The American Husband

By

Jerome K. Jerome

The American Husband

I

THE AMERICAN HUSBAND MADE ENTIRELY OF STAINED GLASS.

I am glad I am not an American husband. At first sight this may appear a remark uncomplimentary to the American wife. It is nothing of the sort. It is the other way about. We, in Europe, have plenty of opportunity of judging the American wife. In America you hear of the American wife, you are told stories about the American wife, you see her portrait in the illustrated journals. By searching under the heading "Foreign Intelligence," you can find out what she is doing. But here in Europe we know her, meet her face to face, talk to her, flirt with her. She is charming, delightful. That is why I say I am glad I am not an American husband. If the American husband only knew how nice was the American wife, he would sell his business and come over here, where now and then he could see her.

Years ago, when I first began to travel about Europe, I argued to myself that America must be a deadly place to live in. How sad it is, I thought to myself, to meet thus, wherever one goes, American widows by the thousand. In one narrow bystreet of Dresden I calculated fourteen American mothers, possessing nineandtwenty American children, and not a father among themnot a single husband among the whole fourteen. I pictured fourteen lonely graves, scattered over the United States. I saw as in a vision those fourteen headstones of best material, handcarved, recording the virtues of those fourteen dead and buried husbands.

Odd, thought I to myself, decidedly odd. These American husbands, they must be a delicate type of humanity. The wonder is their mothers ever reared them. They marry fine girls, the majority of them; two or three sweet children are born to them, and after that there appears to be no further use for them, as far as this world is concerned. Can nothing be done to strengthen their constitutions? Would a tonic be of any help to them? Not the customary tonic, I don't mean, the sort of tonic merely intended to make gouty old gentlemen feel they want to buy a hoop, but the sort of tonic for which it was claimed that three drops poured upon a ham sandwich and the thing would begin to squeak.

It struck me as pathetic, the picture of these American widows leaving their native land, coming over in shiploads to spend the rest of their blighted lives in exile. The mere thought of America, I took it, had for ever become to them distasteful. The ground that once his feet had pressed! The old familiar places once lighted by his smile! Everything

in America would remind them of him. Snatching their babes to their heaving bosoms they would leave the country where lay buried all the joy of their lives, seek in the retirement of Paris, Florence or Vienna, oblivion of the past.

Also, it struck me as beautiful, the noble resignation with which they bore their grief, hiding their sorrow from the indifferent stranger. Some widows make a fuss, go about for weeks looking gloomy and depressed, making not the slightest effort to be merry. These fourteen widowsI knew them personally, all of them, I lived in the same streetwhat a brave show of cheerfulness they put on! What a lesson to the common or European widow, the humpy type of widow! One could spend whole days in their companyI had done itcommencing quite early in the morning with a sleighing excursion, finishing up quite late in the evening with a little supper party, followed by an impromptu dance; and never detect from their outward manner that they were not thoroughly enjoying themselves.

From the mothers I turned my admiring eyes towards the children. This is the secret of American success, said I to myself; this highspirited courage, this Spartan contempt for suffering. Look at them! the gallant little men and women. Who would think that they had lost a father? Why, I have seen a British child more upset at losing sixpence.

Talking to a little girl one day, I enquired of her concerning the health of her father. The next moment I could have bitten my tongue out, remembering that there wasn't such a thing as a fathernot an American fatherin the whole street. She did not burst into tears as they do in the storybooks. She said:

"He is quite well, thank you," simply, pathetically, just like that.

"I am sure of it," I replied with fervour, "well and happy as he deserves to be, and one day you will find him again; you will go to him."

"Ah, yes," she answered, a shining light, it seemed to me, upon her fair young face. "Momma says she is getting just a bit tired of this onehorse sort of place. She is quite looking forward to seeing him again."

It touched me very deeply: this weary woman, tired of her long bereavement, actually looking forward to the fearsome passage leading to where her loved one waited for her in a better land.

For one bright breezy creature I grew to feel a real regard. All the months that I had known her, seen her almost daily, never once had I heard a single cry of pain escape her lips, never once had I heard her cursing fate. Of the many who called upon her in her

charming flat, not one had ever, to my knowledge, offered her consolation or condolence. It seemed to me cruel, callous. The overburdened heart, finding no outlet for its imprisoned grief, finding no sympathetic ear into which to pour its tale of woe, breaks, we are told; anyhow, it isn't good for it. I decidedno one else seeming keenthat I would supply that sympathetic ear. The very next time I found myself alone with her I introduced the subject.

"You have been living here in Dresden a long time, have you not?" I asked.

"About five years," she answered, "on and off."

"And all alone," I commented, with a sigh intended to invite to confidence.

"Well, hardly alone," she corrected me, while a look of patient resignation added dignity to her piquant features. "You see, there are the dear children always round about me, during the holidays."

"Besides," she added, "the people here are real kind to me; they hardly ever let me feel myself alone. We make up little parties, you know, picnics and excursions. And then, of course, there is the Opera and the Symphony Concerts, and the subscription dances. The dear old king has been doing a good deal this winter, too; and I must say the Embassy folks have been most thoughtful, so far as I am concerned. No, it would not be right for me to complain of loneliness, not now that I have got to know a few people, as it were."

"But don't you miss your husband?" I suggested.

A cloud passed over her usually sunny face. "Oh, please don't talk of him," she said, "it makes me feel real sad, thinking about him."

But having commenced, I was determined that my sympathy should not be left to waste.

"What did he die of?" I asked.

She gave me a look the pathos of which I shall never forget.

"Say, young man," she cried, "are you trying to break it to me gently? Because if so, I'd rather you told me straight out. What did he die of?"

"Then isn't he dead?" I asked, "I mean so far as you know."

“Never heard a word about his being dead till you started the idea,” she retorted. “So far as I know he’s alive and well.”

I said that I was sorry. I went on to explain that I did not mean I was sorry to hear that in all probability he was alive and well. What I meant was I was sorry I had introduced a painful subject.

“What’s a painful subject?”

“Why, your husband,” I replied.

“But why should you call him a painful subject?”

I had an idea she was getting angry with me. She did not say so. I gathered it. But I had to explain myself somehow.

“Well,” I answered, “I take it, you didn’t get on well together, and I am sure it must have been his fault.”

“Now look here,” she said, “don’t you breathe a word against my husband or we shall quarrel. A nicer, dearer fellow never lived.”

“Then what did you divorce him for?” I asked. It was impertinent, it was unjustifiable. My excuse is that the mystery surrounding the American husband had been worrying me for months. Here had I stumbled upon the opportunity of solving it. Instinctively I clung to my advantage.

“There hasn’t been any divorce,” she said. “There isn’t going to be any divorce. You’ll make me cross in another minute.”

But I was becoming reckless. “He is not dead. You are not divorced from him. Where is he?” I demanded with some heat.

“Where is he?” she replied, astonished. “Where should he be? At home, of course.”

I looked around the luxuriouslyfurnished room with its air of cosy comfort, of substantial restfulness.

“What home?” I asked.

“What home! Why, our home, in Detroit.”

“What is he doing there?” I had become so much in earnest that my voice had assumed unconsciously an authoritative tone. Presumably, it hypnotised her, for she answered my questions as though she had been in the witnessbox.

“How do I know? How can I possibly tell you what he is doing? What do people usually do at home?”

“Answer the questions, madam, don’t ask them. What are you doing here? Quite truthfully, if you please.” My eyes were fixed upon her.

“Enjoying myself. He likes me to enjoy myself. Besides, I am educating the children.”

“You mean they are here at boardingschool while you are gadding about. What is wrong with American education? When did you see your husband last?”

“Last? Let me see. No, last Christmas I was in Berlin. It must have been the Christmas before, I think.”

“If he is the dear kind fellow you say he is, how is it you haven’t seen him for two years?”

“Because, as I tell you, he is at home, in Detroit. How can I see him when I am here in Dresden and he is in Detroit? You do ask foolish questions. He means to try and come over in the summer, if he can spare the time, and then, of course

“Answer my questions, please. I’ve spoken to you once about it. Do you think you are performing your duty as a wife, enjoying yourself in Dresden and Berlin while your husband is working hard in Detroit?”

“He was quite willing for me to come. The American husband is a good fellow who likes his wife to enjoy herself.”

“I am not asking for your views on the American husband. I am asking your views on the American wifeon yourself. The American husband appears to be a sort of stainedglass saint, and you American wives are imposing upon him. It is doing you no good, and it won’t go on for ever. There will come a day when the American husband will wake up to the fact he is making a fool of himself, and by overindulgence, overdevotion, turning the American woman into a heartless, selfish creature. What sort of a home do you think it is in Detroit, with you and the children over here? Tell me, is the American husband made entirely of driven snow, with blood distilled from moonbeams, or is he composed of the ordinary ingredients? Because, if the latter, you

take my advice and get back home. I take it that in America, proper, there are millions of real homes where the woman does her duty and plays the game. But also it is quite clear there are thousands of homes in America, mere echoing rooms, where the man walks by himself, his wife and children scattered over Europe. It isn't going to work, it isn't right that it should work."

"You take the advice of a sincere friend. Pack upyou and the childrenand get home."

I left. It was growing late. I felt it was time to leave. Whether she took my counsel I cannot say. I only know that there still remain in Europe a goodly number of American wives to whom it is applicable.

II

THE YOUNG MAN KNOW EVERYTHING WORTH KNOWING

I am told that American professors are "mourning the lack of ideals" at Columbia Universitypossibly also at other universities scattered through the United States. If it be any consolation to these mourning American professors, I can assure them that they do not mourn alone. I live not far from Oxford, and enjoy the advantage of occasionally listening to the jeremiads of English University professors. More than once a German professor has done me the honour to employ me as an object on which to sharpen his English. He also has mourned similar lack of ideals at Heidelberg, at Bonn. Youth is youth all the world over; it has its own ideals; they are not those of the University professor. The explanation is tolerably simple. Youth is young, and the University professor, generally speaking, is middleaged.

I can sympathise with the mourning professor. I, in my time, have suffered like despair. I remember the day so well; it was my twelfth birthday. I recall the unholy joy with which I reflected that for the future my unfortunate parents would be called upon to pay for me full railway fare; it marked a decided step towards manhood. I was now in my teens. That very afternoon there came to visit us a relative of ours. She brought with her three small children: a girl, aged six; a precious, goldenhaired thing in a lace collar that called itself a boy, aged five; and a third still smaller creature, it might have been male, it might have been female; I could not have told you at the time, I cannot tell you now. This collection of atoms was handed over to me.

"Now, show yourself a man," said my dear mother, "remember you are in your teens. Take them out for a walk and amuse them; and mind nothing happens to them."

To the children themselves their own mother gave instructions that they were to do everything that I told them, and not to tear their clothes or make themselves untidy. These directions, even to myself, at the time, appeared contradictory. But I said nothing. And out into the wilds the four of us departed.

I was an only child. My own infancy had passed from my memory. To me, at twelve, the ideas of six were as incomprehensible as are those of twenty to the University professor of forty. I wanted to be a pirate. Round the corner and across the road building operations were in progress. Planks and poles lay ready to one's hand. Nature, in the neighbourhood, had placed conveniently a shallow pond. It was Saturday afternoon. The nearest publichouse was a mile away. Immunity from interference by the British workman was thus assured. It occurred to me that by placing my three depressed looking relatives on one raft, attacking them myself from another, taking the eldest girl's

sixpence away from her, disabling their raft, and leaving them to drift without a rudder, innocent amusement would be provided for half an hour at least.

They did not want to play at pirates. At first sight of the pond the thing that called itself a boy began to cry. The sixyearold lady said she did not like the smell of it. Not even after I had explained the game to them were they any the more enthusiastic for it.

I proposed Red Indians. They could go to sleep in the unfinished building upon a sack of lime, I would creep up through the grass, set fire to the house, and dance round it, whooping and waving my tomahawk, watching with fiendish delight the frantic but futile efforts of the palefaces to escape their doom.

It did not "catch on"not even that. The precious thing in the lace collar began to cry again. The creature concerning whom I could not have told you whether it was male or female made no attempt at argument, but started to run; it seemed to have taken a dislike to this particular field. It stumbled over a scaffolding pole, and then it also began to cry. What could one do to amuse such people? I left it to them to propose something. They thought they would like to play at "Mothers"not in this field, but in some other field.

The eldest girl would be mother. The other two would represent her children. They had been taken suddenly ill. "Waterworks," as I had christened him, was to hold his hands to his middle and groan. His face brightened up at the suggestion. The nondescript had the toothache. It took up its part without a moment's hesitation, and set to work to scream. I could be the doctor and look at their tongues.

That was their "ideal" game. As I have said, remembering that afternoon, I can sympathise with the University professor mourning the absence of University ideals in youth. Possibly at six my own ideal game may have been "Mothers." Looking back from the pile of birthdays upon which I now stand, it occurs to me that very probably it was. But from the perspective of twelve, the reflection that there were beings in the world who could find recreation in such fooling saddened me.

Eight years later, his father not being able to afford the time, I conducted Master "Waterworks," now a healthy, uninteresting, gawky lad, to a school in Switzerland. It was my first Continental trip. I should have enjoyed it better had he not been with me. He thought Paris a "beastly hole." He did not share my admiration for the Frenchwoman; he even thought her badly dressed.

"Why she's so tied up, she can't walk straight," was the only impression she left upon him.

We changed the subject; it irritated me to hear him talk. The beautiful Junolike creatures we came across further on in Germany, he said were too fat. He wanted to see them run. I found him utterly soulless.

To expect a boy to love learning and culture is like expecting him to prefer old vintage claret to gooseberry wine. Culture for the majority is an acquired taste. Speaking personally, I am entirely in agreement with the University professor. I find knowledge, prompting to observation and leading to reflection, the most satisfactory luggage with which a traveller through life can provide himself. I would that I had more of it. To be able to enjoy a picture is of more advantage than to be able to buy it.

All that the University professor can urge in favour of idealism I am prepared to endorse. But then I amlet us say, thirtynine. At fourteen my candid opinion was that he was talking "rot." I looked at the old gentleman himselfa narrowchested, spectacled old gentleman, who lived up a by street. He did not seem to have much fun of any sort. It was not my ideal. He told me things had been written in a language called Greek that I should enjoy reading, but I had not even read all Captain Marryat. There were tales by Sir Walter Scott and "Jack Harkaway's Schooldays!" I felt I could wait a while. There was a chap called Aristophanes who had written comedies, satirising the political institutions of a country that had disappeared two thousand years ago. I say, without shame, Drury Lane pantomime and Barnum's Circus called to me more strongly.

Wishing to give the old gentleman a chance, I dipped into translations. Some of these old fellows were not as bad as I had imagined them. A party named Homer had written some really interesting stuff. Here and there, maybe, he was a bit longwinded, but, taking him as a whole, there was "go" in him. There was another of themOvid was his name. He could tell a story, Ovid could. He had imagination. He was almost as good as "Robinson Crusoe." I thought it would please my professor, telling him that I was reading these, his favourite authors.

"Reading them!" he cried, "but you don't know Greek or Latin."

"But I know English," I answered; "they have all been translated into English. You never told me that!"

It appeared it was not the same thing. There were subtle delicacies of diction bound to escape even the best translator. These subtle delicacies of diction I could enjoy only by devoting the next seven or eight years of my life to the study of Greek and Latin. It will grieve the University professor to hear it, but the enjoyment of those subtle delicacies of

diction did not appear to meI was only fourteen at the time, please rememberto be worth the time and trouble.

The boy is materially inclinedthe mourning American professor has discovered it. I did not want to be an idealist living up a back street. I wanted to live in the biggest house in the best street of the town. I wanted to ride a horse, wear a fur coat, and have as much to eat and drink as ever I liked. I wanted to marry the most beautiful woman in the world, to have my name in the newspaper, and to know that everybody was envying me.

Mourn over it, my dear professor, as you willthat is the ideal of youth; and, so long as human nature remains what it is, will continue to be so. It is a materialistic ideala sordid ideal. Maybe it is necessary. Maybe the world would not move much if the young men started thinking too early. They want to be rich, so they fling themselves frenziedly into the struggle. They build the towns, and make the railway tracks, hew down the forests, dig the ore out of the ground. There comes a day when it is borne in upon them that trying to get rich is a poor sort of gamethat there is only one thing more tiresome than being a millionaire, and that is trying to be a millionaire. But, meanwhile, the world has got its work done.

The American professor fears that the artistic development of America leaves much to be desired. I fear the artistic development of most countries leaves much to be desired. Why the Athenians themselves sandwiched their drama between wrestling competitions and boxing bouts. The plays of Sophocles, or Euripides, were given as "side shows." The chief items of the fair were the games and races. Besides, America is still a young man. It has been busy "getting on in the world." It has not yet quite finished. Yet there are signs that young America is approaching the thirtynines. He is finding a little time, a little money to spare for art. One can almost hear young Americanot quite so young as he wassaying to Mrs. Europe as he enters and closes the shop door:

"Well, ma'am, here I am, and maybe you'll be glad to hear I've a little money to spend. Yes, ma'am, I've fixed things all right across the water; we shan't starve. So now, ma'am, you and I can have a chat concerning this art I've been hearing so much about. Let's have a look at it, ma'am, trot it out, and don't you be afraid of putting a fair price upon it."

I am inclined to think that Mrs. Europe has not hesitated to put a good price upon the art she has sold to Uncle Sam. I am afraid Mrs. Europe has occasionally "unloaded" on Uncle Sam. I talked to a certain dealer one afternoon, now many years ago, at the Uwantit Club.

“What is the next picture likely to be missing?” I asked him in the course of general conversation.

“Thome little thing of Hoppner’th, if it mutht be,” he replied with confidence.

“Hoppner,” I murmured, “I seem to have heard the name.”

“Yeth; you’ll hear it a bit oftener during the next eighteen month or tho. You take care you don’t get tired of hearing it, thath all,” he laughed. “Yeth,” he continued, thoughtfully, “Reynoldth ith played out. Nothing much to be made of Gainthborough, either. Dealing in that lot now, why, it’th like keeping a potht offith. Hoppner’th the coming man.”

“You’ve been buying Hoppners up cheap,” I suggested.

“Between uth,” he answered, “yeth, I think we’ve got them all. Maybe a few more. I don’t think we’ve mithed any.”

“You will sell them for more than you gave for them,” I hinted.

“You’re thmart,” he answered, regarding me admiringly, “you thee through everything you do.”

“How do you work it?” I asked him. There is a time in the day when he is confidential. “Here is this man, Hoppner. I take it that you have bought him up at an average of a hundred pounds a picture, and that at that price most owners were fairly glad to sell. Few folks outside the art schools have ever heard of him. I bet that at the present moment there isn’t one art critic who could spell his name without reference to a dictionary. In eighteen months you will be selling him for anything from one thousand to ten thousand pounds. How is it done?”

“How ith everything done that’th done well?” he answered. “By earnetht effort.” He hitched his chair nearer to me, “I get a chapone of your thort of chapthhe writ’th an article about Hoppner. I get another to anthwer him. Before I’ve done there’ll be a hundred articleth about Hoppnerhith life, hith early thruggie, anecdo’th about hith wife. Then a Hoppner will be thold at public auchtion for a thouthand guineath.”

“But how can you be certain it will fetch a thousand guineas?” I interrupted.

“I happen to know the man whoth going to buy it.” He winked, and I understood.

“A fortnight later there will be a thale of halfadothen, and the prithe will be gone up by that time.”

“And after that?” I said.

“After that,” he replied, rising, “the American millionaire! He’ll jutht be waiting on the doorthtep for the thaleroom to open.”

“If by any chance I come across a Hoppner?” I said, laughing, as I turned to go.

“Don’t you hold on to it too long, that’th all,” was his advice.

III

CHARMS HATH MUSIC

The argument of the late Herr Wagner was that grand operathe music drama, as he called itincluded, and therefore did away with the necessity forall other arts. Music in all its branches, of course, it provides: so much I will concede to the late Herr Wagner. There are times, I confess, when my musical yearnings might shock the late Herr Wagnertimes when I feel unequal to following three distinct themes at one and the same instant.

"Listen," whispers the Wagnerian enthusiast to me, "the cornet has now the Brunnhilda motive." It seems to me, in my then state of depravity, as if the cornet had even more than this the matter with him.

"The second violins," continues the Wagnerian enthusiast, "are carrying on the Wotan theme." That they are carrying on goes without saying: the players' faces are streaming with perspiration.

"The brass," explains my friendhis object is to cultivate my ear"is accompanying the singers." I should have said drowning them. There are occasions when I can rave about Wagner with the best of them. High class moods come to all of us. The difference between the really highclass man and us commonplace, workaday men is the difference between, say, the eagle and the barnyard chicken. I am the barnyard chicken. I have my wings. There are ecstatic moments when I feel I want to spurn the sordid earth and soar into the realms of art. I do fly a little, but my body is heavy, and I only get as far as the fence. After a while I find it lonesome on the fence, and I hop down again among my fellows.

Listening to Wagner, during such temporary Philistinic mood, my sense of fair play is outraged. A lone, lorn woman stands upon the stage trying to make herself heard. She has to do this sort of thing for her living; maybe an invalid mother, younger brothers and sisters are dependent upon her. One hundred and forty men, all armed with powerful instruments, wellorganised, and most of them looking wellfed, combine to make it impossible for a single note of that poor woman's voice to be heard above their din. I see her standing there, opening and shutting her mouth, getting redder and redder in the face. She is singing, one feels sure of it; one could hear her if only those one hundred and forty men would ease up for a minute. She makes one mighty, supreme effort; above the banging of the drums, the blare of the trumpets, the shrieking of the strings, that last despairing note is distinctly heard.

She has won, but the victory has cost her dear. She sinks down fainting on the stage and is carried off by supers. Chivalrous indignation has made it difficult for me to keep my seat watching the unequal contest. My instinct was to leap the barrier, hurl the baldheaded chief of her enemies from his high chair, and lay about me with the trombone or the clarionetwhichever might have come the easier to my snatch.

"You cowardly lot of bullies," I have wanted to cry, "are you not ashamed of yourselves? A hundred and forty of you against one, and that one a still beautiful and, comparatively speaking, young lady. Be quiet for a minutecan't you? Give the poor girl a chance."

A lady of my acquaintance says that sitting out a Wagnerian opera seems to her like listening to a singer accompanied by four orchestras playing different tunes at the same time. As I have said, there are times when Wagner carries me along with him, when I exult in the crash and whirl of his contending harmonies. But, alas! there are those other moodsthose after dinner moodswhen my desire is for something distinctly resembling a tune. Still, there are other composers of grand opera besides Wagner. I grant to the late Herr Wagner, that, in so far as music is concerned, opera can supply us with all we can need.

But it was also Wagner's argument that grand opera could supply us with acting, and there I am compelled to disagree with him. Wagner thought that the arts of acting and singing could be combined. I have seen artists the great man has trained himself. As singers they left nothing to be desired, but the acting in grand opera has never yet impressed me. Wagner never succeeded in avoiding the operatic convention and nobody else ever will. When the operatic lover meets his sweetheart he puts her in a corner and, turning his back upon her, comes down to the footlights and tells the audience how he adores her. When he has finished, he, in his turn, retires into the corner, and she comes down and tells the audience that she is simply mad about him.

Overcome with joy at finding she really cares for him, he comes down right and says that this is the happiest moment of his life; and she stands left, twelve feet away from him, and has the presentiment that all this sort of thing is much too good to last. They go off together, backwards, side by side. If there is any lovemaking, such as I understand by the term, it is done "off." This is not my idea of acting. But I do not see how you are going to substitute for it anything more natural. When you are singing at the top of your voice, you don't want a heavy woman hanging round your neck. When you are killing a man and warbling about it at the same time, you don't want him fooling around you defending himself. You want him to have a little reasonable patience, and to wait in his proper place till you have finished, telling him, or rather telling the crowd, how much you hate and despise him.

When the proper time comes, and if he is where you expect to find him while thinking of your upper C, you will hit him lightly on the shoulder with your sword, and then he can die to his own particular tune. If you have been severely wounded in battle, or in any other sort of row, and have got to sing a long ballad before you finally expire, you don't want to have to think how a man would really behave who knew he had only got a few minutes to live and was feeling bad about it. The chances are that he would not want to sing at all. The woman who really loved him would not encourage him to sing. She would want him to keep quiet while she moved herself about a bit, in case there was anything that could be done for him.

If a mob is climbing the stairs thirsting for your blood, you do not want to stand upright with your arms stretched out, a good eighteen inches from the door, while you go over at some length the varied incidents leading up to the annoyance. If your desire were to act naturally you would push against that door for all you were worth, and yell for somebody to bring you a chest of drawers and a bedstead, and things like that, to pile up against it. If you were a king, and were giving a party, you would not want your guests to fix you up at the other end of the room and leave you there, with nobody to talk to but your own wife, while they turned their backs upon you, and had a long and complicated dance all to themselves. You would want to be in it; you would want to let them know that you were king.

In acting, all these little points have to be considered. In opera, everything is rightly sacrificed to musical necessity. I have seen the young, enthusiastic operasinger who thought that he or she could act and sing at the same time. The experienced artist takes the centre of the stage and husbands his resources. Whether he is supposed to be indignant because somebody has killed his mother, or cheerful because he is going out to fight his country's foes, who are only waiting until he has finished singing to attack the town, he leaves it to the composer to make clear.

Also it was Herr Wagner's idea that the back cloth would leave the operagoer indifferent to the picture gallery. The castle on the rock, accessible only by balloon, in which every window lights up simultaneously and instantaneously, one minute after sunset, while the full moon is rushing up the sky at the pace of a champion cometthat wonderful sea that suddenly opens and swallows up the shipthose snowclad mountains, over which the shadow of the hero passes like a threatening cloudthe grand old chateau, trembling in the windwhat need, will ask the operagoer of the future, of your Turners and your Corots, when, for prices ranging from a shilling upwards, we can have a dozen pictures such as these rolled up and down before us every evening?

But perhaps the most daring hope of all was the dream that came to Herr Wagner that his opera singers, his grouped choruses, would eventually satisfy the craving of the

public for high class statuary. I am not quite sure the general public does care for statuary. I do not know whether the idea has ever occurred to the Anarchist, but, were I myself organising secret committee meetings for unholy purposes, I should invite my comrades to meet in that section of the local museum devoted to statuary. I can conceive of no place where we should be freer from prying eyes and listening ears. A select few, however, do appreciate statuary; and such, I am inclined to think, will not be weaned from their passion by the contemplation of the opera singer in his or her various quaint costumes.

And even if the tenor always satisfied our ideal of Apollo, and the soprano were always as sylphlike as she is described in the libretto, even then I should doubt the average operatic chorus being regarded by the connoisseur as a cheap and pleasant substitute for a bas relief from the Elgin marbles. The great thing required of that operatic chorus is experience. The young and giddypated the chorus master has no use for. The sober, honest, industrious lady or gentleman, with a knowledge of music is very properly his ideal.

What I admire about the chorus chiefly is its unity. The whole village dresses exactly alike. In wicked, worldly villages there is rivalry, leading to heartburn and jealously. One lady comes out suddenly, on, say, a Bank Holiday, in a fetching blue that conquers every male heart. Next holiday her rival cuts her out with a green hat. In the operatic village it must be that the girls gather together beforehand to arrange this thing. There is probably a meeting called.

"The dear Count's wedding," announces the chairwoman, "you will all be pleased to hear, has been fixed for the fourteenth, at eleven o'clock in the morning. The entire village will be assembled at tenthirty to await the return of the bridal cortège from the church, and offer its felicitations. Married ladies, will, of course, come accompanied by their husbands. Unmarried ladies must each bring a male partner as near their own height as possible. Fortunately, in this village the number of males is exactly equal to that of females, so that the picture need not be spoiled. The children will organise themselves into an independent body and will group themselves picturesquely. It has been thought advisable," continues the chairwoman, "that the village should meet the dear Count and his bride at some spot not too far removed from the local alehouse. The costume to be worn by the ladies will consist of a short pink skirt terminating at the knees and ornamented with festoons of flowers; above will be worn a bolero in mauve silk without sleeves and cut décolleté. The shoes should be of yellow satin over fleshcoloured stockings. Ladies who are 'out' will wear pearl necklaces, and a simple device in emeralds to decorate the hair. Thank God, we can all of us afford it, and provided the weather holds up and nothing unexpected happenshe is not what I call a

lucky man, our Count, and it is always as well to be prepared for possibilitieswell, I think we may look forward to a really pleasant day."

It cannot be done, Herr Wagner, believe me. You cannot substitute the music drama for all the arts combined. The object to be aimed at by the wise composer should be to make us, while listening to his music, forgetful of all remaining artistic considerations.

IV

THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN! NEED IT BE SO HEAVY

It is a delightful stroll on a sunny summer morning from the Hague to the Huis ten Bosch, the little "house in the wood," built for Princess Amalia, widow of Stadtholter Frederick Henry, under whom Holland escaped finally from the bondage of her foes and entered into the promised land of Liberty. Leaving the quiet streets, the treebordered canals, with their creeping barges, you pass through a pleasant park, where the softeyed deer press round you, hurt and indignant if you have brought nothing in your pocketnot even a piece of sugarto offer them. It is not that they are graspingit is the want of attention that wounds them.

"I thought he was a gentleman," they seem to be saying to one another, if you glance back, "he looked like a gentleman."

Their mild eyes haunt you; on the next occasion you do not forget. The Park merges into the forest; you go by winding ways till you reach the trim Dutch garden, moatencircled, in the centre of which stands the prim oldfashioned villa, which, to the simple Dutchman, appears a palace. The concierge, an old soldier, bows low to you and introduces you to his wifea stately, whitehaired dame, who talks most languages a little, so far as relates to all things within and appertaining to this tiny palace of the wood. To things without, beyond the wood, her powers of conversation do not extend: apparently such matters do not interest her.

She conducts you to the Chinese Room; the sun streams through the windows, illuminating the wondrous golden dragons standing out in bold relief from the burnished lacquer work, decorating still further with light and shade the delicate silk embroideries thin taper hands have woven with infinite pains. The walls are hung with rice paper, depicting the conventional scenes of the conventional Chinese life.

You find your thoughts wandering. These grotesque figures, these caricatures of humanity! A comical creature, surely, this Chinaman, the pantaloon of civilization. How useful he has been to us for our farces, our comic operas! This yellow baby, in his ample pinafore, who lived thousands of years ago, who has now passed into this strange second childhood.

But is he dyingor does the life of a nation wake again, as after sleep? Is he this droll, harmless thing he here depicts himself? And if not? Suppose fresh sap be stirring through his three hundred millions? We thought he was so very dead; we thought the

time had come to cut him up and divide him, the only danger being lest we should quarrel over his carcase among ourselves.

Suppose it turns out as the fable of the woodcutter and the bear? The woodcutter found the bear lying in the forest. At first he was much frightened, but the bear lay remarkably still. So the woodman crept nearer, ventured to kick the bearvery gently, ready to run if need be. Surely the bear was dead! And parts of a bear are good to eat, and bearskin to poor woodfolk on cold winter nights is grateful. So the woodman drew his knife and commenced the necessary preliminaries. But the bear was not dead.

If the Chinaman be not dead? If the cuttingup process has only served to waken him? In a little time from now we shall know.

From the Chinese Room the whitehaired dame leads us to the Japanese Room. Had gentlelooking Princess Amalia some vague foreshadowing of the future in her mind when she planned these two rooms leading into one another? The Japanese decorations are more grotesque, the designs less cheerfully comical than those of cousin Chinaman. These monstrous, misshapen wrestlers, these patientlooking gods, with their inscrutable eyes! Was it always there, or is it only by the light of present events that one reads into the fantastic fancies of the artist working long ago in the doorway of his paper house, a meaning that has hitherto escaped us?

But the chief attraction of the Huis ten Bosch is the gorgeous Orange Saloon, lighted by a cupola, fifty feet above the floor, the walls one blaze of pictures, chiefly of the gorgeous Jordaen school"The Defeat of the Vices," "Time Vanquishing Slander"mostly allegorical, in praise of all the virtues, in praise of enlightenment and progress. Aptly enough in a room so decorated, here was held the famous Peace Congress that closed the last century. One can hardly avoid smiling as one thinks of the solemn conclave of grandees assembled to proclaim the popularity of Peace.

It was in the autumn of the same year that Europe decided upon the dividingup of China, that soldiers were instructed by Christian monarchs to massacre men, women and children, the idea being to impress upon the Heathen Chinee the superior civilization of the white man. The Boer war followed almost immediately. Since when the white man has been pretty busy all over the world with his "expeditions" and his "missions." The world is undoubtedly growing more refined. We do not care for ugly words. Even the burglar refers airily to the "little job" he has on hand. You would think he had found work in the country. I should not be surprised to learn that he says a prayer before starting, telegraphs home to his anxious wife the next morning that his task has been crowned with blessing.

Until the faroff date of Universal Brotherhood war will continue. Matters considered unimportant by both parties willwith a mighty flourish of trumpetsbe referred to arbitration. I was talking of a famous financier a while ago with a man who had been his secretary. Amongst other anecdotes, he told me of a certain agreement about which dispute had arisen. The famous financier took the paper into his own hands and made a few swift calculations.

"Let it go," he concluded, "it is only a thousand pounds at the outside. May as well be honest."

Concerning a dead fisherman or two, concerning boundaries through unproductive mountain ranges we shall arbitrate and feel virtuous. For gold mines and good pasture lands, mixed up with a little honour to give respectability to the business, we shall fight it out, as previously. War being thus inevitable, the humane man will rejoice that by one of those brilliant discoveries, so simple when they are explained, war in the future is going to be rendered equally satisfactory to victor and to vanquished.

In byelections, as a witty writer has pointed out, there are no defeatsonly victories and moral victories. The idea seems to have caught on. War in the future is evidently going to be conducted on the same understanding. Once upon a time, from a faroff land, a certain general telegraphed home congratulating his Government that the enemy had shown no inclination whatever to prevent his running away. The whole country rejoiced.

"Why, they never even tried to stop him," citizens, meeting other citizens in the street, told each other. "Ah, they've had enough of him. I bet they are only too glad to get rid of him. Why, they say he ran for miles without seeing a trace of the foe."

The enemy's general, on the other hand, also wrote home congratulating his Government. In this way the same battle can be mafficked over by both parties. Contentment is the great secret of happiness. Everything happens for the best, if only you look at it the right way. That is going to be the argument. The general of the future will telegraph to headquarters that he is pleased to be able to inform His Majesty that the enemy, having broken down all opposition, has succeeded in crossing the frontier and is now well on his way to His Majesty's capital.

"I am luring him on," he will add, "as fast as I can. At our present rate of progress, I am in hopes of bringing him home by the tenth."

Lest foolish civilian sort of people should wonder whereabouts lies the cause for rejoicing, the military man will condescend to explain. The enemy is being enticed

farther and farther from his base. The defeated generalwho is not really defeated, who is only artful, and who appears to be running away, is not really running away at all. On the contrary, he is running homebringing, as he explains, the enemy with him.

If I remember rightlyit is long since I played itthere is a parlour game entitled "Puss in the Corner." You beckon another player to you with your finger. "Puss, puss!" you cry. Thereupon he has to leave his chairhis "base," as the military man would term itand try to get to you without anything happening to him.

War in the future is going to be Puss in the Corner on a bigger scale. You lure your enemy away from his base. If all goes wellif he does not see the trap that is being laid for himwhy, then, almost before he knows it, he finds himself in your capital. That finishes the game. You find out what it is he really wants. Provided it is something within reason, and you happen to have it handy, you give it to him. He goes home crowing, and you, on your side, laugh when you think how cleverly you succeeded in luring him away from his base.

There is a bright side to all things. The gentleman charged with the defence of a fortress will meet the other gentleman who has captured it and shake hands with him mid the ruins.

"So here you are at last!" he will explain. "Why didn't you come before? We have been waiting for you."

And he will send off dispatches felicitating his chief on having got that fortress off their hands, together with all the worry and expense it has been to them. When prisoners are taken you will console yourself with the reflection that the cost of feeding them for the future will have to be borne by the enemy. Captured cannon you will watch being trailed away with a sigh of relief.

"Confounded heavy things!" you will say to yourself. "Thank goodness I've got rid of them. Let him have the fun of dragging them about these ghastly roads. See how he likes the job!"

War is a ridiculous method of settling disputes. Anything that can tend to make its ridiculous aspect more apparent is to be welcomed. The new school of military dispatchwriters may succeed in turning even the laughter of the mob against it.

The present trouble in the East would never have occurred but for the white man's enthusiasm for bearing other people's burdens. What we call the yellow danger is the fear that the yellow man may before long request us, so far as he is concerned, to put his

particular burden down. It may occur to him that, seeing it is his property, he would just as soon carry it himself. A London policeman told me a story the other day that struck him as an example of Cockney humour under trying circumstances. But it may also serve as a fable. From a lonely street in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, early one morning, the constable heard cries of "Stop thief!" shouted in a childish treble. He arrived on the scene just in time to collar a young hooligan, who, having snatched a basket of fruit from a small lada greengrocer's errand boy, as it turned outwas, with it, making tracks. The greengrocer's boy, between panting and tears, delivered his accusation. The hooligan regarded him with an expression of amazed indignation.

"What d'yer mean, stealing it?" exclaimed Mr. Hooligan. "Why, I was carrying it for yer!"

The white man has got into the way of "carrying" other people's burdens, and now it looks as if the yellow man were going to object to our carrying his any further. Maybe he is going to get nasty, and insist on carrying it himself. We call this "the yellow danger."

A friend of minehe is a man who in the street walks into lampposts, and apologisessees rising from the East the dawn of a new day in the world's history. The yellow danger is to him a golden hope. He sees a race long stagnant, stretching its giant limbs with the first vague movements of returning life. He is a poor sort of patriot; he calls himself, I suppose, a white man, yet he shamelessly confesses he would rather see Asia's millions rise from the ruins of their ancient civilization to take their part in the future of humanity, than that half the population of the globe should remain bound in savagery for the pleasure and the profit of his own particular species.

He even goes so far as to think that the white man may have something to learn. The world has belonged to him now for some thousands of years. Has he done all with it that could have been done? Are his ideals the last word?

Not what the yellow man has absorbed from Europe, but what he is going to give Europe it is that interests my friend. He is watching the birth of a new forcean influence as yet unknown. He clings to the fond belief that new ideas, new formulæ, to replace the old worn shibboleths, may, during these thousands of years, have been developing in those keen brains that behind the impressive yellow mask have been working so long in silence and in mystery.

V

MARRY THE GIRL

What is wrong with marriage, anyhow? I find myself pondering this question so often, when reading highclass literature. I put it to myself again the other evening, during a performance of Faust. Why could not Faust have married the girl? I would not have married her myself for any consideration whatsoever; but that is not the argument. Faust, apparently, could not see anything amiss with her. Both of them were mad about each other. Yet the idea of a quiet, unostentatious marriage with a week's honeymoon, say, in Vienna, followed by a neat little cottage orné, not too far from Nürnberg, so that their friends could have come out to them, never seems to have occurred to either of them.

There could have been a garden. Marguerite might have kept chickens and a cow. That sort of girl, brought up to hard work and by no means too well educated, is all the better for having something to do. Later, with the gradual arrival of the family, a good, allround woman might have been hired in to assist. Faust, of course, would have had his study and got to work again; that would have kept him out of further mischief. The idea that a brainy man, his age, was going to be happy with nothing to do all day but fool round a petticoat was ridiculous from the beginning. Valentinea good fellow, Valentine, with nice ideaswould have spent his Saturdays to Monday with them. Over a pipe and a glass of wine, he and Faust would have discussed the local politics.

He would have danced the children on his knee, have told them tales about the wartaught the eldest boy to shoot. Faust, with a practical man like Valentine to help him, would probably have invented a new gun. Valentine would have got it taken up.

Things might have come of it. Sybil, in course of time, would have married and settled downperhaps have taken a little house near to them. He and Marguerite would have jokedwhen Mrs. Sybil was not aroundabout his early infatuation. The old mother would have toddled over from Nürnbergnot too often, just for the day.

The picture grows upon one the more one thinks of it. Why did it never occur to them? There would have been a bit of a bother with the Old Man. I can imagine Mephistopheles being upset about it, thinking himself swindled. Of course, if that was the reasonif Faust said to himself:

"I should like to marry the girl, but I won't do it; it would not be fair to the Old Man; he has been to a lot of trouble working this thing up; in common gratitude I cannot turn round now and behave like a decent, sensible man; it would not be playing the game"if

this was the way Faust looked at the matter there is nothing more to be said. Indeed, it shows him in rather a fine lightnoble, if quixotic.

If, on the other hand, he looked at the question from the point of view of himself and the girl, I think the thing might have been managed. All one had to do in those days when one wanted to get rid of the Devil was to show him a sword hilt. Faust and Marguerite could have slipped into a church one morning, and have kept him out of the way with a sword hilt till the ceremony was through. They might have hired a small boy:

"You see the gentleman in red? Well, he wants us and we don't want him. That is the only difference between us. Now, you take this sword, and when you see him coming show him the hilt. Don't hurt him; just show him the sword and shake your head. He will understand."

The old gentleman's expression, when subsequently Faust presented him to Marguerite, would have been interesting:

"Allow me, my wife. My dear, aa friend of mine. You may remember meeting him that night at your aunt's."

As I have said, there would have been ructions; but I do not myself see what could have been done. There was nothing in the bond to the effect that Faust should not marry, so far as we are told. The Old Man had a sense of humour. My own opinion is that, after getting over the first annoyance, he himself would have seen the joke. I can even picture him looking in now and again on Mr. and Mrs. Faust. The children would be hurried off to bed. There would be, for a while, an atmosphere of constraint.

But the Old Man had a way with him. He would have told one or two stories at which Marguerite would have blushed, at which Faust would have grinned. I can see the old fellow occasionally joining the homely social board. The children, awed at first, would have sat silent, with staring eyes. But, as I have said, the Old Man had a way with him. Why should he not have reformed? The good woman's unconsciously exerted influencethe sweet childish prattle! One hears of such things. Might he not have come to be known as "Nunkie"?

MyselfI believe I have already mentioned itI would not have married Marguerite. She is not my ideal of a good girl. I never liked the way she deceived her mother. And that aunt of hers! Well, a nice girl would not have been friends with such a woman. She did not behave at all too well to Sybil, either. It is clear to me that she led the boy on. And what was she doing with that box of jewels, anyhow? She was not a fool. She could not have gone every day to that fountain, chatted with those girl friends of hers, and learnt

nothing. She must have known that people don't go leaving twenty thousand pounds' worth of jewels about on doorsteps as part of a round game. Her own instinct, if she had been a good girl, would have told her to leave the thing alone.

I don't believe in these innocent people who do not know what they are doing half their time. Ask any London magistrate what he thinks of the lady who explains that she picked up the diamond brooch:

"Not meaning, of course, your Worship, to take it. I would not do such a thing. It just happened this way, your Worship. I was standing as you might say here, and not seeing anyone about in the shop I opened the case and took it out, thinking as perhaps it might belong to someone; and then this gentleman here, as I had not noticed before, comes up quite suddenly and says; 'You come along with me,' he says. 'What for,' I says, 'when I don't even know you?' I says. 'For stealing,' he says. 'Well, that's a hard word to use to a lady,' I says; 'I don't know what you mean, I'm sure.'"

And if she had put them all on, not thinking, what would a really nice girl have done when the gentleman came up and assured her they were hers? She would have been thirty seconds taking them off and flinging them back into the box.

"Thank you," she would have said, "I'll trouble you to leave this garden as quickly as you entered it and take them with you. I'm not that sort of girl."

Marguerite clings to the jewels, and accepts the young man's arm for a moonlight promenade. And when it does enter into her innocent head that he and she have walked that shady garden long enough, what does she do when she has said goodbye and shut the door? She opens the groundfloor window and begins to sing!

Maybe I am not poetical, but I do like justice. When other girls do these sort of things they get called names. I cannot see why this particular girl should be held up as an ideal. She kills her mother. According to her own account this was an accident. It is not an original line of defence, and we are not allowed to hear the evidence for the prosecution. She also kills her baby. You are not to blame her for that, because at the time she was feeling poorly. I don't see why this girl should have a special line of angels to take her up to heaven. There must have been decent, hardworking women in Nürnburg more entitled to the ticket.

Why is it that all these years we have been content to accept Marguerite as a type of innocence and virtue? The explanation is, I suppose, that Goethe wrote at a time when it was the convention to regard all women as good. Anything in petticoats was virtuous. If she did wrong it was always somebody else's fault. Cherchez la femme was a later

notion. In the days of Goethe it was always Cherchez l'homme. It was the man's fault. It was the devil's fault. It was anybody's fault you liked, but not her's.

The convention has not yet died out. I was reading the other day a most interesting book by a brilliant American authoress. Seeing I live far away from the lady's haunts, I venture to mention names. I am speaking of "Patience Sparhawk," by Gertrude Atherton. I take this book because it is typical of a large body of fiction. Miss Sparhawk lives a troubled life: it puzzles her. She asks herself what is wrong. Her own idea is that it is civilisation.

If it is not civilisation, then it is the American man or Natureor Democracy. Miss Sparhawk marries the wrong man. Later on she gets engaged to another wrong man. In the end we are left to believe she is about to be married to the right man. I should be better satisfied if I could hear Miss Sparhawk talking six months after that last marriage. But if a mistake has again been made I am confident that, in Miss Sparhawk's opinion, the fault will not be Miss Sparhawk's. The argument is always the same: Miss Sparhawk, being a lady, can do no wrong.

If Miss Sparhawk cared to listen to me for five minutes, I feel I could put her right on this point.

"It is quite true, my dear girl," I should say to her, "something is wrongvery wrong. But it is not the American man. Never you mind the American man: you leave him to worry out his own salvation. You are not the girl to put him right, even where he is wrong. And it is not civilisation. Civilisation has a deal to answer for, I admit: don't you load it up with this additional trouble. The thing that is wrong in this case of yoursif you will forgive my saying sois you. You make a fool of yourself; you marry a man who is a mere animal because he appeals to your animal instincts. Then, like the lady who cried out 'Alack, I've married a black,' you appeal to heaven against the injustice of being mated with a clown. You are not a nice girl, either in your ideas or in your behaviour. I don't blame you for it; you did not make yourself. But when you set to work to attract all that is lowest in man, why be so astonished at your own success? There are plenty of shocking American men, I agree. One meets the class even outside America. But nice American girls will tell you that there are also nice American men. There is an old proverb about birds of a feather. Next time you find yourself in the company of a shocking American man, you just ask yourself how he got there, and how it is he seems to be feeling at home. You learn selfcontrol. Get it out of your head that you are the centre of the universe, and grasp the idea that a petticoat is not a halo, and you will find civilisation not half as wrong as you thought it."

I know what Miss Sparhawk's reply would be.

“You say all this to meto me, a lady? Great Heavens! What has become of chivalry?”

A Frenchman was once put on trial for murdering his father and mother. He confessed his guilt, but begged for mercy on the plea that he was an orphan. Chivalry was founded on the assumption that woman was worthy to be worshipped. The modern woman’s notion is that when she does wrong she ought to be excused by chivalrous man because she is a lady.

I like the naughty heroine; we all of us do. The early Victorian heroinethe angel in a white frock, was a bore. We knew exactly what she was going to dothe right thing. We did not even have to ask ourselves, “What will she think is the right thing to do under the circumstances?” It was always the conventional right thing. You could have put it to a Sunday school and have got the answer every time. The heroine with passions, instincts, emotions, is to be welcomed. But I want her to grasp the fact that after all she is only one of us. I should like her better if, instead of demanding:

“What is wrong in civilisation? What is the world coming to?” and so forth, she would occasionally say to herself:

“Guess I’ve made a fool of myself this time. I do feel that ’shamed of myself.”

She would not lose by it. We should respect her all the more.

VI

MRS. WILKINS THOUGHT

Last year, travelling on the Underground Railway, I met a man; he was one of the saddestlooking men I had seen for years. I used to know him well in the old days when we were journalists together. I asked him, in a sympathetic tone, how things were going with him. I expected his response would be a flood of tears, and that in the end I should have to fork out a fiver. To my astonishment, his answer was that things were going exceedingly well with him. I did not want to say to him bluntly:

"Then what has happened to you to make you look like a mute at a temperance funeral?" I said:

"And how are all at home?"

I thought that if the trouble lay there he would take the opportunity. It brightened him somewhat, the necessity of replying to the question. It appeared that his wife was in the best of health.

"You remember her," he continued with a smile; "wonderful spirits, always cheerful, nothing seems to put her out, not even"

He ended the sentence abruptly with a sigh.

His motherinlaw, I learned from further talk with him, had died since I had last met him, and had left them a comfortable addition to their income. His eldest daughter was engaged to be married.

"It is entirely a love match," he explained, "and he is such a dear, good fellow, that I should not have made any objection even had he been poor. But, of course, as it is, I am naturally all the more content."

His eldest boy, having won the Mottle Scholarship, was going up to Cambridge in the Autumn. His own health, he told me, had greatly improved; and a novel he had written in his leisure time promised to be one of the successes of the season. Then it was that I spoke plainly.

"If I am opening a wound too painful to be touched," I said, "tell me. If, on the contrary, it is an ordinary sort of trouble upon which the sympathy of a fellow worker may fall as balm, let me hear it."

“So far as I am concerned,” he replied, “I should be glad to tell you. Speaking about it does me good, and may leadso I am always in hopesto an idea. But, for your own sake, if you take my advice, you will not press me.”

“How can it affect me?” I asked, “it is nothing to do with me, is it?”

“It need have nothing to do with you,” he answered, “if you are sensible enough to keep out of it. If I tell you: from this time onward it will be your trouble also. Anyhow, that is what has happened in four other separate cases. If you like to be the fifth and complete the half dozen of us, you are welcome. But remember I have warned you.”

“What has it done to the other five?” I demanded.

“It has changed them from cheerful, companionable persons into gloomy oneidead bores,” he told me. “They think of but one thing, they talk of but one thing, they dream of but one thing. Instead of getting over it, as time goes on, it takes possession of them more and more. There are men, of course, who would be unaffected by itwho could shake it off. I warn you in particular against it, because, in spite of all that is said, I am convinced you have a sense of humour; and that being so, it will lay hold of you. It will plague you night and day. You see what it has made of me! Three months ago a lady interviewer described me as of a sunny temperament. If you know your own business you will get out at the next station.”

I wish now I had followed his advice. As it was, I allowed my curiosity to take possession of me, and begged him to explain. And he did so.

“It was just about Christmas time,” he said. “We were discussing the Drury Lane Pantomimesome three or four of usin the smoking room of the Devonshire Club, and young Gold said he thought it would prove a mistake, the introduction of a subject like the Fiscal question into the story of Humpty Dumpty. The two things, so far as he could see, had nothing to do with one another. He added that he entertained a real regard for Mr. Dan Leno, whom he had once met on a steamboat, but that there were other topics upon which he would prefer to seek that gentleman’s guidance. Nettleship, on the other hand, declared that he had no sympathy with the argument that artists should never intrude upon public affairs. The actor was a fellow citizen with the rest of us. He said that, whether one agreed with their conclusions or not, one must admit that the nation owed a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Brown Potter and to Miss Olga Nethersole for giving to it the benefit of their convictions. He had talked to both ladies in private on the subject and was convinced they knew as much about it as did most people.

“Burnside, who was one of the party, contended that if sides were to be taken, a pantomime should surely advocate the FreeFood Cause, seeing it was a form of entertainment supposed to appeal primarily to the tastes of the Little Englander. Then I came into the discussion.

“‘The Fiscal question,’ I said, ‘is on everybody’s tongue. Such being the case, it is fit and proper it should be referred to in our annual pantomime, which has come to be regarded as a review of the year’s doings. But it should not have been dealt with from the political standpoint. The proper attitude to have assumed towards it was that of innocent raillery, free from all trace of partisanship.’

“Old Johnson had strolled up and was standing behind us.

“‘The very thing I have been trying to get hold of for weeks,’ he said‘a bright, amusing resumé of the whole problem that should give offence to neither side. You know our paper,’ he continued; ‘we steer clear of politics, but, at the same time, try to be uptodate; it is not always easy. The treatment of the subject, on the lines you suggest, is just what we require. I do wish you would write me something.’

“He is a good old sort, Johnson; it seemed an easy thing. I said I would. Since that time I have been thinking how to do it. As a matter of fact, I have not thought of much else. Maybe you can suggest something.”

I was feeling in a good working mood the next morning.

“Pilson,” said I to myself, “shall have the benefit of this. He does not need anything boisterously funny. A few playfully witty remarks on the subject will be the ideal.”

I lit a pipe and sat down to think. At halfpast twelve, having to write some letters before going out to lunch, I dismissed the Fiscal question from my mind.

But not for long. It worried me all the afternoon. I thought, maybe, something would come to me in the evening. I wasted all that evening, and I wasted all the following morning. Everything has its amusing side, I told myself. One turns out comic stories about funerals, about weddings. Hardly a misfortune that can happen to mankind but has produced its comic literature. An American friend of mine once took a contract from the Editor of an Insurance Journal to write four humorous stories; one was to deal with an earthquake, the second with a cyclone, the third with a flood, and the fourth with a thunderstorm. And more amusing stories I have never read. What is the matter with the Fiscal question?

I myself have written lightly on Bimemetallism. Home Rule we used to be merry over in the eighties. I remember one delightful evening at the Codgers' Hall. It would have been more delightful still, but for a rawboned Irishman, who rose towards eleven o'clock and requested to be informed if any other speaker was wishful to make any more jokes on the subject of Ould Ireland; because, if so, the rawboned gentleman was prepared to save time by waiting and dealing with them altogether. But if not, thenso the rawboned gentleman announcedhis intention was to go for the last speaker and the last speaker but two at once and without further warning.

No other humourist rising, the rawboned gentleman proceeded to make good his threat, with the result that the fun degenerated somewhat. Even on the Boer War we used to whisper jokes to one another in quiet places. In this Fiscal question there must be fun. Where is it?

For days I thought of little else. My laundressas we call them in the Templenoticed my trouble.

"Mrs. Wilkins," I confessed, "I am trying to think of something innocently amusing to say on the Fiscal question."

"I've 'eard about it," she said, "but I don't 'ave much time to read the papers. They want to make us pay more for our food, don't they?"

"For some of it," I explained. "But, then, we shall pay less for other things, so that really we shan't be paying more at all."

"There don't seem much in it, either way," was Mrs. Wilkins' opinion.

"Just so," I agreed, "that is the advantage of the system. It will cost nobody anything, and will result in everybody being better off."

"The pity is," said Mrs. Wilkins "that pity nobody ever thought of it before."

"The whole trouble hitherto," I explained, "has been the foreigner."

"Ah," said Mrs. Wilkins, "I never 'eard much good of 'em, though they do say the Almighty 'as a use for almost everything."

"These foreigners," I continued, "these Germans and Americans, they dump things on us, you know."

“What’s that?” demanded Mrs. Wilkins.

“What’s dump? Well, it’s dumping, you know. You take things, and you dump them down.”

“But what things? ’Ow do they do it?” asked Mrs. Wilkins.

“Why, all sorts of things: pig iron, bacon, doormatseverything. They bring them over herein ships, you understandand then, if you please, just dump them down upon our shores.”

“You don’t mean surely to tell me that they just throw them out and leave them there?” queried Mrs. Wilkins.

“Of course not,” I replied; “when I say they dump these things upon our shores, that is a figure of speech. What I mean is they sell them to us.”

“But why do we buy them if we don’t want them?” asked Mrs. Wilkins; “we’re not bound to buy them, are we?”

“It is their artfulness,” I explained, “these Germans and Americans, and the others; they are all just as bad as one anotherthey insist on selling us these things at less price than they cost to make.”

“It seems a bit silly of them, don’t it?” thought Mrs. Wilkins. “I suppose being foreigners, poor things, they ain’t naturally got much sense.”

“It does seem silly of them, if you look at it that way,” I admitted, “but what we have got to consider is, the injury it is doing us.”

“Don’t see ’ow it can do us much ’arm,” argued Mrs. Wilkins; “seems a bit of luck so far as we are concerned. There’s a few more things they’d be welcome to dump round my way.”

“I don’t seem to be putting this thing quite in the right light to you, Mrs. Wilkins,” I confessed. “It is a long argument, and you might not be able to follow it; but you must take it as a fact now generally admitted that the cheaper you buy things the sooner your money goes. By allowing the foreigner to sell us all these things at about half the cost price, he is getting richer every day, and we are getting poorer. Unless we, as a country, insist on paying at least twenty per cent. more for everything we want, it is calculated that in a very few years England won’t have a penny left.”

“Sounds a bit topsy turvy,” suggested Mrs. Wilkins.

“It may sound so,” I answered, “but I fear there can be no doubt of it. The Board of Trade Returns would seem to prove it conclusively.”

“Well, God be praised, we’ve found it out in time,” ejaculated Mrs. Wilkins piously.

“It is a matter of congratulation,” I agreed; “the difficulty is that a good many other people say that far from being ruined, we are doing very well indeed, and are growing richer every year.”

“But ’ow can they say that,” argued Mrs. Wilkins, “when, as you tell me, those Trade Returns prove just the opposite?”

“Well, they say the same, Mrs. Wilkins, that the Board of Trade Returns prove just the opposite.”

“Well, they can’t both be right,” said Mrs. Wilkins.

“You would be surprised, Mrs. Wilkins,” I said, “how many things can be proved from Board of Trade Returns!”

But I have not yet thought of that article for Pilso

VII

CHINESE CHEAP LABOUR

"What is all this talk I 'ear about the Chinese?" said Mrs. Wilkins to me the other morning. We generally indulge in a little chat while Mrs. Wilkins is laying the breakfasttable. Letters and newspapers do not arrive in my part of the Temple much before nine. From halfpast eight to nine I am rather glad of Mrs. Wilkins. "They 'ave been up to some of their tricks again, 'aven't they?"

"The foreigner, Mrs. Wilkins," I replied, "whether he be Chinee or any other he, is always up to tricks. Was not England specially prepared by an allwise Providence to frustrate these knavish tricks? Which of such particular tricks may you be referring to at the moment, Mrs. Wilkins?"

"Well, 'e's comin' over 'ereisn't he, sir? to take the work out of our mouths, as it were."

"Well, not exactly over here, to England, Mrs. Wilkins," I explained. "He has been introduced into Africa to work in the mines there."

"It's a funny thing," said Mrs. Wilkins, "but to 'ear the way some of them talk in our block, you might run away with the notionthat is, if you didn't know 'emthat work was their only joy. I said to one of 'em, the other eveninga man as calls 'isself a brass finisher, though, Lord knows, the only brass 'e ever finishes is what 'is poor wife earns and isn't quick enough to 'ide away from 'imwell, whatever 'appens, I says, it will be clever of 'em if they take away much work from you. It made them all laugh, that did," added Mrs. Wilkins, with a touch of pardonable pride.

"Ah," continued the good lady, "it's surprising 'ow contented they can be with a little, some of 'em. Give 'em a 'ardworking woman to look after them, and a day out once a week with a procession of the unemployed, they don't ask for nothing more. There's that beauty my poor sister Jane was fool enough to marry. Serves 'er right, as I used to tell 'er at first, till there didn't seem any more need to rub it into 'er. She'd 'ad one good 'usband. It wouldn't 'ave been fair for 'er to 'ave 'ad another, even if there'd been a chance of it, seeing the few of 'em there is to go round among so many. But it's always the same with us widows: if we 'appen to 'ave been lucky the first time, we put it down to our own judgmentthink we can't ever make a mistake; and if we draw a wrong 'un, as the saying is, we argue as if it was the duty of Providence to make it up to us the second time. Why, I'd a been making a fool of myself three years ago if 'e 'adn't been goodnatured enough to call one afternoon when I was out, and 'ook it off with two pounds eight in the best teapot that I 'ad been soft enough to talk to 'im about: and

never let me set eyes on 'im again. God bless 'im! 'E's one of the borntireds, 'e is, as poor Jane might 'ave seen for 'erself, if she 'ad only looked at 'im, instead of listening to 'im.

"But that's courtship all the world overold and young alike, so far as I've been able to see it," was the opinion of Mrs. Wilkins. "The man's all eyes and the woman all ears. They don't seem to 'ave any other senses left 'em. I ran against 'im the other night, on my way 'ome, at the corner of Gray's Inn Road. There was the usual crowd watching a pack of them Italians laying down the asphalt in 'Olborn, and 'e was among 'em. 'E 'ad secured the only lamppost, and was leaning agen it.

"'Ullo,' I says, 'glad to see you 'aven't lost your job. Nothin' like stickin' to it, when you've dropped into somethin' that really suits you.'

"'What do you mean, Martha?' 'e says. 'E's not one of what I call your smart sort. It takes a bit of sarcasm to get through 'is 'ead.

"'Well,' I says, 'you're still on the old track, I see, looking for work. Take care you don't 'ave an accident one of these days and run up agen it before you've got time to get out of its way.'

"'It's these miserable foreigners,' 'e says. 'Look at 'em,' 'e says.

"'There's enough of you doing that,' I says. 'I've got my room to put straight and three hours needlework to do before I can get to bed. But don't let me 'inder you. You might forget what work was like, if you didn't take an opportunity of watching it now and then.'

"'They come over 'ere,' 'e says, 'and take the work away from us chaps.'

"'Ah,' I says, 'poor things, perhaps they ain't married.'

"'Lazy devils! 'e says. 'Look at 'em, smoking cigarettes. I could do that sort of work. There's nothing in it. It don't take 'eathen foreigners to dab a bit of tar about a road.'

"'Yes,' I says, 'you always could do anybody else's work but your own.'

"'I can't find it, Martha,' 'e says.

"'No,' I says, 'and you never will in the sort of places you go looking for it. They don't 'ang it out on lampposts, and they don't leave it about at the street corners. Go 'ome,' I

says, ‘and turn the mangle for your poor wife. That’s big enough for you to find, even in the dark.’

“Looking for work!” snorted Mrs. Wilkins with contempt; “we women never ’ave much difficulty in finding it, I’ve noticed. There are times when I feel I could do with losing it for a day.”

“But what did he reply, Mrs. Wilkins,” I asked; “your brassfinishing friend, who was holding forth on the subject of Chinese cheap labour.” Mrs. Wilkins as a conversationalist is not easily kept to the point. I was curious to know what the working classes were thinking on the subject.

“Oh, that,” replied Mrs. Wilkins, “’e did not say nothing. ’E ain’t the sort that’s got much to say in an argument. ’E belongs to the crowd that ’angs about at the back, and does the shouting. But there was another of ’em, a young fellow as I feels sorry for, with a wife and three small children, who ’asn’t ’ad much luck for the last six months; and that through no fault of ’is own, I should say, from the look of ’im. ‘I was a fool,’ says ’e, ‘when I chucked a good situation and went out to the war. They told me I was going to fight for equal rights for all white men. I thought they meant that all of us were going to ’ave a better chance, and it seemed worth making a bit of sacrifice for, that did. I should be glad if they would give me a job in their mines that would enable me to feed my wife and children. That’s all I ask them for!’”

“It is a difficult problem, Mrs. Wilkins,” I said. “According to the mine owners”

“Ah,” said Mrs. Wilkins. “They don’t seem to be exactly what you’d call popular, them mine owners, do they? Daresay they’re not as bad as they’re painted.”

“Some people, Mrs. Wilkins,” I said, “paint them very black. There are those who hold that the South African mineowner is not a man at all, but a kind of pantomime demon. You take Goliath, the whale that swallowed Jonah, a selection from the least respectable citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah at their worst, Bluebeard, Bloody Queen Mary, Guy Fawkes, and the seaserpentor, rather, you take the most objectionable attributes of all these various personages, and mix them up together. The result is the South African mineowner, a monster who would willingly promote a company for the putting on the market of a new meat extract, prepared exclusively from newborn infants, provided the scheme promised a fair and reasonable opportunity of fleecing the widow and orphan.”

“I’ve ’eard they’re a bad lot,” said Mrs. Wilkins. “But we’re most of us that, if we listen to what other people say about us.”

“Quite so, Mrs. Wilkins,” I agreed. “One never arrives at the truth by listening to one side only. On the other hand, for example, there are those who stoutly maintain that the South African mineowner is a kind of spiritual creature, all heart and sentiment, who, against his own will, has been, so to speak, dumped down upon this earth as the result of overproduction up above of the higher class of archangel. The stock of archangels of superior finish exceeds the heavenly demand; the surplus has been dropped down into South Africa and has taken to mine owning. It is not that these celestial visitors of German sounding nomenclature care themselves about the gold. Their only desire is, during this earthly pilgrimage of theirs, to benefit the human race. Nothing can be obtained in this world without money”

“That’s true,” said Mrs. Wilkins, with a sigh.

“For gold, everything can be obtained. The aim of the mineowning archangel is to provide the world with gold. Why should the world trouble to grow things and make things? ‘Let us,’ say these archangels, temporarily dwelling in South Africa, ‘dig up and distribute to the world plenty of gold, then the world can buy whatever it wants, and be happy.’

“There may be a flaw in the argument, Mrs. Wilkins,” I allowed. “I am not presenting it to you as the last word upon the subject. I am merely quoting the view of the South African mineowner, feeling himself a much misunderstood benefactor of mankind.”

“I expect,” said Mrs. Wilkins, “they are just the ordinary sort of Christian, like the rest of us, anxious to do the best they can for themselves, and not too particular as to doing other people in the process.”

“I am inclined to think, Mrs. Wilkins,” I said, “that you are not very far from the truth. A friend of mine, a year ago, was very bitter on this subject of Chinese cheap labour. A little later there died a distant relative of his who left him twenty thousand South African mining shares. He thinks now that to object to the Chinese is narrowminded, illiberal, and against all religious teaching. He has bought an abridged edition of Confucius, and tells me that there is much that is ennobling in Chinese morality. Indeed, I gather from him that the introduction of the Chinese into South Africa will be the saving of that country. The noble Chinese will afford an object lesson to the poor white man, displaying to him the virtues of sobriety, thrift, and humility. I also gather that it will be of inestimable benefit to the noble Chinee himself. The Christian missionary will get hold of him in bulk, so to speak, and imbue him with the higher theology. It appears to be one of those rare cases where everybody is benefited at the expense of nobody. It is always a pity to let these rare opportunities slip by.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Wilkins, “I’ve nothin’ to say agen the Chinaman, as a Chinaman. As to ’is being a ’eathen, well, throwin’ stones at a church, as the sayin’ is, don’t make a Christian of you. There’s Christians I’ve met as couldn’t do themselves much ’arm by changing their religion; and as to cleanliness, well, I’ve never met but one, and ’e was a washerwoman, and I’d rather ’ave sat next to ’im in a thirdclass carriage on a Bank ’Oliday than next to some of ’em.

“Seems to me,” continued Mrs. Wilkins, “we’ve got into the ’abit of talkin’ a bit too much about other people’s dirt. The London atmosphere ain’t nat’rally a drycleanin’ process in itself, but there’s a goodish few as seem to think it is. One comes across Freeborn Britons ’ere and there as I’d be sorry to scrub clean for a shillin’ and find my own soap.”

“It is a universal failing, Mrs. Wilkins,” I explained. “If you talk to a travelled Frenchman, he contrasts to his own satisfaction the Paris ouvrier in his blue blouse with the appearance of the London labourer.”

“I daresay they’re all right according to their lights,” said Mrs. Wilkins, “but it does seem a bit wrong that if our own chaps are willin’ and anxious to work, after all they’ve done, too, in the way of getting the mines for us, they shouldn’t be allowed the job.”

“Again, Mrs. Wilkins, it is difficult to arrive at a just conclusion,” I said. “The mineowner, according to his enemies, hates the British workman with the natural instinct that evil creatures feel towards the noble and virtuous. He will go to trouble and expense merely to spite the British workman, to keep him out of South Africa. According to his friends, the mineowner sets his face against the idea of white labour for two reasons. First and foremost, it is not nice work; the mineowner hates the thought of his beloved white brother toiling in the mines. It is not right that the noble white man should demean himself by such work. Secondly, white labour is too expensive. If for digging gold men had to be paid anything like the same prices they are paid for digging coal, the mines could not be worked. The world would lose the gold that the mineowner is anxious to bestow upon it.

“The mineowner, following his own inclinations, would take a little farm, grow potatoes, and live a beautiful lifeperhaps write a little poetry. A slave to sense of duty, he is chained to the philanthropic work of goldmining. If we hamper him and worry him the danger is that he will get angry with uspossibly he will order his fiery chariot and return to where he came from.”

“Well, ’e can’t take the gold with him, wherever ’e goes to?” argued Mrs. Wilkins.

“You talk, Mrs. Wilkins,” I said, “as if the gold were of more value to the world than is the mineowner.”

“Well, isn’t it?” demanded Mrs. Wilkins.

“It’s a new idea, Mrs. Wilkins,” I answered; “it wants thinking out.”

VIII

SOLVE THE SERVANT PROBLEM.

“I am glad to see, Mrs. Wilkins,” I said, “that the Women’s Domestic Guild of America has succeeded in solving the servant girl problemnone too soon, one might almost say.”

“Ah,” said Mrs. Wilkins, as she took the cover off the bacon and gave an extra polish to the mustardpot with her apron, “they are clever people over there; leastways, so I’ve always ’eard.”

“This, their latest, Mrs. Wilkins,” I said, “I am inclined to regard as their greatest triumph. My hope is that the Women’s Domestic Guild of America, when it has finished with the United States and Canada, will, perhaps, see its way to establishing a branch in England. There are ladies of my acquaintance who would welcome, I feel sure, any really satisfactory solution of the problem.”

“Well, good luck to it, is all I say,” responded Mrs. Wilkins, “and if it makes all the gals contented with their places, and all the mistresses satisfied with what they’ve got and ’appy in their minds, why, God bless it, say I.”

“The mistake hitherto,” I said, “from what I read, appears to have been that the right servant was not sent to the right place. What the Women’s Domestic Guild of America proposes to do is to find the right servant for the right place. You see the difference, don’t you, Mrs. Wilkins?”

“That’s the secret,” agreed Mrs. Wilkins. “They don’t anticipate any difficulty in getting the right sort of gal, I take it?”

“I gather not, Mrs. Wilkins,” I replied.

Mrs. Wilkins is of a pessimistic turn of mind.

“I am not so sure about it,” she said; “the Almighty don’t seem to ’ave made too many of that sort. Unless these American ladies that you speak of are going to start a factory of their own. I am afraid there is disappointment in store for them.”

“Don’t throw cold water on the idea before it is fairly started, Mrs. Wilkins,” I pleaded.

“Well, sir,” said Mrs. Wilkins, “I ’ave been a gal myself in service; and in my time I‘ve ’ad a few mistresses of my own, and I’ve ’eard a good deal about others. There are ladies

and ladies, as you may know, sir, and some of them, if they aren't exactly angels, are about as near to it as can be looked for in this climate, and they are not the ones that do most of the complaining. But, as for the average mistresswell it ain't a gal she wants, it's a plaster image, without any natural innardsa sort of thing as ain't 'uman, and ain't to be found in 'uman nature. And then she'd grumble at it, if it didn't 'appen to be able to be in two places at once."

"You fear that the standard for that 'right girl' is likely to be set a trifle too high Mrs. Wilkins," I suggested.

"That 'right gal,' according to the notions of some of 'em," retorted Mrs. Wilkins, "'er place ain't down 'ere among us mere mortals; 'er place is up in 'eaven with a 'arp and a golden crown. There's my niece, Emma, I don't say she is a saint, but a better 'earted, 'arder working gal, at twenty pounds a year, you don't expect to find, unless maybe you're a natural born fool that can't 'elp yourself. She wanted a place. She 'ad been 'ome for nearly six months, nursing 'er old father, as 'ad been down all the winter with rheumatic fever; and 'ardput to it she was for a few clothes. You 'ear 'em talk about gals as insists on an hour a day for practising the piano, and the right to invite their young man to spend the evening with them in the drawingroom. Perhaps it is meant to be funny; I ain't come across that type of gal myself, outside the pictures in the comic papers; and I'll never believe, till I see 'er myself, that anybody else 'as. They sent 'er from the registry office to a lady at Clapton.

"'I 'ope you are good at getting up early in the morning?' says the lady, 'I like a gal as rises cheerfully to 'er work.'

"'Well, ma'am,' says Emma, 'I can't say as I've got a passion for it. But it's one of those things that 'as to be done, and I guess I've learnt the trick.'

"'I'm a great believer in early rising,' says my lady; 'in the morning, one is always fresher for one's work; my 'usband and the younger children breakfast at 'arf past seven; myself and my eldest daughter 'ave our breakfest in bed at eight.'

"'That'll be all right, ma'am,' says Emma.

"'And I 'ope,' says the lady, 'you are of an amiable disposition. Some gals when you ring the bell come up looking so disagreeable, one almost wishes one didn't want them.'

"'Well, it ain't a thing,' explains Emma, 'as makes you want to burst out laughing, 'earing the bell go off for the twentieth time, and 'aving suddenly to put down your work at,

perhaps, a critical moment. Some ladies don't seem able to reach down their 'at for themselves.'

"'I 'ope you are not impertinent,' says the lady; 'if there's one thing that I object to in a servant it is impertinence.'

"'We none of us like being answered back,' says Emma, 'more particularly when we are in the wrong. But I know my place ma'am, and I shan't give you no lip. It always leads to less trouble, I find, keeping your mouth shut, rather than opening it.'

"'Are you fond of children,' asks my lady.

"'It depends upon the children,' says Emma; 'there are some I 'ave 'ad to do with as made the day seem pleasanter, and I've come across others as I could 'ave parted from at any moment without tears.'

"'I like a gal,' says the lady, 'who is naturally fond of children, it shows a good character.'

"'How many of them are there?' says Emma.

"'Four of them,' answers my lady, 'but you won't 'ave much to do except with the two youngest. The great thing with young children is to surround them with good examples. Are you a Christian?' asks my lady.

"'That's what I'm generally called,' says Emma.

"'Every other Sunday evening out is my rule,' says the lady, 'but of course I shall expect you to go to church.'

"'Do you mean in my time, ma'am,' says Emma, 'or in yours.'

"'I mean on your evening of course,' says my lady. ''Ow else could you go?'

"'Well, ma'am,' says Emma, 'I like to see my people now and then.'

"'There are better things,' says my lady, 'than seeing what you call your people, and I should not care to take a girl into my 'ouse as put 'er pleasure before 'er religion. You are not engaged, I 'ope?'

"'Walking out, ma'am, do you mean?' says Emma. 'No, ma'am, there is nobody I've got in my mindnot just at present.'

"'I never will take a gal,' explains my lady, 'who is engaged. I find it distracts 'er attention from 'er work. And I must insist if you come to me,' continues my lady, 'that you get yourself another 'at and jacket. If there is one thing I object to in a servant it is a disposition to cheap finery.'

"'Er own daughter was sitting there beside 'er with 'alf a dozen silver bangles on 'er wrist, and a sort of thing 'anging around 'er neck, as, 'ad it been real, would 'ave been worth perhaps a thousand pounds. But Emma wanted a job, so she kept 'er thoughts to 'erself.

"'I can put these things by and get myself something else,' she says, 'if you don't mind, ma'am, advancing me something out of my first three months' wages. I'm afraid my account at the bank is a bit overdrawn.'

"The lady whispered something to 'er daughter. 'I am afraid, on thinking it over,' she says, 'that you won't suit, after all. You don't look serious enough. I feel sure, from the way you do your 'air,' says my lady, 'there's a frivolous side to your nature.'

"So Emma came away, and was not, on the whole, too sorry."

"But do they get servants to come to them, this type of mistress, do you think, Mrs. Wilkins?" I asked.

"They get them all right," said Mrs. Wilkins, "and if it's a decent gal, it makes a bad gal of 'er, that ever afterwards looks upon every mistress as 'er enemy, and acts accordingly. And if she ain't a naturally good gal, it makes 'er worse, and then you 'ear what awful things gals are. I don't say it's an easy problem," continued Mrs. Wilkins, "it's just like marriages. The good mistress gets 'old of the bad servant, and the bad mistress, as often as not is lucky."

"But how is it," I argued, "that in hotels, for instance, the service is excellent, and the girls, generally speaking, seem contented? The work is hard, and the wages not much better, if as good."

"Ah," said Mrs. Wilkins, "you 'ave 'it the right nail on the 'ead, there, sir. They go into the 'otels and work like niggers, knowing that if a single thing goes wrong they will be bullyragged and sworn at till they don't know whether they are standing on their 'ead or their 'eels. But they 'ave their hours; the gal knows when 'er work is done, and when the clock strikes she is a 'uman being once again. She 'as got that moment to look forward to all day, and it keeps 'er going. In private service there's no moment in the day to 'ope

for. If the lady is reasonable she ain't overworked; but no 'ow can she ever feel she is her own mistress, free to come and go, to wear 'er bit of finery, to 'ave 'er bit of fun. She works from six in the morning till eleven or twelve at night, and then she only goes to bed provided she ain't wanted. She don't belong to 'erself at all; it's that that irritates them."

"I see your point, Mrs. Wilkins," I said, "and, of course, in a house where two or three servants were kept some such plan might easily be arranged. The girl who commenced work at six o'clock in the morning might consider herself free at six o'clock in the evening. What she did with herself, how she dressed herself in her own time, would be her affair. What church the clerk or the workman belongs to, what company he keeps, is no concern of the firm. In such matters, mistresses, I am inclined to think, saddle themselves with a responsibility for which there is no need. If the girl behaves herself while in the house, and does her work, there the contract ends. The mistress who thinks it her duty to combine the rôles of employer and of maiden aunt is naturally resented. The next month the girl might change her hours from twelve to twelve, and her fellowservant could enjoy the six a.m. to six p.m. shift. But how do you propose to deal, Mrs. Wilkins, with the smaller menage, that employs only one servant?"

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Wilkins, "it seems to me simple enough. Ladies talk pretty about the dignity of labour, and are never tired of pointing out why gals should prefer domestic service to all other kinds of work. Suppose they practise what they preach. In the 'ouse, where there's only the master and the mistress, and, say a couple of small children, let the lady take her turn. After all, it's only her duty, same as the office or the shop is the man's. Where, on the other 'and, there are biggish boys and gals about the place, well it wouldn't do them any 'arm to be taught to play a little less, and to look after themselves a little more. It's just arranging thingsthat's all that's wanted."

"You remind me of a family I once knew, Mrs. Wilkins," I said; "it consisted of the usual father and mother, and of five sad, healthy girls. They kept two servantsor, rather, they never kept any servants; they lived always looking for servants, breaking their hearts over servants, packing servants off at a moment's notice, standing disconsolately looking after servants who had packed themselves off at a moment's notice, wondering generally what the world was coming too. It occurred to me at the time, that without much trouble, they could have lived a peaceful life without servants. The eldest girl was learning paintingand seemed unable to learn anything else. It was poor sort of painting; she noticed it herself. But she seemed to think that, if she talked a lot about it, and thought of nothing else, that somehow it would all come right. The second girl played the violin. She played it from early morning till late evening, and friends fell away from them. There wasn't a spark of talent in the family, but they all had a notion that a vague longing to be admired was just the same as genius.

“Another daughter fancied she would like to be an actress, and screamed all day in the attic. The fourth wrote poetry on a typewriter, and wondered why nobody seemed to want it; while the fifth one suffered from a weird belief that smearing wood with a redhot sort of poker was a thing worth doing for its own sake. All of them seemed willing enough to work, provided only that it was work of no use to any living soul. With a little sense, and the occasional assistance of a charwoman, they could have led a merrier life.”

“If I was giving away secrets,” said Mrs. Wilkins, “I’d say to the mistresses: ‘Show yourselves able to be independent.’ It’s because the gals know that the mistresses can’t do without them that they sometimes gives themselves airs.”

IX

WE HATE THE FOREIGNER

The advantage that the foreigner possesses over the Englishman is that he is born good. He does not have to try to be good, as we do. He does not have to start the New Year with the resolution to be good, and succeed, bar accidents, in being so till the middle of January. He is just good all the year round. When a foreigner is told to mount or descend from a tram on the near side, it does not occur to him that it would be humanly possible to secure egress from or ingress to that tram from the off side.

In Brussels once I witnessed a daring attempt by a lawless foreigner to enter a tram from the wrong side. The gate was open: he was standing close beside it. A line of traffic was in his way: to have got round to the right side of that tram would have meant missing it. He entered when the conductor was not looking, and took his seat. The astonishment of the conductor on finding him there was immense. How did he get there? The conductor had been watching the proper entrance, and the man had not passed him. Later, the true explanation suggested itself to the conductor, but for a while he hesitated to accuse a fellow human being of such crime.

He appealed to the passenger himself. Was his presence to be accounted for by miracle or by sin? The passenger confessed. It was more in sorrow than in anger that the conductor requested him at once to leave. This tram was going to be kept respectable. The passenger proved refractory, a halt was called, and the gendarmerie appealed to. After the manner of policemen, they sprang, as it were, from the ground, and formed up behind an imposing officer, whom I took to be the sergeant. At first the sergeant could hardly believe the conductor's statement. Even then, had the passenger asserted that he had entered by the proper entrance, his word would have been taken. Much easier to the foreign official mind would it have been to believe that the conductor had been stricken with temporary blindness, than that man born of woman would have deliberately done anything expressly forbidden by a printed notice.

Myself, in his case, I should have lied and got the trouble over. But he was a proud man, or had not much senseone of the two, and so held fast to the truth. It was pointed out to him that he must descend immediately and wait for the next tram. Other gendarmes were arriving from every quarter: resistance in the circumstances seemed hopeless. He said he would get down. He made to descend this time by the proper gate, but that was not justice. He had mounted the wrong side, he must alight on the wrong side. Accordingly, he was put out amongst the traffic, after which the conductor preached a

sermon from the centre of the tram on the danger of ascents and descents conducted from the wrong quarter.

There is a law throughout Germanyan excellent law it is: I would we had it in Englandthat nobody may scatter paper about the street. An English military friend told me that, one day in Dresden, unacquainted with this rule, he tore a long letter he had been reading into some fifty fragments and threw them behind him. A policeman stopped him and explained to him quite politely the law upon the subject. My military friend agreed that it was a very good law, thanked the man for his information, and said that for the future he would bear it in mind. That, as the policeman pointed out, would make things right enough for the future, but meanwhile it was necessary to deal with the pastwith the fifty or so pieces of paper lying scattered about the road and pavement.

My military friend, with a pleasant laugh, confessed he did not see what was to be done. The policeman, more imaginative, saw a way out. It was that my military friend should set to work and pick up those fifty scraps of paper. He is an English General on the Retired List, and of imposing appearance: his manner on occasion is haughty. He did not see himself on his hands and knees in the chief street of Dresden, in the middle of the afternoon, picking up paper.

The German policeman himself admitted that the situation was awkward. If the English General could not accept it there happened to be an alternative. It was that the English General should accompany the policeman through the streets, followed by the usual crowd, to the nearest prison, some three miles off. It being now four o'clock in the afternoon, they would probably find the judge departed. But the most comfortable thing possible in prison cells should be allotted to him, and the policeman had little doubt that the General, having paid his fine of forty marks, would find himself a free man again in time for lunch the following day. The general suggested hiring a boy to pick up the paper. The policeman referred to the wording of the law, and found that this would not be permitted.

"I thought the matter out," my friend told me, "imagining all the possible alternatives, including that of knocking the fellow down and making a bolt, and came to the conclusion that his first suggestion would, on the whole, result in the least discomfort. But I had no idea that picking up small scraps of thin paper off greasy stones was the business that I found it! It took me nearly ten minutes, and afforded amusement, I calculate, to over a thousand people. But it is a good law, mind you: all I wish is that I had known it beforehand."

On one occasion I accompanied an American lady to a German Opera House. The takingoff of hats in the German Schausspielhaus is obligatory, and again I would it were

so in England. But the American lady is accustomed to disregard rules made by mere man. She explained to the doorkeeper that she was going to wear her hat. He, on his side, explained to her that she was not: they were both a bit short with one another. I took the opportunity to turn aside and buy a programme: the fewer people there are mixed up in an argument, I always think, the better.

My companion explained quite frankly to the doorkeeper that it did not matter what he said, she was not going to take any notice of him. He did not look a talkative man at any time, and, maybe, this announcement further discouraged him. In any case, he made no attempt to answer. All he did was to stand in the centre of the doorway with a faraway look in his eyes. The doorway was some four feet wide: he was about three feet six across, and weighed about twenty stone. As I explained, I was busy buying a programme, and when I returned my friend had her hat in her hand, and was digging pins into it: I think she was trying to make believe it was the heart of the doorkeeper. She did not want to listen to the opera, she wanted to talk all the time about that doorkeeper, but the people round us would not even let her do that.

She has spent three winters in Germany since then. Now when she feels like passing through a door that is standing wide open just in front of her, and which leads to just the place she wants to get to, and an official shakes his head at her, and explains that she must not, but must go up two flights of stairs and along a corridor and down another flight of stairs, and so get to her place that way, she apologises for her error and trots off looking ashamed of herself.

Continental Governments have trained their citizens to perfection. Obedience is the Continent's first law. The story that is told of a Spanish king who was nearly drowned because the particular official whose duty it was to dive in after Spanish kings when they tumbled out of boats happened to be dead, and his successor had not yet been appointed, I can quite believe. On the Continental railways if you ride second class with a firstclass ticket you render yourself liable to imprisonment. What the penalty is for riding first with a secondclass ticket I cannot sayprobably death, though a friend of mine came very near on one occasion to finding out.

All would have gone well with him if he had not been so darned honest. He is one of those men who pride themselves on being honest. I believe he takes a positive pleasure in being honest. He had purchased a secondclass ticket for a station up a mountain, but meeting, by chance on the platform, a lady acquaintance, had gone with her into a firstclass apartment. On arriving at the journey's end he explained to the collector what he had done, and, with his purse in his hand, demanded to know the difference. They took him into a room and locked the door. They wrote out his confession and read it over to him, and made him sign it, and then they sent for a policeman.

The policeman crossexamined him for about a quarter of an hour. They did not believe the story about the lady. Where was the lady? He did not know. They searched the neighbourhood for her, but could not find her. He suggestedwhat turned out to be the truththat, tired of loitering about the station, she had gone up the mountain. An Anarchist outrage had occurred in the neighbouring town some months before. The policeman suggested searching for bombs. Fortunately, a Cook's agent, returning with a party of tourists, arrived upon the scene, and took it upon himself to explain in delicate language that my friend was a bit of an ass and could not tell first class from second. It was the red cushions that had deceived my friend: he thought it was first class, as a matter of fact it was second class.

Everybody breathed again. The confession was torn up amid universal joy: and then the fool of a ticket collector wanted to know about the ladywho must have travelled in a secondclass compartment with a firstclass ticket. It looked as if a bad time were in store for her on her return to the station.

But the admirable representative of Cook was again equal to the occasion. He explained that my friend was also a bit of a liar. When he said he had travelled with this lady he was merely boasting. He would like to have travelled with her, that was all he meant, only his German was shaky. Joy once more entered upon the scene. My friend's character appeared to be reestablished. He was not the abandoned wretch for whom they had taken himonly, apparently, a wandering idiot. Such an one the German official could respect. At the expense of such an one the German official even consented to drink beer.

Not only the foreign man, woman and child, but the foreign dog is born good. In England, if you happen to be the possessor of a dog, much of your time is taken up dragging him out of fights, quarrelling with the possessor of the other dog as to which began it, explaining to irate elderly ladies that he did not kill the cat, that the cat must have died of heart disease while running across the road, assuring disbelieving gamekeepers that he is not your dog, that you have not the faintest notion whose dog he is. With the foreign dog, life is a peaceful proceeding. When the foreign dog sees a row, tears spring to his eyes: he hastens on and tries to find a policeman. When the foreign dog sees a cat in a hurry, he stands aside to allow her to pass. They dress the foreign dogsome of themin a little coat, with a pocket for his handkerchief, and put shoes on his feet. They have not given him a hatnot yet. When they do, he will contrive by some means or another to raise it politely when he meets a cat he thinks he knows.

One morning, in a Continental city, I came across a disturbanceit might be more correct to say the disturbance came across me: it swept down upon me, enveloped me before I

knew that I was in it. A foxterrier it was, belonging to a very young ladyit was when the disturbance was to a certain extent over that we discovered he belonged to this young lady. She arrived towards the end of the disturbance, very much out of breath: she had been running for a mile, poor girl, and shouting most of the way. When she looked round and saw all the things that had happened, and had had other things that she had missed explained to her, she burst into tears. An English owner of that foxterrier would have given one look round and then have jumped upon the nearest tram going anywhere. But, as I have said, the foreigner is born good. I left her giving her name and address to seven different people.

But it was about the dog I wished to speak more particularly. He had commenced innocently enough, trying to catch a sparrow. Nothing delights a sparrow more than being chased by a dog. A dozen times he thought he had the sparrow. Then another dog had got in his way. I don't know what they call this breed of dog, but abroad it is popular: it has no tail and looks like a pigwhen things are going well with it. This particular specimen, when I saw him, looked more like part of a doormat. The foxterrier had seized it by the scruff of the neck and had rolled it over into the gutter just in front of a motor cycle. Its owner, a large lady, had darted out to save it, and had collided with the motor cyclist. The large lady had been thrown some half a dozen yards against an Italian boy carrying a tray load of plaster images.

I have seen a good deal of trouble in my life, but never one yet that did not have an Italian imagevendor somehow or other mixed up in it. Where these boys hide in times of peace is a mystery. The chance of being upset brings them out as sunshine brings out flies. The motor cycle had dashed into a little milkcart and had spread it out neatly in the middle of the tram lines. The tram traffic looked like being stopped for a quarter of an hour; but the idea of every approaching tram driver appeared to be that if he rang his bell with sufficient vigor this seeming obstruction would fade away and disappear.

In an English town all this would not have attracted much attention. Somebody would have explained that a dog was the original cause, and the whole series of events would have appeared ordinary and natural. Upon these foreigners the fear descended that the Almighty, for some reason, was angry with them. A policeman ran to catch the dog.

The delighted dog rushed backwards, barking furiously, and tried to throw up paving stones with its hind legs. That frightened a nursemaid who was wheeling a perambulator, and then it was that I entered into the proceedings. Seated on the edge of the pavement, with a perambulator on one side of me and a howling baby on the other, I told that dog what I thought of him.

Forgetful that I was in a foreign landthat he might not understand meI told it him in English, I told it him at length, I told it very loud and clear. He stood a yard in front of me, listening to me with an expression of ecstatic joy I have never before or since seen equalled on any face, human or canine. He drank it in as though it had been music from Paradise.

“Where have I heard that song before?” he seemed to be saying to himself, “the old familiar language they used to talk to me when I was young?”

He approached nearer to me; there were almost tears in his eyes when I had finished.

“Say it again!” he seemed to be asking of me. “Oh! say it all over again, the dear old English oaths and curses that in this Godforsaken land I never hoped to hear again.”

I learnt from the young lady that he was an Englishborn foxterrier. That explained everything. The foreign dog does not do this sort of thing. The foreigner is born good: that is why we hate him.