'and I shall feel myself gettin' scarlet all over. Then I shall jump out o' bed, and look at myself in the glass. "You howling little cad," I shall say to myself, "I have half a mind to strangle you"; and I shall shave myself, and put on a quiet blue serge suit and a bowler 'at, tell my landlady to keep my rooms for me till I comes back, slip out o' the 'ouse, and into the fust 'ansom I meets, and back to the Halbany. And a month arter that, I shall come into my chambers at the Halbany, fling Voltaire and Parini into the fire, shy me 'at at the bust of good old 'Omer, slip on my blue suit agen, and back to the Mile End Road.'

"'How do you explain your absence to both parties?' I asked.

"'Oh, that's simple enough,' he replied. 'I just tells my 'ousekeeper at the Halbany as I'm goin' on the Continong; and my mates 'ere thinks I'm a traveller.'

"'Nobody misses me much,' he added, pathetically; 'I hain't a partic'larly fetchin' sort o' bloke, either of me. I'm sich an outandouter. When I'm an 'Arry, I'm too much of an 'Arry, and when I'm a prig, I'm a reg'lar fust prize prig. Seems to me as if I was two ends of a man without any middle. If I could only mix myself up a bit more, I'd be all right.'

"He sniffed once or twice, and then he laughed. 'Ah, well,' he said, casting aside his momentary gloom; 'it's all a game, and wot's the odds so long as yer 'appy. 'Ave a wet?'

"I declined the wet, and left him playing sentimental airs to himself upon the concertina.

"One afternoon, about a month later, the servant came to me with a card on which was engraved the name of 'Mr. Joseph Smythe.' I requested her to show him up. He entered with his usual air of languid superciliousness, and seated himself in a graceful attitude upon the sofa.

"'Well,' I said, as soon as the girl had closed the door behind her, 'so you've got rid of Smith?'

"A sickly smile passed over his face. 'You have not mentioned it to any one?' he asked anxiously.

"'Not to a soul,' I replied; 'though I confess I often feel tempted to.'

"'I sincerely trust you never will,' he said, in a tone of alarm. 'You can have no conception of the misery the whole thing causes me. I cannot understand it. What possible affinity there can be between myself and that disgusting little snob passes my

comprehension. I assure you, my dear Mac, the knowledge that I was a ghoul, or a vampire, would cause me less nausea than the reflection that I am one and the same with that odious little Whitechapel bounder. When I think of him every nerve in my body'

"'Don't think about him any more,' I interrupted, perceiving his stronglysuppressed emotion. 'You didn't come here to talk about him, I'm sure. Let us dismiss him.'

"'Well,' he replied, 'in a certain roundabout way it is slightly connected with him. That is really my excuse for inflicting the subject upon you. You are the only man I can speak to about itif I shall not bore you?'

"'Not in the least,' I said. 'I am most interested.' As he still hesitated, I asked him pointblank what it was.

"He appeared embarrassed. 'It is really very absurd of me,' he said, while the faintest suspicion of pink crossed his usually colourless face; 'but I feel I must talk to somebody about it. The fact is, my dear Mac, I am in love.'

"'Capital!' I cried; 'I'm delighted to hear it.' (I thought it might make a man of him.) 'Do I know the lady?'

"'I am inclined to think you must have seen her,' he replied; 'she was with me on the pier at Yarmouth that evening you met me.'

"'Not 'Liza!' I exclaimed.

"'That was she,' he answered; 'Miss Elizabeth Muggins.' He dwelt lovingly upon the name.

"'But,' I said, 'you seemedI really could not help noticing, it was so pronouncedyou seemed to positively dislike her. Indeed, I gathered from your remark to a friend that her society was distinctly distasteful to you.'

"'To Smith,' he corrected me. 'What judge would that howling little blackguard be of a woman's worth! The dislike of such a man as that is a testimonial to her merit!'

"'I may be mistaken,' I said; 'but she struck me as a bit common.'

"'She is not, perhaps, what the world would call a lady,' he admitted; 'but then, my dear Mac, my opinion of the world is not such as to render its opinion of much value to me. I

and the world differ on most subjects, I am glad to say. She is beautiful, and she is good, and she is my choice.'

"'She's a jolly enough little girl,' I replied, 'and, I should say, affectionate; but have you considered, Smythe, whether she is quitewhat shall we sayquite as intellectual as could be desired?'

"'Really, to tell the truth, I have not troubled myself much about her intellect,' he replied, with one of his sneering smiles. 'I have no doubt that the amount of intellect absolutely necessary to the formation of a British home, I shall be able to supply myself. I have no desire for an intellectual wife. One is compelled to meet tiresome people, but one does not live with them if one can avoid it.'

"'No,' he continued, reverting to his more natural tone; 'the more I think of Elizabeth the more clear it becomes to me that she is the one woman in the world for whom marriage with me is possible. I perceive that to the superficial observer my selection must appear extraordinary. I do not pretend to explain it, or even to understand it. The study of mankind is beyond man. Only fools attempt it. Maybe it is her contrast to myself that attracts me. Maybe my, perhaps, too spiritual nature feels the need of contact with her coarser clay to perfect itself. I cannot tell. These things must always remain mysteries. I only know that I love herthat, if any reliance is to be placed upon instinct, she is the mate to whom Artemis is leading me.'

"It was clear that he was in love, and I therefore ceased to argue with him. 'You kept up your acquaintanceship with her, then, after you'I was going to say 'after you ceased to be Smith,' but not wishing to agitate him by more mention of that person than I could help, I substituted, 'after you returned to the Albany?'

"'Not exactly,' he replied; 'I lost sight of her after I left Yarmouth, and I did not see her again until five days ago, when I came across her in an aerated bread shop. I had gone in to get a glass of milk and a bun, and she brought them to me. I recognised her in a moment.' His face lighted up with quite a human smile. 'I take tea there every afternoon now,' he added, glancing towards the clock, 'at four.'

"'There's not much need to ask her views on the subject,' I said, laughing; 'her feelings towards you were pretty evident.'

"'Well, that is the curious part of it,' he replied, with a return to his former embarrassment; 'she does not seem to care for me now at all. Indeed, she positively refuses me. She saysto put it in the dear child's own racy languagethat she wouldn't take

me on at any price. She says it would be like marrying a clockwork figure without the key. She's more frank than complimentary, but I like that.'

"'Wait a minute,' I said; 'an idea occurs to me. Does she know of your identity with Smith?'

"'No,' he replied, alarmed, 'I would not have her know it for worlds. Only yesterday she told me that I reminded her of a fellow she had met at Yarmouth, and my heart was in my mouth.'

"'How did she look when she told you that?' I asked.

"'How did she look?' he repeated, not understanding me.

"'What was her expression at that moment?' I said'was it severe or tender?'

"'Well,' he replied, 'now I come to think of it, she did seem to soften a bit just then.'

"'My dear boy,' I said, 'the case is as clear as daylight. She loves Smith. No girl who admired Smith could be attracted by Smythe. As your present self you will never win her. In a few weeks' time, however, you will be Smith. Leave the matter over until then. Propose to her as Smith, and she will accept you. After marriage you can break Smythe gently to her.'

"'By Jove!' he exclaimed, startled out of his customary lethargy, 'I never thought of that. The truth is, when I am in my right senses, Smith and all his affairs seem like a dream to me. Any idea connected with him would never enter my mind.'

"He rose and held out his hand. 'I am so glad I came to see you,' he said; 'your suggestion has almost reconciled me to my miserable fate. Indeed, I quite look forward to a month of Smith, now.'

"'I'm so pleased,' I answered, shaking hands with him. 'Mind you come and tell me how you get on. Another man's love affairs are not usually absorbing, but there is an element of interest about yours that renders the case exceptional.'

"We parted, and I did not see him again for another month. Then, late one evening, the servant knocked at my door to say that a Mr. Smith wished to see me.

"'Smith, Smith,' I repeated; 'what Smith? didn't he give you a card?'

"'No, sir,' answered the girl; 'he doesn't look the sort that would have a card. He's not a gentleman, sir; but he says you'll know him.' She evidently regarded the statement as an aspersion upon myself.

"I was about to tell her to say I was out, when the recollection of Smythe's other self flashed into my mind, and I directed her to send him up.

"A minute passed, and then he entered. He was wearing a new suit of a louder pattern, if possible, than before. I think he must have designed it himself. He looked hot and greasy. He did not offer to shake hands, but sat down awkwardly on the extreme edge of a small chair, and gaped about the room as if he had never seen it before.

"He communicated his shyness to myself. I could not think what to say, and we sat for a while in painful silence.

"'Well,' I said, at last, plunging headforemost into the matter, according to the method of shy people, 'and how's 'Liza?'

"'Oh, she's all right,' he replied, keeping his eyes fixed on his hat.

"'Have you done it?' I continued.

"'Done wot?' he asked, looking up.

"'Married her.'

"'No,' he answered, returning to the contemplation of his hat.

"'Has she refused you then?' I said.

"'I ain't arst 'er,' he returned.

"He seemed unwilling to explain matters of his own accord. I had to put the conversation into the form of a crossexamination.

"'Why not?' I asked; 'don't you think she cares for you any longer?'

"He burst into a harsh laugh. 'There ain't much fear o' that,' he said; 'it's like 'aving an Alcock's porous plaster mashed on yer, blowed if it ain't. There's no gettin' rid of 'er. I wish she'd giv' somebody else a turn. I'm fair sick of 'er.'

"'But you were enthusiastic about her a month ago!' I exclaimed in astonishment.

"'Smythe may 'ave been,' he said; 'there ain't no accounting for that ninny, 'is 'ead's full of starch. Anyhow, I don't take 'er on while I'm myself. I'm too jolly fly.'

"'That sort o' gal's all right enough to lark with,' he continued; 'but yer don't want to marry 'em. They don't do yer no good. A man wants a wife as 'e can respectsome one as is a cut above 'imself, as will raise 'im up a peg or twosome one as 'e can look up to and worship. A man's wife orter be to 'im a gawddessa hangel, a'

"'You appear to have met the lady,' I remarked, interrupting him.

"He blushed scarlet, and became suddenly absorbed in the pattern of the carpet. But the next moment he looked up again, and his face seemed literally transformed.

"'Oh! Mr. MacShaughnassy,' he burst out, with a ring of genuine manliness in his voice, 'you don't know 'ow good, 'ow beautiful she is. I ain't fit to breathe 'er name in my thoughts. An' she's so clever. I met 'er at that Toynbee 'All. There was a party of toffs there all together. You would 'ave enjoyed it, Mr. MacShaughnassy, if you could 'ave 'eard 'er; she was makin' fun of the pictures and the people round about to 'er pasuch wit, such learnin', such 'aughtiness. I follered them out and opened the carriage door for 'er, and she just drew 'er skirt aside and looked at me as if I was the dirt in the road. I wish I was, for then perhaps one day I'd kiss 'er feet.'

"His emotion was so genuine that I did not feel inclined to laugh at him. 'Did you find out who she was?' I asked.

"'Yes,' he answered; 'I 'eard the old gentleman say "'Ome" to the coachman, and I ran after the carriage all the way to 'Arley Street. Trevior's 'er name, Hedith Trevior.'

"'Miss Trevior!' I cried, 'a tall, dark girl, with untidy hair and rather weak eyes?'

"'Tall and dark,' he replied 'with 'air that seems tryin' to reach 'er lips to kiss 'em, and heyes, light blue, like a Cambridge necktie. A 'undred and seventythree was the number.'

"'That's right,' I said; 'my dear Smith, this is becoming complicated. You've met the lady and talked to her for half an houras Smythe, don't you remember?'

"'No,' he said, after cogitating for a minute, 'carn't say I do; I never can remember much about Smythe. He allers seems to me like a bad dream.'

"'Well, you met her,' I said; 'I'm positive. I introduced you to her myself, and she confided to me afterwards that she thought you a most charming man.'

"'Nodid she?' he remarked, evidently softening in his feelings towards Smythe; 'and did I like 'er?'

"'Well, to tell the truth,' I answered, 'I don't think you did. You looked intensely bored.'

"'The Juggins,' I heard him mutter to himself, and then he said aloud: 'D'yer think I shall get a chance o' seein' 'er agen, when I'mwhen I'm Smythe?'

"'Of course,' I said, 'I'll take you round myself. By the bye,' I added, jumping up and looking on the mantelpiece, 'I've got a card for a Cinderella at their placesomething to do with a birthday. Will you be Smythe on November the twentieth?'

"'Yeas,' he replied; 'oh, yasbound to be by then.'

"'Very well, then,' I said, 'I'll call round for you at the Albany, and we'll go together.'

"He rose and stood smoothing his hat with his sleeve. 'Fust time I've ever looked for'ard to bein' that hanimated corpse, Smythe,' he said slowly. 'Blowed if I don't try to 'urry it up'pon my sivey I will.'

"'He'll be no good to you till the twentieth,' I reminded him. 'And,' I added, as I stood up to ring the bell, 'you're sure it's a genuine case this time. You won't be going back to 'Liza?'

"'Oh, don't talk 'bout 'Liza in the same breath with Hedith,' he replied, 'it sounds like sacrilege.'

"He stood hesitating with the handle of the door in his hand. At last, opening it and looking very hard at his hat, he said, 'I'm goin' to 'Arley Street now. I walk up and down outside the 'ouse every evening, and sometimes, when there ain't no one lookin', I get a chance to kiss the doorstep.'

"He disappeared, and I returned to my chair.

"On November twentieth, I called for him according to promise. I found him on the point of starting for the club: he had forgotten all about our appointment. I reminded him of it, and he with difficulty recalled it, and consented, without any enthusiasm, to

accompany me. By a few artful hints to her mother (including a casual mention of his income), I manoeuvred matters so that he had Edith almost entirely to himself for the whole evening. I was proud of what I had done, and as we were walking home together I waited to receive his gratitude.

"As it seemed slow in coming, I hinted my expectations.

"'Well,' I said, 'I think I managed that very cleverly for you.'

"'Managed what very cleverly?' said he.

"'Why, getting you and Miss Trevior left together for such a long time in the conservatory,' I answered, somewhat hurt; 'I fixed that for you.'

"'Oh, it was you, was it,' he replied; 'I've been cursing Providence.'

"I stopped dead in the middle of the pavement, and faced him. 'Don't you love her?' I said.

"'Love her!' he repeated, in the utmost astonishment; 'what on earth is there in her to love? She's nothing but a bad translation of a modern French comedy, with the interest omitted.'

"This 'tired' meto use an Americanism. 'You came to me a month ago,' I said, 'raving over her, and talking about being the dirt under her feet and kissing her doorstep.'

"He turned very red. 'I wish, my dear Mac,' he said, 'you would pay me the compliment of not mistaking me for that detestable little cad with whom I have the misfortune to be connected. You would greatly oblige me if next time he attempts to inflict upon you his vulgar drivel you would kindly kick him downstairs.'

"'No doubt,' he added, with a sneer, as we walked on, 'Miss Trevior would be his ideal. She is exactly the type of woman, I should say, to charm that type of man. For myself, I do not appreciate the artistic and literary female.'

"'Besides,' he continued, in a deeper tone, 'you know my feelings. I shall never care for any other woman but Elizabeth.'

"'And she?' I said

"'She,' he sighed, 'is breaking her heart for Smith.'

"'Why don't you tell her you are Smith?' I asked.

"'I cannot,' he replied, 'not even to win her. Besides, she would not believe me.'

"We said goodnight at the corner of Bond Street, and I did not see him again till one afternoon late in the following March, when I ran against him in Ludgate Circus. He was wearing his transition blue suit and bowler hat. I went up to him and took his arm.

"'Which are you?' I said.

"'Neither, for the moment,' he replied, 'thank God. Half an hour ago I was Smythe, half an hour hence I shall be Smith. For the present halfhour I am a man.'

"There was a pleasant, hearty ring in his voice, and a genial, kindly light in his eyes, and he held himself like a frank gentleman.

"'You are certainly an improvement upon both of them,' I said.

"He laughed a sunny laugh, with just the shadow of sadness dashed across it. 'Do you know my idea of Heaven?' he said.

"'No,' I replied, somewhat surprised at the question.

"'Ludgate Circus,' was the answer. 'The only really satisfying moments of my life,' he said, 'have been passed in the neighbourhood of Ludgate Circus. I leave Piccadilly an unhealthy, unwholesome prig. At Charing Cross I begin to feel my blood stir in my veins. From Ludgate Circus to Cheapside I am a human thing with human feeling throbbing in my heart, and human thought throbbing in my brainwith fancies, sympathies, and hopes. At the Bank my mind becomes a blank. As I walk on, my senses grow coarse and blunted; and by the time I reach Whitechapel I am a poor little uncivilised cad. On the return journey it is the same thing reversed.'

"'Why not live in Ludgate Circus,' I said, 'and be always as you are now?'

"'Because,' he answered, 'man is a pendulum, and must travel his arc.'

"'My dear Mac,' said he, laying his hand upon my shoulder, 'there is only one good thing about me, and that is a moral. Man is as God made him: don't be so sure that you can take him to pieces and improve him. All my life I have sought to make myself an unnaturally superior person. Nature has retaliated by making me also an unnaturally

inferior person. Nature abhors lopsidedness. She turns out man as a whole, to be developed as a whole. I always wonder, whenever I come across a supernaturally pious, a supernaturally moral, a supernaturally cultured person, if they also have a reverse self.'

"I was shocked at his suggested argument, and walked by his side for a while without speaking. At last, feeling curious on the subject, I asked him how his various love affairs were progressing.

"'Oh, as usual,' he replied; 'in and out of a cul de sac. When I am Smythe I love Eliza, and Eliza loathes me. When I am Smith I love Edith, and the mere sight of me makes her shudder. It is as unfortunate for them as for me. I am not saying it boastfully. Heaven knows it is an added draught of misery in my cup; but it is a fact that Eliza is literally pining away for me as Smith, andas Smith I find it impossible to be even civil to her; while Edith, poor girl, has been foolish enough to set her heart on me as Smythe, and as Smythe she seems to me but the skin of a woman stuffed with the husks of learning, and rags torn from the corpse of wit.'

"I remained absorbed in my own thoughts for some time, and did not come out of them till we were crossing the Minories. Then, the idea suddenly occurring to me, I said:

"'Why don't you get a new girl altogether? There must be medium girls that both Smith and Smythe could like, and that would put up with both of you.'

"'No more girls for this child,' he answered 'they're more trouble than they're worth. Those yer want yer carn't get, and those yer can 'ave, yer don't want.'

"I started, and looked up at him. He was slouching along with his hands in his pockets, and a vacuous look in his face.

"A sudden repulsion seized me. 'I must go now,' I said, stopping. 'I'd no idea I had come so far.'

"He seemed as glad to be rid of me as I to be rid of him. 'Oh, must yer,' he said, holding out his hand. 'Well, so long.'

"We shook hands carelessly. He disappeared in the crowd, and that is the last I have ever seen of him."

“Is that a true story?” asked Jephson.

“Well, I’ve altered the names and dates,” said MacShaughnassy; “but the main facts you can rely upon.”

1

The final question discussed at our last meeting been: What shall our hero be? MacShaughnassy had suggested an author, with a critic for the villain. My idea was a stockbroker, with an undercurrent of romance in his nature. Said Jephson, who has a practical mind: "The question is not what we like, but what the female novelreader likes."

"That is so," agreed MacShaughnassy. "I propose that we collect feminine opinion upon this point. I will write to my aunt and obtain from her the old lady's view. You," he said, turning to me, "can put the case to your wife, and get the young lady's ideal. Let Brown write to his sister at Newnham, and find out whom the intellectual maiden favours, while Jephson can learn from Miss Medbury what is most attractive to the commonsensed girl."

This plan we had adopted, and the result was now under consideration. MacShaughnassy opened the proceedings by reading his aunt's letter. Wrote the old lady:

"I think, if I were you, my dear boy, I should choose a soldier. You know your poor grandfather, who ran away to America with that wicked Mrs. Featherly, the banker's wife, was a soldier, and so was your poor cousin Robert, who lost eight thousand pounds at Monte Carlo. I have always felt singularly drawn towards soldiers, even as a girl; though your poor dear uncle could not bear them. You will find many allusions to soldiers and men of war in the Old Testament (see Jer. xlviii. 14). Of course one does not like to think of their fighting and killing each other, but then they do not seem to do that sort of thing nowadays."

"So much for the old lady," said MacShaughnassy, as he folded up the letter and returned it to his pocket. "What says culture?"

Brown produced from his cigarcase a letter addressed in a bold round hand, and read as follows:

"What a curious coincidence! A few of us were discussing this very subject last night in Millicent Hightopper's rooms, and I may tell you at once that our decision was unanimous in favour of soldiers. You see, my dear Selkirk, in human nature the attraction is towards the opposite. To a milliner's apprentice a poet would no doubt be satisfying; to a woman of intelligence he would he an unutterable bore. What the intellectual woman requires in man is not something to argue with, but something to look at. To an emptyheaded woman I can imagine the soldier type proving vapid and

uninteresting; to the woman of mind he represents her ideal of mana creature strong, handsome, welldressed, and not too clever."

"That gives us two votes for the army," remarked MacShaughnassy, as Brown tore his sister's letter in two, and threw the pieces into the wastepaper basket. "What says the commonsensed girl?"

"First catch your commonsensed girl," muttered Jephson, a little grumpily, as it seemed to me. "Where do you propose finding her?"

"Well," returned MacShaughnassy, "I looked to find her in Miss Medbury."

As a rule, the mention of Miss Medbury's name brings a flush of joy to Jephson's face; but now his features wore an expression distinctly approaching a scowl.

"Oh!" he replied, "did you? Well, then, the commonsensed girl loves the military also."

"By Jove!" exclaimed MacShaughnassy, "what an extraordinary thing. What reason does she give?"

"That there's a something about them, and that they dance so divinely," answered Jephson, shortly.

"Well, you do surprise me," murmured MacShaughnassy, "I am astonished."

Then to me he said: "And what does the young married woman say? The same?"

"Yes," I replied, "precisely the same."

"Does she give a reason?" he asked.

"Oh yes," I explained; "because you can't help liking them."

There was silence for the next few minutes, while we smoked and thought. I fancy we were all wishing we had never started this inquiry.

That four distinctly different types of educated womanhood should, with promptness and unanimity quite unfeminine, have selected the soldier as their ideal, was certainly discouraging to the civilian heart. Had they been nursemaids or servant girls, I should have expected it. The worship of Mars by the Venus of the white cap is one of the few vital religions left to this devoutless age. A year or two ago I lodged near a barracks, and

the sight to be seen round its huge iron gates on Sunday afternoons I shall never forget. The girls began to assemble about twelve o'clock. By two, at which hour the army, with its hair nicely oiled and a cane in its hand, was ready for a stroll, there would be some four or five hundred of them waiting in a line. Formerly they had collected in a wild mob, and as the soldiers were let out to them two at a time, had fought for them, as lions for early Christians. This, however, had led to scenes of such disorder and brutality, that the police had been obliged to interfere; and the girls were now marshalled in queue, two abreast, and compelled, by a force of constables specially told off for the purpose, to keep their places and wait their proper turn.

At three o'clock the sentry on duty would come down to the wicket and close it. "They're all gone, my dears," he would shout out to the girls still left; "it's no good your stopping, we've no more for you today."

"Oh, not one!" some poor child would murmur pleadingly, while the tears welled up into her big round eyes, "not even a little one. I've been waiting such a long time."

"Can't help that," the honest fellow would reply, gruffly, but not unkindly, turning aside to hide his emotion; "you've had 'em all between you. We don't make 'em, you know: you can't have 'em if we haven't got 'em, can you? Come earlier next time."

Then he would hurry away to escape further importunity; and the police, who appeared to have been waiting for this moment with gloating anticipation, would jeeringly hustle away the weeping remnant. "Now then, pass along, you girls, pass along," they would say, in that irritatingly unsympathetic voice of theirs. "You've had your chance. Can't have the roadway blocked up all the afternoon with this 'ere demonstration of the unloved. Pass along."

In connection with this same barracks, our charwoman told Amenda, who told Ethelbertha, who told me a story, which I now told the boys.

Into a certain house, in a certain street in the neighbourhood, there moved one day a certain family. Their servant had left themmost of their servants did at the end of a weekand the day after the movingin an advertisement for a domestic was drawn up and sent to the Chronicle. It ran thus:

WANTED, GENERAL SERVANT, in small family of eleven. Wages, £6; no beer money. Must be early riser and hard worker. Washing done at home. Must be good cook, and not object to windowcleaning. Unitarian preferred.Apply, with references, to A. B., etc.

That advertisement was sent off on Wednesday afternoon. At seven o'clock on Thursday morning the whole family were awakened by continuous ringing of the streetdoor bell. The husband, looking out of window, was surprised to see a crowd of about fifty girls surrounding the house. He slipped on his dressinggown and went down to see what was the matter. The moment he opened the door, fifteen of them charged tumultuously into the passage, sweeping him completely off his legs. Once inside, these fifteen faced round, fought the other thirtyfive or so back on to the doorstep, and slammed the door in their faces. Then they picked up the master of the house, and asked him politely to conduct them to "A. B."

At first, owing to the clamour of the mob outside, who were hammering at the door and shouting curses through the keyhole, he could understand nothing, but at length they succeeded in explaining to him that they were domestic servants come ill answer to his wife's advertisement. The man went and told his wife, and his wife said she would see them, one at a time.

Which one should have audience first was a delicate question to decide. The man, on being appealed to, said he would prefer to leave it to them. They accordingly discussed the matter among themselves. At the end of a quarter of an hour, the victor, having borrowed some hairpins and a lookingglass from our charwoman, who had slept in the house, went upstairs, while the remaining fourteen sat down in the hall, and fanned themselves with their bonnets.

"A. B." was a good deal astonished when the first applicant presented herself. She was a tall, genteellooking girl. Up to yesterday she had been head housemaid at Lady Stanton's, and before that she had been undercook for two years to the Duchess of York.

"And why did you leave Lady Stanton?" asked "A. B."

"To come here, mum," replied the girl. The lady was puzzled.

"And you'll be satisfied with six pounds a year?" she asked.

"Certainly, mum, I think it ample."

"And you don't mind hard work?"

"I love it, mum."

"And you're an early riser?"

“Oh yes, mum, it upsets me stopping in bed after halfpast five.”

“You know we do the washing at home?”

“Yes, mum. I think it so much better to do it at home. Those laundries ruin good clothes. They’re so careless.”

“Are you a Unitarian?” continued the lady.

“Not yet, mum,” replied the girl, “but I should like to be one.”

The lady took her reference, and said she would write.

The next applicant offered to come for three poundsthought six pounds too much. She expressed her willingness to sleep in the back kitchen: a shakedown under the sink was all she wanted. She likewise had yearnings towards Unitarianism.

The third girl did not require any wages at allcould not understand what servants wanted with wagesthought wages only encouraged a love of foolish finerythought a comfortable home in a Unitarian family ought to be sufficient wages for any girl.

This girl said there was one stipulation she should like to make, and that was that she should be allowed to pay for all breakages caused by her own carelessness or neglect. She objected to holidays and evenings out; she held that they distracted a girl from her work.

The fourth candidate offered a premium of five pounds for the place; and then “A. B.” began to get frightened, and refused to see any more of the girls, convinced that they must be lunatics from some neighbouring asylum out for a walk.

Later in the day, meeting the nextdoor lady on the doorstep, she related her morning’s experiences.

“Oh, that’s nothing extraordinary,” said the nextdoor lady; “none of us on this side of the street pay wages; and we get the pick of all the best servants in London. Why, girls will come from the other end of the kingdom to get into one of these houses. It’s the dream of their lives. They save up for years, so as to be able to come here for nothing.”

“What’s the attraction?” asked “A. B.,” more amazed than ever.

“Why, don’t you see,” explained the next door lady, “our back windows open upon the barrack yard. A girl living in one of these houses is always close to soldiers. By looking out of window she can always see soldiers; and sometimes a soldier will nod to her or even call up to her. They never dream of asking for wages. They’ll work eighteen hours a day, and put up with anything just to be allowed to stop.”

“A. B.” profited by this information, and engaged the girl who offered the five pounds premium. She found her a perfect treasure of a servant. She was invariably willing and respectful, slept on a sofa in the kitchen, and was always contented with an egg for her dinner.

The truth of this story I cannot vouch for. Myself, I can believe it. Brown and MacShaughnassy made no attempt to do so, which seemed unfriendly. Jephson excused himself on the plea of a headache. I admit there are points in it presenting difficulties to the average intellect. As I explained at the commencement, it was told to me by Ethelbertha, who had it from Amenda, who got it from the charwoman, and exaggerations may have crept into it. The following, however, were incidents that came under my own personal observation. They afforded a still stronger example of the influence exercised by Tommy Atkins upon the British domestic, and I therefore thought it right to relate them.

“The heroine of them,” I said, “is our Amenda. Now, you would call her a tolerably wellbehaved, orderly young woman, would you not?”

“She is my ideal of unostentatious respectability,” answered MacShaughnassy.

“That was my opinion also,” I replied. “You can, therefore, imagine my feelings on passing her one evening in the Folkestone High Street with a Panama hat upon her head (my Panama hat), and a soldier’s arm round her waist. She was one of a mob following the band of the Third Berkshire Infantry, then in camp at Sandgate. There was an ecstatic, faraway look in her eyes. She was dancing rather than walking, and with her left hand she beat time to the music.

“Ethelbertha was with me at the time. We stared after the procession until it had turned the corner, and then we stared at each other.

“‘Oh, it’s impossible,’ said Ethelbertha to me.

“‘But that was my hat,’ I said to Ethelbertha.

“The moment we reached home Ethelbertha looked for Amenda, and I looked for my hat. Neither was to be found.

“Nine o’clock struck, ten o’clock struck. At halfpast ten, we went down and got our own supper, and had it in the kitchen. At a quarterpast eleven, Amenda returned. She walked into the kitchen without a word, hung my hat up behind the door, and commenced clearing away the supper things.

“Ethelbertha rose, calm but severe.

“‘Where have you been, Amenda?’ she inquired.

“‘Gadding half over the county with a lot of low soldiers,’ answered Amenda, continuing her work.

“‘You had on my hat,’ I added.

“‘Yes, sir,’ replied Amenda, still continuing her work, ‘it was the first thing that came to hand. What I’m thankful for is that it wasn’t missis’s best bonnet.’

“Whether Ethelbertha was mollified by the proper spirit displayed in this last remark, I cannot say, but I think it probable. At all events, it was in a voice more of sorrow than of anger that she resumed her examination.

“‘You were walking with a soldier’s arm around your waist when we passed you, Amenda?’ she observed interrogatively.

“‘I know, mum,’ admitted Amenda, ‘I found it there myself when the music stopped.’

“Ethelbertha looked her inquiries. Amenda filled a saucepan with water, and then replied to them.

“‘I’m a disgrace to a decent household,’ she said; ‘no mistress who respected herself would keep me a moment. I ought to be put on the doorstep with my box and a month’s wages.’

“‘But why did you do it then?’ said Ethelbertha, with natural astonishment.

“‘Because I’m a helpless ninny, mum. I can’t help myself; if I see soldiers I’m bound to follow them. It runs in our family. My poor cousin Emma was just such another fool. She was engaged to be married to a quiet, respectable young fellow with a shop of his

own, and three days before the wedding she ran off with a regiment of marines to Chatham and married the coloursergeant. That's what I shall end by doing. I've been all the way to Sandgate with that lot you saw me with, and I've kissed four of themthe nasty wretches. I'm a nice sort of girl to be walking out with a respectable milkman.'

"She was so deeply disgusted with herself that it seemed superfluous for anybody else to be indignant with her; and Ethelbertha changed her tone and tried to comfort her.

"'Oh, you'll get over all that nonsense, Amenda,' she said, laughingly; 'you see yourself how silly it is. You must tell Mr. Bowles to keep you away from soldiers.'

"'Ah, I can't look at it in the same light way that you do, mum,' returned Amenda, somewhat reprovingly; 'a girl that can't see a bit of red marching down the street without wanting to rush out and follow it ain't fit to be anybody's wife. Why, I should be leaving the shop with nobody in it about twice a week, and he'd have to go the round of all the barracks in London, looking for me. I shall save up and get myself into a lunatic asylum, that's what I shall do.'

"Ethelbertha began to grow quite troubled. 'But surely this is something altogether new, Amenda,' she said; 'you must have often met soldiers when you've been out in London?'

"'Oh yes, one or two at a time, walking about anyhow, I can stand that all right. It's when there's a lot of them with a band that I lose my head.'

"'You don't know what it's like, mum,' she added, noticing Ethelbertha's puzzled expression; 'you've never had it. I only hope you never may.'

"We kept a careful watch over Amenda during the remainder of our stay at Folkestone, and an anxious time we had of it. Every day some regiment or other would march through the town, and at the first sound of its music Amenda would become restless and excited. The Pied Piper's reed could not have stirred the Hamelin children deeper than did those Sandgate bands the heart of our domestic. Fortunately, they generally passed early in the morning when we were indoors, but one day, returning home to lunch, we heard distant strains dying away upon the Hythe Road. We hurried in. Ethelbertha ran down into the kitchen; it was empty!up into Amenda's bedroom; it was vacant! We called. There was no answer.

"'That miserable girl has gone off again,' said Ethelbertha. 'What a terrible misfortune it is for her. It's quite a disease.'

“Ethelbertha wanted me to go to Sandgate camp and inquire for her. I was sorry for the girl myself, but the picture of a young and innocentlooking man wandering about a complicated camp, inquiring for a lost domestic, presenting itself to my mind, I said that I’d rather not.

“Ethelbertha thought me heartless, and said that if I would not go she would go herself. I replied that I thought one female member of my household was enough in that camp at a time, and requested her not to. Ethelbertha expressed her sense of my inhuman behaviour by haughtily declining to eat any lunch, and I expressed my sense of her unreasonableness by sweeping the whole meal into the grate, after which Ethelbertha suddenly developed exuberant affection for the cat (who didn’t want anybody’s love, but wanted to get under the grate after the lunch), and I became supernaturally absorbed in the daybeforeyesterday’s newspaper.

“In the afternoon, strolling out into the garden, I heard the faint cry of a female in distress. I listened attentively, and the cry was repeated. I thought it sounded like Amenda’s voice, but where it came from I could not conceive. It drew nearer, however, as I approached the bottom of the garden, and at last I located it in a small wooden shed, used by the proprietor of the house as a darkroom for developing photographs.

“The door was locked. ‘Is that you, Amenda?’ I cried through the keyhole.

“’Yes, sir,’ came back the muffled answer. ‘Will you please let me out? you’ll find the key on the ground near the door.’

“I discovered it on the grass about a yard away, and released her. ‘Who locked you in?’ I asked.

“‘I did, sir,’ she replied; ‘I locked myself in, and pushed the key out under the door. I had to do it, or I should have gone off with those beastly soldiers.’

“‘I hope I haven’t inconvenienced you, sir,’ she added, stepping out; ‘I left the lunch all laid.’”

Amenda’s passion for soldiers was her one tribute to sentiment. Towards all others of the male sex she maintained an attitude of callous unsusceptibility, and her engagements with them (which were numerous) were entered into or abandoned on grounds so sordid as to seriously shock Ethelbertha.

When she came to us she was engaged to a pork butcherwith a milkman in reserve. For Amenda's sake we dealt with the man, but we never liked him, and we liked his pork still less. When, therefore, Amenda announced to us that her engagement with him was "off," and intimated that her feelings would in no way suffer by our going elsewhere for our bacon, we secretly rejoiced.

"I am confident you have done right, Amenda," said Ethelbertha; "you would never have been happy with that man."

"No, mum, I don't think I ever should," replied Amenda. "I don't see how any girl could as hadn't the digestion of an ostrich."

Ethelbertha looked puzzled. "But what has digestion got to do with it?" she asked.

"A pretty good deal, mum," answered Amenda, "when you're thinking of marrying a man as can't make a sausage fit to eat."

"But, surely," exclaimed Ethelbertha, "you don't mean to say you're breaking off the match because you don't like his sausages!"

"Well, I suppose that's what it comes to," agreed Amenda, unconcernedly.

"What an awful idea!" sighed poor Ethelbertha, after a long pause. "Do you think you ever really loved him?"

"Oh yes," said Amenda, "I loved him right enough, but it's no good loving a man that wants you to live on sausages that keep you awake all night."

"But does he want you to live on sausages?" persisted Ethelbertha.

"Oh, he doesn't say anything about it," explained Amenda; "but you know what it is, mum, when you marry a pork butcher; you're expected to eat what's left over. That's the mistake my poor cousin Eliza made. She married a muffin man. Of course, what he didn't sell they had to finish up themselves. Why, one winter, when he had a run of bad luck, they lived for two months on nothing but muffins. I never saw a girl so changed in all my life. One has to think of these things, you know."

But the most shamefully mercenary engagement that I think Amenda ever entered into, was one with a 'bus conductor. We were living in the north of London then, and she had a young man, a cheesemonger, who kept a shop in Lupus Street, Chelsea. He could not come up to her because of the shop, so once a week she used to go down to him. One did

not ride ten miles for a penny in those days, and she found the fare from Holloway to Victoria and back a severe tax upon her purse. The same 'bus that took her down at six brought her back at ten. During the first journey the 'bus conductor stared at Amenda; during the second he talked to her, during the third he gave her a cocoanut, during the fourth he proposed to her, and was promptly accepted. After that, Amenda was enabled to visit her cheesemonger without expense.

He was a quaint character himself, this 'bus conductor. I often rode with him to Fleet Street. He knew me quite well (I suppose Amenda must have pointed me out to him), and would always ask me after heraloud, before all the other passengers, which was tryingand give me messages to take back to her. Where women were concerned he had what is called "a way" with him, and from the extent and variety of his female acquaintance, and the evident tenderness with which the majority of them regarded him, I am inclined to hope that Amenda's desertion of him (which happened contemporaneously with her jilting of the cheesemonger) caused him less prolonged suffering than might otherwise have been the case.

He was a man from whom I derived a good deal of amusement one way and another. Thinking of him brings back to my mind a somewhat odd incident.

One afternoon, I jumped upon his 'bus in the Seven Sisters Road. An elderly Frenchman was the only other occupant of the vehicle. "You vil not forget me," the Frenchman was saying as I entered, "I desire Sharing Cross."

"I won't forget yer," answered the conductor, "you shall 'ave yer Sharing Cross. Don't make a fuss about it."

"That's the third time 'ee's arst me not to forget 'im," he remarked to me in a stentorian aside; "'ee don't giv' yer much chance of doin' it, does 'ee?"

At the corner of the Holloway Road we drew up, and our conductor began to shout after the manner of his species: "Charing CrossCharing Cross'ere yer areCome along, ladyCharing Cross."

The little Frenchman jumped up, and prepared to exit; the conductor pushed him back.

"Sit down and don't be silly," he said; "this ain't Charing Cross."

The Frenchman looked puzzled, but collapsed meekly. We picked up a few passengers, and proceeded on our way. Half a mile up the Liverpool Road a lady stood on the kerb

regarding us as we passed with that pathetic mingling of desire and distrust which is the average woman's attitude towards conveyances of all kinds. Our conductor stopped.

"Where d'yer want to go to?" he asked her severely"StrandCharing Cross?"

The Frenchman did not hear or did not understand the first part of the speech, but he caught the words "Charing Cross," and bounced up and out on to the step. The conductor collared him as he was getting off, and jerked him back savagely.

"Carn't yer keep still a minute," he cried indignantly; "blessed if you don't want lookin' after like a bloomin' kid."

"I vont to be put down at Sharing Cross," answered the Frenchman, humbly.

"You vont to be put down at Sharing Cross," repeated the other bitterly, as he led him back to his seat. "I shall put yer down in the middle of the road if I 'ave much more of yer. You stop there till I come and sling yer out. I ain't likely to let yer go much past yer Sharing Cross, I shall be too jolly glad to get rid o' yer."

The poor Frenchman subsided, and we jolted on. At "The Angel" we, of course, stopped. "Charing Cross," shouted the conductor, and up sprang the Frenchman.

"Oh, my Gawd," said the conductor, taking him by the shoulders and forcing him down into the corner seat, "wot am I to do? Carn't somebody sit on 'im?"

He held him firmly down until the 'bus started, and then released him. At the top of Chancery Lane the same scene took place, and the poor little Frenchman became exasperated.

"He keep saying Sharing Cross, Sharing Cross," he exclaimed, turning to the other passengers; "and it is no Sharing Cross. He is fool."

"Carn't yer understand," retorted the conductor, equally indignant; "of course I say Sharing CrossI mean Charing Cross, but that don't mean that it is Charing Cross. That means" and then perceiving from the blank look on the Frenchman's face the utter impossibility of ever making the matter clear to him, he turned to us with an appealing gesture, and asked:

"Does any gentleman know the French for 'bloomin' idiot'?"

A day or two afterwards, I happened to enter his omnibus again.

“Well,” I asked him, “did you get your French friend to Charing Cross all right?”

“No, sir,” he replied, “you’ll ’ardly believe it, but I ’ad a bit of a row with a policeman just before I got to the corner, and it put ’im clean out o’ my ’ead. Blessed if I didn’t run ’im on to Victoria.”

2

Said Brown one evening, “There is but one vice, and that is selfishness.”

Jephson was standing before the fire lighting his pipe. He puffed the tobacco into a glow, threw the match into the embers, and then said:

“And the seed of all virtue also.”

“Sit down and get on with your work,” said MacShaughnassy from the sofa where he lay at full length with his heels on a chair; “we’re discussing the novel. Paradoxes not admitted during business hours.”

Jephson, however, was in an argumentative mood.

“Selfishness,” he continued, “is merely another name for Will. Every deed, good or bad, that we do is prompted by selfishness. We are charitable to secure ourselves a good place in the next world, to make ourselves respected in this, to ease our own distress at the knowledge of suffering. One man is kind because it gives him pleasure to be kind, just as another is cruel because cruelty pleases him. A great man does his duty because to him the sense of duty done is a deeper delight than would be the case resulting from avoidance of duty. The religious man is religious because he finds a joy in religion; the moral man moral because with his strong selfrespect, viciousness would mean wretchedness. Selfsacrifice itself is only a subtle selfishness: we prefer the mental exaltation gained thereby to the sensual gratification which is the alternative reward. Man cannot be anything else but selfish. Selfishness is the law of all life. Each thing, from the farthest fixed star to the smallest insect crawling on the earth, fighting for itself according to its strength; and brooding over all, the Eternal, working for Himself: that is the universe.”

“Have some whisky,” said MacShaughnassy; “and don’t be so complicatedly metaphysical. You make my head ache.”

“If all action, good and bad, spring from selfishness,” replied Brown, “then there must be good selfishness and bad selfishness: and your bad selfishness is my plain selfishness, without any adjective, so we are back where we started. I say selfishnessbad selfishnessis the root of all evil, and there you are bound to agree with me.”

“Not always,” persisted Jephson; “I’ve known selfishnessselfishness according to the ordinarily accepted meaning of the termto be productive of good actions. I can give you an instance, if you like.”

“Has it got a moral?” asked MacShaughnassy, drowsily,

Jephson mused a moment. “Yes,” he said at length; “a very practical moraland one very useful to young men.”

“That’s the sort of story we want,” said the MacShaughnassy, raising himself into a sitting position. “You listen to this, Brown.”

Jephson seated himself upon a chair, in his favourite attitude, with his elbows resting upon the back, and smoked for a while in silence.

“There are three people in this story,” he began; “the wife, the wife’s husband, and the other man. In most dramas of this type, it is the wife who is the chief character. In this case, the interesting person is the other man.

“The wifeI met her once: she was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and the most wickedlooking; which is saying a good deal for both statements. I remember, during a walking tour one year, coming across a lovely little cottage. It was the sweetest place imaginable. I need not describe it. It was the cottage one sees in pictures, and reads of in sentimental poetry. I was leaning over the neatlycropped hedge, drinking in its beauty, when at one of the tiny casements I saw, looking out at me, a face. It stayed there only a moment, but in that moment the cottage had become ugly, and I hurried away with a shudder.

“That woman’s face reminded me of the incident. It was an angel’s face, until the woman herself looked out of it: then you were struck by the strange incongruity between tenement and tenant.

“That at one time she had loved her husband, I have little doubt. Vicious women have few vices, and sordidness is not usually one of them. She had probably married him, borne towards him by one of those waves of passion upon which the souls of animal natures are continually rising and falling. On possession, however, had quickly followed satiety, and from satiety had grown the desire for a new sensation.

“They were living at Cairo at the period; her husband held an important official position there, and by virtue of this, and of her own beauty and tact, her house soon became the centre of the AngloSaxon society ever drifting in and out of the city. The women disliked her, and copied her. The men spoke slightingly of her to their wives, lightly of her to each other, and made idiots of themselves when they were alone with her. She laughed

at them to their faces, and mimicked them behind their backs. Their friends said it was clever.

“One year there arrived a young English engineer, who had come out to superintend some canal works. He brought with him satisfactory letters of recommendation, and was at once received by the European residents as a welcome addition to their social circle. He was not particularly goodlooking, he was not remarkably charming, but he possessed the one thing that few women can resist in a man, and that is strength. The woman looked at the man, and the man looked back at the woman; and the drama began.

“Scandal flies swiftly through small communities. Before a month, their relationship was the chief topic of conversation throughout the quarter. In less than two, it reached the ears of the woman’s husband.

“He was either an exceptionally mean or an exceptionally noble character, according to how one views the matter. He worshipped his wifeas men with big hearts and weak brains often do worship such womenwith doglike devotion. His only dread was lest the scandal should reach proportions that would compel him to take notice of it, and thus bring shame and suffering upon the woman to whom he would have given his life. That a man who saw her should love her seemed natural to him; that she should have grown tired of himself, a thing not to be wondered at. He was grateful to her for having once loved him, for a little while.

“As for ‘the other man,’ he proved somewhat of an enigma to the gossips. He attempted no secrecy; if anything, he rather paraded his subjugationor his conquest, it was difficult to decide which term to apply. He rode and drove with her; visited her in public and in private (in such privacy as can be hoped for in a house filled with chattering servants, and watched by spying eyes); loaded her with expensive presents, which she wore openly, and papered his smokingden with her photographs. Yet he never allowed himself to appear in the least degree ridiculous; never allowed her to come between him and his work. A letter from her, he would lay aside unopened until he had finished what he evidently regarded as more important business. When boudoir and engineshed became rivals, it was the boudoir that had to wait.

“The woman chafed under his selfcontrol, which stung her like a lash, but clung to him the more abjectly.

“‘Tell me you love me!’ she would cry fiercely, stretching her white arms towards him.

“‘I have told you so,’ he would reply calmly, without moving.

"'I want to hear you tell it me again,' she would plead with a voice that trembled on a sob. 'Come close to me and tell it me again, again, again!'

"Then, as she lay with halfclosed eyes, he would pour forth a flood of passionate words sufficient to satisfy even her thirsty ears, and afterwards, as the gates clanged behind him, would take up an engineering problem at the exact point at which half an hour before, on her entrance into the room, he had temporarily dismissed it.

"One day, a privileged friend put bluntly to him this question: 'Are you playing for love or vanity?'

"To which the man, after long pondering, gave this reply: ''Pon my soul, Jack, I couldn't tell you.'

"Now, when a man is in love with a woman who cannot make up her mind whether she loves him or not, we call the complication comedy; where it is the woman who is in earnest the result is generally tragedy.

"They continued to meet and to make love. They talkedas people in their position are prone to talkof the beautiful life they would lead if it only were not for the thing that was; of the earthly paradiseor, maybe, 'earthy' would be the more suitable adjectivethey would each create for the other, if only they had the right which they hadn't.

"In this work of imagination the man trusted chiefly to his literary faculties, which were considerable; the woman to her desires. Thus, his scenes possessed a grace and finish which hers lacked, but her pictures were the more vivid. Indeed, so realistic did she paint them, that to herself they seemed realities, waiting for her. Then she would rise to go towards them only to strike herself against the thought of the thing that stood between her and them. At first she only hated the thing, but after a while there came an ugly look of hope into her eyes.

"The time drew near for the man to return to England. The canal was completed, and a day appointed for the letting in of the water. The man determined to make the event the occasion of a social gathering. He invited a large number of guests, among whom were the woman and her husband, to assist at the function. Afterwards the party were to picnic at a pleasant wooded spot some threequarters of a mile from the first lock.

"The ceremony of flooding was to be performed by the woman, her husband's position entitling her to this distinction. Between the river and the head of the cutting had been left a strong bank of earth, pierced some distance down by a hole, which hole was kept

closed by means of a closelyfitting steel plate. The woman drew the lever releasing this plate, and the water rushed through and began to press against the lock gates. When it had attained a certain depth, the sluices were raised, and the water poured down into the deep basin of the lock.

"It was an exceptionally deep lock. The party gathered round and watched the water slowly rising. The woman looked down, and shuddered; the man was standing by her side.

"'How deep it is,' she said.

"'Yes,' he replied, 'it holds thirty feet of water, when full.'

"The water crept up inch by inch.

"'Why don't you open the gates, and let it in quickly?' she asked.

"'It would not do for it to come in too quickly,' he explained; 'we shall half fill this lock, and then open the sluices at the other end, and so let the water pass through.'

"The woman looked at the smooth stone walls and at the ironplated gates.

"'I wonder what a man would do,' she said, 'if he fell in, and there was no one near to help him?'

"The man laughed. 'I think he would stop there,' he answered. 'Come, the others are waiting for us.'

"He lingered a moment to give some final instructions to the workmen. 'You can follow on when you've made all right,' he said, 'and get something to eat. There's no need for more than one to stop.' Then they joined the rest of the party, and sauntered on, laughing and talking, to the picnic ground.

"After lunch the party broke up, as is the custom of picnic parties, and wandered away in groups and pairs. The man, whose duty as host had hitherto occupied all his attention, looked for the woman, but she was gone.

"A friend strolled by, the same that had put the question to him about love and vanity.

"'Have you quarrelled?' asked the friend.

"'No,' replied the man.

"'I fancied you had,' said the other. 'I met her just now walking with her husband, of all men in the world, and making herself quite agreeable to him.'

"The friend strolled on, and the man sat down on a fallen tree, and lighted a cigar. He smoked and thought, and the cigar burnt out, but he still sat thinking.

"After a while he heard a faint rustling of the branches behind him, and peering between the interlacing leaves that hid him, saw the crouching figure of the woman creeping through the wood.

"His lips were parted to call her name, when she turned her listening head in his direction, and his eyes fell full upon her face. Something about it, he could not have told what, struck him dumb, and the woman crept on.

"Gradually the nebulous thoughts floating through his brain began to solidify into a tangible idea, and the man unconsciously started forward. After walking a few steps he broke into a run, for the idea had grown clearer. It continued to grow still clearer and clearer, and the man ran faster and faster, until at last he found himself racing madly towards the lock. As he approached it he looked round for the watchman who ought to have been there, but the man was gone from his post. He shouted, but if any answer was returned, it was drowned by the roar of the rushing water.

"He reached the edge and looked down. Fifteen feet below him was the reality of the dim vision that had come to him a mile back in the woods: the woman's husband swimming round and round like a rat in a pail.

"The river was flowing in and out of the lock at the same rate, so that the level of the water remained constant. The first thing the man did was to close the lower sluices and then open those in the upper gate to their fullest extent. The water began to rise.

"'Can you hold out?' he cried.

"The drowning man turned to him a face already contorted by the agony of exhaustion, and answered with a feeble 'No.'

"He looked around for something to throw to the man. A plank had lain there in the morning, he remembered stumbling over it, and complaining of its having been left there; he cursed himself now for his care.

“A hut used by the navvies to keep their tools in stood about two hundred yards away; perhaps it had been taken there, perhaps there he might even find a rope.

“‘Just one minute, old fellow!’ he shouted down, ‘and I’ll be back.’

“But the other did not hear him. The feeble struggles ceased. The face fell back upon the water, the eyes half closed as if with weary indifference. There was no time for him to do more than kick off his riding boots and jump in and clutch the unconscious figure as it sank.

“Down there, in that walledin trap, he fought a long fight with Death for the life that stood between him and the woman. He was not an expert swimmer, his clothes hampered him, he was already blown with his long race, the burden in his arms dragged him down, the water rose slowly enough to make his torture fit for Dante’s hell.

“At first he could not understand why this was so, but in glancing down he saw to his horror that he had not properly closed the lower sluices; in each some eight or ten inches remained open, so that the stream was passing out nearly half as fast as it came in. It would be another fiveandtwenty minutes before the water would be high enough for him to grasp the top.

“He noted where the line of wet had reached to, on the smooth stone wall, then looked again after what he thought must be a lapse of ten minutes, and found it had risen half an inch, if that. Once or twice he shouted for help, but the effort taxed severely his already failing breath, and his voice only came back to him in a hundred echoes from his prison walls.

“Inch by inch the line of wet crept up, but the spending of his strength went on more swiftly. It seemed to him as if his inside were being gripped and torn slowly out: his whole body cried out to him to let it sink and lie in rest at the bottom.

“At length his unconscious burden opened its eyes and stared at him stupidly, then closed them again with a sigh; a minute later opened them once more, and looked long and hard at him.

“‘Let me go,’ he said, ‘we shall both drown. You can manage by yourself.’

“He made a feeble effort to release himself, but the other held him.

“‘Keep still, you fool!’ he hissed; ‘you’re going to get out of this with me, or I’m going down with you.’

“So the grim struggle went on in silence, till the man, looking up, saw the stone coping just a little way above his head, made one mad leap and caught it with his fingertips, held on an instant, then fell back with a ‘plump’ and sank; came up and made another dash, and, helped by the impetus of his rise, caught the coping firmly this time with the whole of his fingers, hung on till his eyes saw the stunted grass, till they were both able to scramble out upon the bank and lie there, their breasts pressed close against the ground, their hands clutching the earth, while the overflowing water swirled softly round them.

“After a while, they raised themselves and looked at one another.

“‘Tiring work,’ said the other man, with a nod towards the lock.

“‘Yes,’ answered the husband, ‘beastly awkward not being a good swimmer. How did you know I had fallen in? You met my wife, I suppose?’

“‘Yes,’ said the other man.

“The husband sat staring at a point in the horizon for some minutes. ‘Do you know what I was wondering this morning?’ said he.

“‘No,’ said the other man.

“‘Whether I should kill you or not.’

“‘They told me,’ he continued, after a pause, ‘a lot of silly gossip which I was cad enough to believe. I know now it wasn’t true, becausewell, if it had been, you would not have done what you have done.’

“He rose and came across. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, holding out his hand.

“‘I beg yours,’ said the other man, rising and taking it; ‘do you mind giving me a hand with the sluices?’

“They set to work to put the lock right.

“‘How did you manage to fall in?’ asked the other man, who was raising one of the lower sluices, without looking round.

“The husband hesitated, as if he found the explanation somewhat difficult. ‘Oh,’ he answered carelessly, ‘the wife and I were chaffing, and she said she’d often seen you jump it, and’he laughed a rather forced laugh‘she promised me aa kiss if I cleared it. It was a foolish thing to do.’

“‘Yes, it was rather,’ said the other man.

“A few days afterwards the man and woman met at a reception. He found her in a leafy corner of the garden talking to some friends. She advanced to meet him, holding out her hand. ‘What can I say more than thank you?’ she murmured in a low voice.

“The others moved away, leaving them alone. ‘They tell me you risked your life to save his?’ she said.

“‘Yes,’ he answered.

“She raised her eyes to his, then struck him across the face with her ungloved hand.

“‘You damned fool!’ she whispered.

“He seized her by her white arms, and forced her back behind the orange trees. ‘Do you know why?’ he said, speaking slowly and distinctly; ‘because I feared that, with him dead, you would want me to marry you, and that, talked about as we have been, I might find it awkward to avoid doing so; because I feared that, without him to stand between us, you might prove an annoyance to meperhaps come between me and the woman I love, the woman I am going back to. Now do you understand?’

“‘Yes,’ whispered the woman, and he left her.

“But there are only two people,” concluded Jephson, “who do not regard his saving of the husband’s life as a highly noble and unselfish action, and they are the man himself and the woman.”

We thanked Jephson for his story, and promised to profit by the moral, when discovered. Meanwhile, MacShaughnassy said that he knew a story dealing with the same theme, namely, the too close attachment of a woman to a strange man, which really had a moral, which moral was: don’t have anything to do with inventions.

Brown, who had patented a safety gun, which he had never yet found a man plucky enough to let off, said it was a bad moral. We agreed to hear the particulars, and judge for ourselves.

“This story,” commenced MacShaughnassy, “comes from Furtwangen, a small town in the Black Forest. There lived there a very wonderful old fellow named Nicholaus Geibel. His business was the making of mechanical toys, at which work he had acquired an almost European reputation. He made rabbits that would emerge from the heart of a cabbage, flap their ears, smooth their whiskers, and disappear again; cats that would wash their faces, and mew so naturally that dogs would mistake them for real cats, and fly at them; dolls, with phonographs concealed within them, that would raise their hats and say, ‘Good morning; how do you do?’ and some that would even sing a song.

“But he was something more than a mere mechanic; he was an artist. His work was with him a hobby, almost a passion. His shop was filled with all manner of strange things that never would, or could, be soldthings he had made for the pure love of making them. He had contrived a mechanical donkey that would trot for two hours by means of stored electricity, and trot, too, much faster than the live article, and with less need for exertion on the part of the driver; a bird that would shoot up into the air, fly round and round in a circle, and drop to earth at the exact spot from where it started; a skeleton that, supported by an upright iron bar, would dance a hornpipe; a lifesize lady doll that could play the fiddle; and a gentleman with a hollow inside who could smoke a pipe and drink more lager beer than any three average German students put together, which is saying much.

“Indeed, it was the belief of the town that old Geibel could make a man capable of doing everything that a respectable man need want to do. One day he made a man who did too much, and it came about in this way.

“Young Doctor Follen had a baby, and the baby had a birthday. Its first birthday put Doctor Follen’s household into somewhat of a flurry, but on the occasion of its second birthday, Mrs. Doctor Follen gave a ball in honour of the event. Old Geibel and his daughter Olga were among the guests.

“During the afternoon of the next day, some three or four of Olga’s bosom friends, who had also been present at the ball, dropped in to have a chat about it. They naturally fell to discussing the men, and to criticising their dancing. Old Geibel was in the room, but he appeared to be absorbed in his newspaper, and the girls took no notice of him.

“‘There seem to be fewer men who can dance, at every ball you go to,’ said one of the girls.

“‘Yes, and don’t the ones who can, give themselves airs,’ said another; ‘they make quite a favour of asking you.’

"'And how stupidly they talk,' added a third. 'They always say exactly the same things: "How charming you are looking tonight." "Do you often go to Vienna? Oh, you should, it's delightful." "What a charming dress you have on." "What a warm day it has been." "Do you like Wagner?" I do wish they'd think of something new.'

"'Oh, I never mind how they talk,' said a fourth. 'If a man dances well he may be a fool for all I care.'

"'He generally is,' slipped in a thin girl, rather spitefully.

"'I go to a ball to dance,' continued the previous speaker, not noticing the interruption. 'All I ask of a partner is that he shall hold me firmly, take me round steadily, and not get tired before I do.'

"'A clockwork figure would be the thing for you,' said the girl who had interrupted.

"'Bravo!' cried one of the others, clapping her hands, 'what a capital idea!'

"'What's a capital idea?' they asked.

"'Why, a clockwork dancer, or, better still, one that would go by electricity and never run down.'

"The girls took up the idea with enthusiasm.

"'Oh, what a lovely partner he would make,' said one; 'he would never kick you, or tread on your toes.'

"'Or tear your dress,' said another.

"'Or get out of step.'

"'Or get giddy and lean on you.'

"'And he would never want to mop his face with his handkerchief. I do hate to see a man do that after every dance.'

"'And wouldn't want to spend the whole evening in the supperroom.'

"'Why, with a phonograph inside him to grind out all the stock remarks, you would not be able to tell him from a real man,' said the girl who had first suggested the idea.

"'Oh yes, you would,' said the thin girl, 'he would be so much nicer.'

"Old Geibel had laid down his paper, and was listening with both his ears. On one of the girls glancing in his direction, however, he hurriedly hid himself again behind it.

"After the girls were gone, he went into his workshop, where Olga heard him walking up and down, and every now and then chuckling to himself; and that night he talked to her a good deal about dancing and dancing menasked what they usually said and didwhat dances were most popularwhat steps were gone through, with many other questions bearing on the subject.

"Then for a couple of weeks he kept much to his factory, and was very thoughtful and busy, though prone at unexpected moments to break into a quiet low laugh, as if enjoying a joke that nobody else knew of.

"A month later another ball took place in Furtwangen. On this occasion it was given by old Wenzel, the wealthy timber merchant, to celebrate his niece's betrothal, and Geibel and his daughter were again among the invited.

"When the hour arrived to set out, Olga sought her father. Not finding him in the house, she tapped at the door of his workshop. He appeared in his shirtsleeves, looking hot, but radiant.

"'Don't wait for me,' he said, 'you go on, I'll follow you. I've got something to finish.'

"As she turned to obey he called after her, 'Tell them I'm going to bring a young man with mesuch a nice young man, and an excellent dancer. All the girls will like him.' Then he laughed and closed the door.

"Her father generally kept his doings secret from everybody, but she had a pretty shrewd suspicion of what he had been planning, and so, to a certain extent, was able to prepare the guests for what was coming. Anticipation ran high, and the arrival of the famous mechanist was eagerly awaited.

"At length the sound of wheels was heard outside, followed by a great commotion in the passage, and old Wenzel himself, his jolly face red with excitement and suppressed laughter, burst into the room and announced in stentorian tones:

"'Herr Geibeland a friend.'

"Herr Geibel and his 'friend' entered, greeted with shouts of laughter and applause, and advanced to the centre of the room.

"'Allow me, ladies and gentlemen,' said Herr Geibel, 'to introduce you to my friend, Lieutenant Fritz. Fritz, my dear fellow, bow to the ladies and gentlemen.'

"Geibel placed his hand encouragingly on Fritz's shoulder, and the lieutenant bowed low, accompanying the action with a harsh clicking noise in his throat, unpleasantly suggestive of a death rattle. But that was only a detail.

"'He walks a little stiffly' (old Geibel took his arm and walked him forward a few steps. He certainly did walk stiffly), 'but then, walking is not his forte. He is essentially a dancing man. I have only been able to teach him the waltz as yet, but at that he is faultless. Come, which of you ladies may I introduce him to, as a partner? He keeps perfect time; he never gets tired; he won't kick you or tread on your dress; he will hold you as firmly as you like, and go as quickly or as slowly as you please; he never gets giddy; and he is full of conversation. Come, speak up for yourself, my boy.'

"The old gentleman twisted one of the buttons of his coat, and immediately Fritz opened his mouth, and in thin tones that appeared to proceed from the back of his head, remarked suddenly, 'May I have the pleasure?' and then shut his mouth again with a snap.

"That Lieutenant Fritz had made a strong impression on the company was undoubted, yet none of the girls seemed inclined to dance with him. They looked askance at his waxen face, with its staring eyes and fixed smile, and shuddered. At last old Geibel came to the girl who had conceived the idea.

"'It is your own suggestion, carried out to the letter,' said Geibel, 'an electric dancer. You owe it to the gentleman to give him a trial.'

"She was a bright saucy little girl, fond of a frolic. Her host added his entreaties, and she consented.

"Herr Geibel fixed the figure to her. Its right arm was screwed round her waist, and held her firmly; its delicately jointed left hand was made to fasten itself upon her right. The old toymaker showed her how to regulate its speed, and how to stop it, and release herself.

"'It will take you round in a complete circle,' he explained; 'be careful that no one knocks against you, and alters its course.'

"The music struck up. Old Geibel put the current in motion, and Annette and her strange partner began to dance.

"For a while every one stood watching them. The figure performed its purpose admirably. Keeping perfect time and step, and holding its little partner tightly clasped in an unyielding embrace, it revolved steadily, pouring forth at the same time a constant flow of squeaky conversation, broken by brief intervals of grinding silence.

"'How charming you are looking tonight,' it remarked in its thin, faraway voice. 'What a lovely day it has been. Do you like dancing? How well our steps agree. You will give me another, won't you? Oh, don't be so cruel. What a charming gown you have on. Isn't waltzing delightful? I could go on dancing for everwith you. Have you had supper?'

"As she grew more familiar with the uncanny creature, the girl's nervousness wore off, and she entered into the fun of the thing.

"'Oh, he's just lovely,' she cried, laughing, 'I could go on dancing with him all my life.'

"Couple after couple now joined them, and soon all the dancers in the room were whirling round behind them. Nicholaus Geibel stood looking on, beaming with childish delight at his success,

"Old Wenzel approached him, and whispered something in his ear. Geibel laughed and nodded, and the two worked their way quietly towards the door.

"'This is the young people's house tonight,' said Wenzel, as soon as they were outside; 'you and I will have a quiet pipe and a glass of hock, over in the countinghouse.'

"Meanwhile the dancing grew more fast and furious. Little Annette loosened the screw regulating her partner's rate of progress, and the figure flew round with her swifter and swifter. Couple after couple dropped out exhausted, but they only went the faster, till at length they were the only pair left dancing.

"Madder and madder became the waltz. The music lagged behind: the musicians, unable to keep pace, ceased, and sat staring. The younger guests applauded, but the older faces began to grow anxious.

"'Hadn't you better stop, dear,' said one of the women, 'You'll make yourself so tired.'

“But Annette did not answer.

“‘I believe she’s fainted,’ cried out a girl, who had caught sight of her face as it was swept by.

“One of the men sprang forward and clutched at the figure, but its impetus threw him down on to the floor, where its steelcased feet laid bare his cheek. The thing evidently did not intend to part with its prize easily.

“Had any one retained a cool head, the figure, one cannot help thinking, might easily have been stopped. Two or three men, acting in concert, might have lifted it bodily off the floor, or have jammed it into a corner. But few human heads are capable of remaining cool under excitement. Those who are not present think how stupid must have been those who were; those who are, reflect afterwards how simple it would have been to do this, that, or the other, if only they had thought of it at the time.

“The women grew hysterical. The men shouted contradictory directions to one another. Two of them made a bungling rush at the figure, which had the result of forcing it out of its orbit in the centre of the room, and sending it crashing against the walls and furniture. A stream of blood showed itself down the girl’s white frock, and followed her along the floor. The affair was becoming horrible. The women rushed screaming from the room. The men followed them.

“One sensible suggestion was made: ‘Find Geibelfetch Geibel.’

“No one had noticed him leave the room, no one knew where he was. A party went in search of him. The others, too unnerved to go back into the ballroom, crowded outside the door and listened. They could hear the steady whir of the wheels upon the polished floor, as the thing spun round and round; the dull thud as every now and again it dashed itself and its burden against some opposing object and ricocheted off in a new direction.

“And everlastingly it talked in that thin ghostly voice, repeating over and over the same formula: ‘How charming you are looking tonight. What a lovely day it has been. Oh, don’t be so cruel. I could go on dancing for everwith you. Have you had supper?’

“Of course they sought for Geibel everywhere but where he was. They looked in every room in the house, then they rushed off in a body to his own place, and spent precious minutes in waking up his deaf old housekeeper. At last it occurred to one of the party that Wenzel was missing also, and then the idea of the countinghouse across the yard presented itself to them, and there they found him.

“He rose up, very pale, and followed them; and he and old Wenzel forced their way through the crowd of guests gathered outside, and entered the room, and locked the door behind them.

“From within there came the muffled sound of low voices and quick steps, followed by a confused scuffling noise, then silence, then the low voices again.

“After a time the door opened, and those near it pressed forward to enter, but old Wenzel’s broad shoulders barred the way.

“‘I want youand you, Bekler,’ he said, addressing a couple of the elder men. His voice was calm, but his face was deadly white. ‘The rest of you, please goget the women away as quickly as you can.’

“From that day old Nicholaus Geibel confined himself to the making of mechanical rabbits and cats that mewed and washed their faces.”

We agreed that the moral of MacShaughnassy’s story was a good one.

3

How much more of ourfortunately not very valuabletime we devoted to this wonderful novel of ours, I cannot exactly say. Turning the dogs'eared leaves of the dilapidated diary that lies before me, I find the record of our later gatherings confused and incomplete. For weeks there does not appear a single word. Then comes an alarmingly businesslike minute of a meeting at which there were"Present: Jephson, MacShaughnassy, Brown, and Self"; and at which the "Proceedings commenced at 8.30." At what time the "proceedings" terminated, and what business was done, the chronicle, however, sayeth not; though, faintly pencilled in the margin of the page, I trace these hieroglyphics: "3.14.92.6.7," bringing out a result of "1.8.2." Evidently an unremunerative night.

On September 13th we seem to have become suddenly imbued with energy to a quite remarkable degree, for I read that we "Resolved to start the first chapter at once""at once" being underlined. After this spurt, we rest until October 4th, when we "Discussed whether it should be a novel of plot or of character," withoutso far as the diary affords indicationarriving at any definite decision. I observe that on the same day "Mac told a story about a man who accidentally bought a camel at a sale." Details of the story are, however, wanting, which, perhaps, is fortunate for the reader.

On the 16th, we were still debating the character of our hero; and I see that I suggested "a man of the Charley Buswell type."

Poor Charley, I wonder what could have made me think of him in connection with heroes; his lovableness, I supposecertainly not his heroic qualities. I can recall his boyish face now (it was always a boyish face), the tears streaming down it as he sat in the schoolyard beside a bucket, in which he was drowning three white mice and a tame rat. I sat down opposite and cried too, while helping him to hold a saucepan lid over the poor little creatures, and thus there sprang up a friendship between us, which grew.

Over the grave of these murdered rodents, he took a solemn oath never to break school rules again, by keeping either white mice or tame rats, but to devote the whole of his energies for the future to pleasing his masters, and affording his parents some satisfaction for the money being spent upon his education.

Seven weeks later, the pervadence throughout the dormitory of an atmospheric effect more curious than pleasing led to the discovery that he had converted his box into a rabbit hutch. Confronted with eleven kicking witnesses, and reminded of his former promises, he explained that rabbits were not mice, and seemed to consider that a new and vexatious regulation had been sprung upon him. The rabbits were confiscated.

What was their ultimate fate, we never knew with certainty, but three days later we were given rabbitpie for dinner. To comfort him I endeavoured to assure him that these could not be his rabbits. He, however, convinced that they were, cried steadily into his plate all the time that he was eating them, and afterwards, in the playground, had a standup fight with a fourth form boy who had requested a second helping.

That evening he performed another solemn oathtaking, and for the next month was the model boy of the school. He read tracts, sent his spare pocketmoney to assist in annoying the heathen, and subscribed to The Young Christian and The Weekly Rambler, an Evangelical Miscellany (whatever that may mean). An undiluted course of this pernicious literature naturally created in him a desire towards the opposite extreme. He suddenly dropped The Young Christian and The Weekly Rambler, and purchased penny dreadfuls; and taking no further interest in the welfare of the heathen, saved up and bought a secondhand revolver and a hundred cartridges. His ambition, he confided to me, was to become "a dead shot," and the marvel of it is that he did not succeed.

Of course, there followed the usual discovery and consequent trouble, the usual repentance and reformation, the usual determination to start a new life.

Poor fellow, he lived "starting a new life." Every New Year's Day he would start a new lifeon his birthdayon other people's birthdays. I fancy that, later on, when he came to know their importance, he extended the principle to quarter days. "Tidying up, and starting afresh," he always called it.

I think as a young man he was better than most of us. But he lacked that great gift which is the distinguishing feature of the Englishspeaking race all the world over, the gift of hypocrisy. He seemed incapable of doing the slightest thing without getting found out; a grave misfortune for a man to suffer from, this.

Dear simplehearted fellow, it never occurred to him that he was as other menwith, perhaps, a dash of straightforwardness added; he regarded himself as a monster of depravity. One evening I found him in his chambers engaged upon his Sisyphean labour of "tidying up." A heap of letters, photographs, and bills lay before him. He was tearing them up and throwing them into the fire.

I came towards him, but he stopped me. "Don't come near me," he cried, "don't touch me. I'm not fit to shake hands with a decent man."

It was the sort of speech to make one feel hot and uncomfortable. I did not know what to answer, and murmured something about his being no worse than the average.

“Don’t talk like that,” he answered excitedly; “you say that to comfort me, I know; but I don’t like to hear it. If I thought other men were like me I should be ashamed of being a man. I’ve been a blackguard, old fellow, but, please God, it’s not too late. Tomorrow morning I begin a new life.”

He finished his work of destruction, and then rang the bell, and sent his man downstairs for a bottle of champagne.

“My last drink,” he said, as we clicked glasses. “Here’s to the old life out, and the new life in.”

He took a sip and flung the glass with the remainder into the fire. He was always a little theatrical, especially when most in earnest.

For a long while after that I saw nothing of him. Then, one evening, sitting down to supper at a restaurant, I noticed him opposite to me in company that could hardly be called doubtful.

He flushed and came over to me. “I’ve been an old woman for nearly six months,” he said, with a laugh. “I find I can’t stand it any longer.”

“After all,” he continued, “what is life for but to live? It’s only hypocritical to try and be a thing we are not. And do you know”he leant across the table, speaking earnestly“honestly and seriously, I’m a better manI feel it and know itwhen I am my natural self than when I am trying to be an impossible saint.”

That was the mistake he made; he always ran to extremes. He thought that an oath, if it were only big enough, would frighten away Human Nature, instead of serving only as a challenge to it. Accordingly, each reformation was more intemperate than the last, to be duly followed by a greater swing of the pendulum in the opposite direction.

Being now in a thoroughly reckless mood, he went the pace rather hotly. Then, one evening, without any previous warning, I had a note from him. “Come round and see me on Thursday. It is my wedding eve.”

I went. He was once more “tidying up.” All his drawers were open, and on the table were piled packs of cards, betting books, and much written paper, all, as before, in course of demolition.

I smiled: I could not help it, and, no way abashed, he laughed his usual hearty, honest laugh.

“I know,” he exclaimed gaily, “but this is not the same as the others.”

Then, laying his hand on my shoulder, and speaking with the sudden seriousness that comes so readily to shallow natures, he said, “God has heard my prayer, old friend. He knows I am weak. He has sent down an angel out of Heaven to help me.”

He took her portrait from the mantelpiece and handed it me. It seemed to me the face of a hard, narrow woman, but, of course, he raved about her.

As he talked, there fluttered to the ground from the heap before him an old restaurant bill, and, stooping, he picked it up and held it in his hand, musing.

“Have you ever noticed how the scent of the champagne and the candles seems to cling to these things?” he said lightly, sniffing carelessly at it. “I wonder what’s become of her?”

“I think I wouldn’t think about her at all tonight,” I answered.

He loosened his hand, letting the paper fall into the fire.

“My God!” he cried vehemently, “when I think of all the wrong I have donethe irreparable, everwidening ruin I have perhaps brought into the worldO God! spare me a long life that I may make amends. Every hour, every minute of it shall be devoted to your service.”

As he stood there, with his eager boyish eyes upraised, a light seemed to fall upon his face and illumine it. I had pushed the photograph back to him, and it lay upon the table before him. He knelt and pressed his lips to it.

“With your help, my darling, and His,” he murmured.

The next morning he was married. She was a wellmeaning girl, though her piety, as is the case with most people, was of the negative order; and her antipathy to things evil much stronger than her sympathy with things good. For a longer time than I had expected she kept him straightperhaps a little too straight. But at last there came the inevitable relapse.

I called upon him, in answer to an excited message, and found him in the depths of despair. It was the old story, human weakness, combined with lamentable lack of the most ordinary precautions against being found out. He gave me details, interspersed

with exuberant denunciations of himself, and I undertook the delicate task of peacemaker.

It was a weary work, but eventually she consented to forgive him. His joy, when I told him, was boundless.

“How good women are,” he said, while the tears came into his eyes. “But she shall not repent it. Please God, from this day forth, I’ll”

He stopped, and for the first time in his life the doubt of himself crossed his mind. As I sat watching him, the joy died out of his face, and the first hint of age passed over it.

“I seem to have been ‘tidying up and starting afresh’ all my life,” he said wearily; “I’m beginning to see where the untidiness lies, and the only way to get rid of it.”

I did not understand the meaning of his words at the time, but learnt it later on.

He strove, according to his strength, and fell. But by a miracle his transgression was not discovered. The facts came to light long afterwards, but at the time there were only two who knew.

It was his last failure. Late one evening I received a hurriedlyscrawled note from his wife, begging me to come round.

“A terrible thing has happened,” it ran; “Charley went up to his study after dinner, saying he had some ‘tidying up,’ as he calls it, to do, and did not wish to be disturbed. In clearing out his desk he must have handled carelessly the revolver that he always keeps there, not remembering, I suppose, that it was loaded. We heard a report, and on rushing into the room found him lying dead on the floor. The bullet had passed right through his heart.”

Hardly the type of man for a hero! And yet I do not know. Perhaps he fought harder than many a man who conquers. In the world’s courts, we are compelled to judge on circumstantial evidence only, and the chief witness, the man’s soul, cannot very well be called.

I remember the subject of bravery being discussed one evening at a dinner party, when a German gentleman present related an anecdote, the hero of which was a young Prussian officer.

“I cannot give you his name,” our German friend explained“the man himself told me the story in confidence; and though he personally, by virtue of his after record, could afford to have it known, there are other reasons why it should not be bruited about.

“How I learnt it was in this way. For a dashing exploit performed during the brief war against Austria he had been presented with the Iron Cross. This, as you are well aware, is the most highlyprized decoration in our army; men who have earned it are usually conceited about it, and, indeed, have some excuse for being so. He, on the contrary, kept his locked in a drawer of his desk, and never wore it except when compelled by official etiquette. The mere sight of it seemed to be painful to him. One day I asked him the reason. We are very old and close friends, and he told me.

“The incident occurred when he was a young lieutenant. Indeed, it was his first engagement. By some means or another he had become separated from his company, and, unable to regain it, had attached himself to a line regiment stationed at the extreme right of the Prussian lines.

“The enemy’s effort was mainly directed against the left centre, and for a while our young lieutenant was nothing more than a distant spectator of the battle. Suddenly, however, the attack shifted, and the regiment found itself occupying an extremely important and critical position. The shells began to fall unpleasantly near, and the order was given to ‘grass.’

“The men fell upon their faces and waited. The shells ploughed the ground around them, smothering them with dirt. A horrible, griping pain started in my young friend’s stomach, and began creeping upwards. His head and heart both seemed to be shrinking and growing cold. A shot tore off the head of the man next to him, sending the blood spurting into his face; a minute later another ripped open the back of a poor fellow lying to the front of him.

“His body seemed not to belong to himself at all. A strange, shrivelled creature had taken possession of it. He raised his head and peered about him. He and three soldiersyoungsters, like himself, who had never before been under fireappeared to be utterly alone in that hell. They were the end men of the regiment, and the configuration of the ground completely hid them from their comrades.

“They glanced at each other, these four, and read one another’s thoughts. Leaving their rifles lying on the grass, they commenced to crawl stealthily upon their bellies, the lieutenant leading, the other three following.

“Some few hundred yards in front of them rose a small, steep hill. If they could reach this it would shut them out of sight. They hastened on, pausing every thirty yards or so to lie still and pant for breath, then hurrying on again, quicker than before, tearing their flesh against the broken ground.

“At last they reached the base of the slope, and slinking a little way round it, raised their heads and looked back. Where they were it was impossible for them to be seen from the Prussian lines.

“They sprang to their feet and broke into a wild race. A dozen steps further they came face to face with an Austrian field battery.

“The demon that had taken possession of them had been growing stronger the further they had fled. They were not men, they were animals mad with fear. Driven by the same frenzy that prompted other panicstricken creatures to once rush down a steep place into the sea, these four men, with a yell, flung themselves, sword in hand, upon the whole battery; and the whole battery, bewildered by the suddenness and unexpectedness of the attack, thinking the entire battalion was upon them, gave way, and rushed pellmell down the hill.

“With the sight of those flying Austrians the fear, as independently as it had come to him, left him, and he felt only a desire to hack and kill. The four Prussians flew after them, cutting and stabbing at them as they ran; and when the Prussian cavalry came thundering up, they found my young lieutenant and his three friends had captured two guns and accounted for half a score of the enemy.

“Next day, he was summoned to headquarters.

“‘Will you be good enough to remember for the future, sir,’ said the Chief of the Staff, ‘that His Majesty does not require his lieutenants to execute manoeuvres on their own responsibility, and also that to attack a battery with three men is not war, but damned tomfoolery. You ought to be courtmartialled, sir!’

“Then, in somewhat different tones, the old soldier added, his face softening into a smile: ‘However, alertness and daring, my young friend, are good qualities, especially when crowned with success. If the Austrians had once succeeded in planting a battery on that hill it might have been difficult to dislodge them. Perhaps, under the circumstances, His Majesty may overlook your indiscretion.’

"'His Majesty not only overlooked it, but bestowed upon me the Iron Cross,' concluded my friend. 'For the credit of the army, I judged it better to keep quiet and take it. But, as you can understand, the sight of it does not recall very pleasurable reflections.'"

To return to my diary, I see that on November 14th we held another meeting. But at this there were present only "Jephson, MacShaughnassy, and Self"; and of Brown's name I find henceforth no further trace. On Christmas eve we three met again, and my notes inform me that MacShaughnassy brewed some whiskeypunch, according to a recipe of his own, a record suggestive of a sad Christmas for all three of us. No particular business appears to have been accomplished on either occasion.

Then there is a break until February 8th, and the assemblage has shrunk to "Jephson and Self." With a final flicker, as of a dying candle, my diary at this point, however, grows luminous, shedding much light upon that evening's conversation.

Our talk seems to have been of many thingsof most things, in fact, except our novel. Among other subjects we spoke of literature generally.

"I am tired of this eternal cackle about books," said Jephson; "these columns of criticism to every line of writing; these endless books about books; these shrill praises and shrill denunciations; this silly worship of novelist Tom; this silly hate of poet Dick; this silly squabbling over playwright Harry. There is no soberness, no sense in it all. One would think, to listen to the High Priests of Culture, that man was made for literature, not literature for man. Thought existed before the Printing Press; and the men who wrote the best hundred books never read them. Books have their place in the world, but they are not its purpose. They are things side by side with beef and mutton, the scent of the sea, the touch of a hand, the memory of a hope, and all the other items in the sumtotal of our threescore years and ten. Yet we speak of them as though they were the voice of Life instead of merely its faint echo. Tales are delightful as talessweet as primroses after the long winter, restful as the cawing of rooks at sunset. But we do not write 'tales' now; we prepare 'human documents' and dissect souls."

He broke off abruptly in the midst of his tirade. "Do you know what these 'psychological studies,' that are so fashionable just now, always make me think of?" he said. "One monkey examining another monkey for fleas.

"And what, after all, does our dissecting pen lay bare?" he continued. "Human nature? or merely some more or less unsavoury undergarment, disguising and disfiguring human nature? There is a story told of an elderly tramp, who, overtaken by misfortune,

was compelled to retire for a while to the seclusion of Portland. His hosts, desiring to see as much as possible of their guest during his limited stay with them, proceeded to bath him. They bathed him twice a day for a week, each time learning more of him; until at last they reached a flannel shirt. And with that they had to be content, soap and water proving powerless to go further.

"That tramp appears to me symbolical of mankind. Human Nature has worn its conventions for so long that its habit has grown on to it. In this nineteenth century it is impossible to say where the clothes of custom end and the natural man begins. Our virtues are taught to us as a branch of 'Deportment'; our vices are the recognised vices of our reign and set. Our religion hangs readymade beside our cradle to be buttoned upon us by loving hands. Our tastes we acquire, with difficulty; our sentiments we learn by rote. At cost of infinite suffering, we study to love whiskey and cigars, high art and classical music. In one age we admire Byron and drink sweet champagne: twenty years later it is more fashionable to prefer Shelley, and we like our champagne dry. At school we are told that Shakespeare is a great poet, and that the Venus di Medici is a fine piece of sculpture; and so for the rest of our lives we go about saying what a great poet we think Shakespeare, and that there is no piece of sculpture, in our opinion, so fine as the Venus di Medici. If we are Frenchmen we adore our mother; if Englishmen we love dogs and virtue. We grieve for the death of a near relative twelve months; but for a second cousin we sorrow only three. The good man has his regulation excellencies to strive after, his regulation sins to repent of. I knew a good man who was quite troubled because he was not proud, and could not, therefore, with any reasonableness, pray for humility. In society one must needs be cynical and mildly wicked: in Bohemia, orthodoxly unorthodox. I remember my mother expostulating with a friend, an actress, who had left a devoted husband and eloped with a disagreeable, ugly, little low comedian (I am speaking of long, long ago).

"'You must be mad,' said my mother; 'what on earth induced you to take such a step?'

"'My dear Emma,' replied the lady; 'what else was there for me? You know I can't act. I had to do something to show I was 'an artiste!'

"We are dressedup marionettes. Our voice is the voice of the unseen showman, Convention; our very movements of passion and pain are but in answer to his jerk. A man resembles one of those gigantic bundles that one sees in nursemaids' arms. It is very bulky and very long; it looks a mass of delicate lace and rich fur and fine woven stuffs; and somewhere, hidden out of sight among the finery, there is a tiny red bit of bewildered humanity, with no voice but a foolish cry.

“There is but one story,” he went on, after a long pause, uttering his own thoughts aloud rather than speaking to me. “We sit at our desks and think and think, and write and write, but the story is ever the same. Men told it and men listened to it many years ago; we are telling it to one another today; we shall be telling it to one another a thousand years hence; and the story is: ‘Once upon a time there lived a man, and a woman who loved him.’ The little critic cries that it is not new, and asks for something fresh, thinkingas children dothat there are strange things in the world.”

At that point my notes end, and there is nothing in the book beyond. Whether any of us thought any more of the novel, whether we ever met again to discuss it, whether it were ever begun, whether it were ever abandonedI cannot say. There is a fairy story that I read many, many years ago that has never ceased to haunt me. It told how a little boy once climbed a rainbow. And at the end of the rainbow, just behind the clouds, he found a wondrous city. Its houses were of gold, and its streets were paved with silver, and the light that shone upon it was as the light that lies upon the sleeping world at dawn. In this city there were palaces so beautiful that merely to look upon them satisfied all desires; temples so perfect that they who once knelt therein were cleansed of sin. And all the men who dwelt in this wondrous city were great and good, and the women fairer than the women of a young man’s dreams. And the name of the city was, “The city of the things men meant to do.”