SIXPENNY PIECES

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIXPENNY PIECES ***

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SIXPENNY
:: *PIECES* ::

BY A. NEIL LYONS

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TO
K. L. S.

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SIXPENNY PIECES

I
INTRODUCTORY

I was a beautiful evening in the month of May.

The stars were shining.

The beautiful moon looked beautifully forth from her beautiful throne.

A nightingale greeted her with a beautiful sonnet. England—our England—bore upon her bosom the beautiful perfume of woodruff and the wild clover. In Bovingdon Street, London, E., a lover was kicking his sweetheart.

That was the beginning of this book. I happened to be standing at Mr. Wilson's coffee stall. And I heard the screaming. And I saw some shadows moving

briskly, like the funny silhouettes on the blind at a pantomime. And some of us laughed and some of us whined and one of us blew a whistle. And the constabulary arrived, and with their coming the tumult died. And they brought the girl to the light of the stall, and her face was bruised and swollen and she lost her voice. But before doing so she was able to assure us that "'E done it in drink." "'E" was removed under escort.

They did not take her to a hospital, because there was a round little man at the stall who prevented them from doing so. "Lemme alone," the lady had remarked, upon regaining speech. "Don't you worry me. I'm all right, I am. I got my doctor 'ere: this genelman in the top 'at. Ain't that right, sir? You are my doctor, ain't you?"

"That is so," said the round little man, "I'm her doctor. Shift your dam carcases and give the woman some air."

"There you are," gasped the woman, "what did I tell you? He *is* my doctor. I got 'is confinement card in me pocket this minute."

"She can't stop 'ere you know, Dr. Brink," expostulated a constable.

"I'll take her home," said the round man.

"Be a lot better in the 'orspital," muttered the constable.

"I'm obliged for your opinion, officer; but I think I'll have my own way *this* time. Catch hold of her middle, will you, Sonny?"

It was your servant who had the honour to be addressed as Sonny, and he hastened to do the little round man's bidding. When we had got the lady into a perpendicular attitude, the doctor put his arm about her, and, anticipating the little man's commands, your servant did the same. And so we led her from the stall, all the cut-throats of Bovingdon Street following reverently behind us. Happily our march was not a long one, for the patient lived in Smith Street; and Smith Street, as everybody knows, is the second turning past the African Chief beer-house in Bovingdon Street. Short as the journey was, however, I could have wished it to be shorter: for the cut-throats pressed us close, breathing thickly about our ears; and the woman weighed heavy, having no manner of use for her legs and being stupid in the head. She only spoke once during the walk, and that was to say, in a drowsy sort of monotone: "'E done it—in drink."

We came at last to 13, Smith Street, and the fact that eighteen eager faces were already distributed among the six small windows of that dwelling-house removed my latent fears that our arrival would disturb "the neighbours." The owners of these faces were entirely mute, save for one, an elderly woman, who, in a loud wail, made certain representations to Providence in regard to one 'Erry Barber, whom I understood to be the lusty gallant primarily responsible for this adventure. Having repeated these commands a great number of times, and having exercised undoubted talent in describing 'Erry and 'Erry's parentage, the old

woman proceeded to chronicle her views respecting a vast number of alien subjects. At last this lady had the great misfortune to "catch her breath," at which the doctor cut in.

"Stop that beastly noise!" he shouted, "and shut the window, and put on a respectable garment, and come downstairs and let us in."

The lady looked benignly down upon us.

"Go' bless ye, doctor," she exclaimed, "you are a good man. But you didn't ought to talk like that to *me*. I lorst a son in the Bower war."

At that moment the door was opened by some other dweller in the house. And the doctor and his patient entered in. Not knowing the neighbourhood and not liking it, and being also of a curious nature, I awaited the doctor's return. I had not long to wait. He came out very soon, and we walked away together into clearer air. And the doctor spoke.

"It is a deuced queer thing," he said, "that a man can't stop for five minutes at a dam coffee stall without some fool or other finding work for him. I'll never go to that stall again. I'll be damned if I will. I ought to have got home half an hour ago."

"Yes," I said—I believe that vaguely I sought to comfort him—"and she *would* have been better off in the infirmary?"

"Don't talk foolishness, young man," replied the round little doctor. "You are talking dam nonsense. Infirmary—pooh! With a baby almost due, and with all those bruises! They would have made a complete job of it there. They would have kept her there for the lying-in and all—a six weeks' job at least."

"And would that matter?"

"Matter? Of course it would. That man will be out in a week, even if our local humorist doesn't let him off with a fine. What's to become of that poor girl's home, do you suppose, while she's in and he's out?"

"Would he touch it?"

"Do you live in this neighbourhood, sir?" The doctor wore a visage as of painful wonder.

I explained that I didn't.

The doctor's wonder grew. "What under heaven are you doing in the purlieus of Mile End Road at two in the morning, then?" he demanded.

"Sir," I said, with grand simplicity, "you behold in me the representative of an inexpensive but celebrated newspaper. I am come here, by editorial instruction, to seek out Blossom, the chimney-sweep philosopher, whose opinion on horse-racing we are anxious to secure for our magazine page. But Blossom has evaporated. Mrs. Blossom vainly seeketh him. So does the other woman's husband. I have prepared a full and detailed report of this disgraceful scandal, which will appear, together with photographs, on our sermon page next Sunday.

And as, when I communicated by telephone with my editor, he was so kind as to relieve me from further intellectual activity for the day, and as I do not know Mile End, and as I——"

"Never mind the 'ases,'" interpolated the doctor. "My name is Brink. I like your politics."

"I have no politics," I explained. "But ... I hate my job."

"That is what I mean," replied the doctor. "... So you want me to send this woman to the infirmary, where they will feed her well and keep her warm between white sheets, and give her copies of the *Nineteenth Century* to read. But during that time, you see, her 'man' and some other woman would be pawning her home. She knows this, and I know it. So I took her home. If she has concussion, of course, she'll *have* to go; but short of that we can get her through it at home. There's a boilerman's wife in the room above who has rudimentary graces. Infirmary, forsooth! Why, even the respectable married ones would rather pawn their wedding rings than 'lie in' on a public bed. A woman at home is a woman at home, even though she talks through the mouth of a midwife; but when a woman is in hospital William's wages and the marble ornaments are both at William's mercy. And so the women stop at home and call in Brink—Brink—the sixpenny doctor."

I laughed. "Is it *really* sixpence—your fee, I mean?"

"It is *really* sixpence. And my income is twelve hundred a year. I used to have a respectable half-guinea practice in Norfolk, and then I was doing eight hundred, and spending it all on dog-carts and dinner-parties. Here I have no expenses at all, except in the matter of top-hats; they insist upon top-hats. And I like the place: I am charmed with the people. Do you like smoked salmon and cold duck?"

"I do."

"Then come inside, and have some. And have a look at James. James will do you good. James is unique. And I can give you a bed, and I can tell you stories, and show you some fun, too—sideways sort of fun—at sixpence a time."

"Sixpenny pieces," I suggested, as his key turned in the lock.

II

CONCERNING JAMES

I have confused impressions of that first visit to the house of Dr. Brink. It was so late when we entered, you see, and all within the house was strange and unexpected, and the duck and Burgundy were very peace-provoking.

The sort of house which I had expected the doctor to inhabit was not at all the sort of house he really lived in. I had, perhaps, no very definite ideas at all. One knows the *ordinary* doctor's house: a cool and studious consulting-room, having leathern armchairs and a telephone and a stethoscope and some framed engravings after Landseer and a silver goblet which he won at tennis in the eighties and a case of text-books and a mule canary and claret plush curtains and the centenary edition of Sir Walter Scott. And a very quiet and lofty waiting-room, containing all the illustrated papers for last April and a reading-glass and a stereoscope, besides a decanter of water and three clean tumblers.

One knows that sort of house, I say, and likewise the gentle, murmuring press of sufferers which lays siege to it. But the spot-cash practitioners of Mile End Road are rather strange and foreign to us. We do not go into their little, weird consulting-hatches nor sweat amid the tumult of their vulgar patrons. We can imagine what the thing is like: and there are some of us perhaps who imagine truthfully. I didn't.

My imagination did not run to Japanese colour prints and pastel studies, and neatly framed examples of the art of Mr. Nicholson. And yet these things were hung upon the white distempered walls of Dr. Brink's infirmary. I figured the tumult as gazing speechlessly upon these curious East End substitutes for Landseer. "What do they think of them?" I asked the doctor.

"They are much amused," said he. We were standing before a pastel when he spoke—a thing of heavy shadows with purple deeps, wherefrom there stood forth dimly the figures of a crippled man and an old sick woman, and the face of a child with brazen eyes. "Out Patients" was the title of this drawing, and it preached of a divine torture. "They are much amused," said the doctor.

But this was in the morning. That night we did not look at pictures, nor at patients. We sat above and supped off duck and Burgundy. I saw confusedly—it was a pleasant confusion—that there were many good pictures in the house, and that books were everywhere—everywhere. And the bottle was a full one. And we spoke of olives and the Norfolk women.

Then he took me to a little brown room with more books in it, and a bedstead which was of oak and carven.

"Good-night," said the doctor. "You shall see old James to-morrow. You will like old James. Good-night."

* * * * *

When morning came, I had the pleasure of viewing Bovingdon Street in the sunshine.

It was a queer sort of sunshine, to be sure—weak and uncertain and rather dirty: a sort of actinic heel-taps. But I remember thinking that any less shabby form of sunshine would have carried with it an air of disrespect, as though it had come forth to mock at the gloom and ugliness of the thing beneath it. A gloomier, sillier, dirtier street than Bovingdon Street I do not wish to see. But I have seen such all the same. Indeed, I have looked upon some filth and squalor beside which Bovingdon Street is as the Mall compared to Worship Street. So much I must admit in common fairness.

There was at least no actual squalor in the street on which I looked: only dirt and gloom and ugliness. The houses which faced me were comparatively new, and they were small and neat, and of a square and thick-set build. But there happened to be one hundred and sixty of them, each exactly like its neighbour, and having each before its doorway a small pale or enclosure containing—cinders and rags and pieces of paper and battered cans and smudgy babies and hungry cats. And there was grime on all the windows, and in front of them a very vulgar man was selling bloaters, loudly. Also, in all that soot-brown avenue there was one white thing: a hawthorn tree in bloom, which shuddered gently in the fog-shine like a discontented spectre. And those ridiculous fat houses stood there stoutly, shoulder to shoulder, one hundred and sixty of them, eyeing her with dolour. And a voice beneath my window made speech, saying loudly: "You give me my daughter's combings back, ye thievin' slut." So I left the window and lighted a pipe and crawled back into bed.

* * * * *

And then, as the story writers say, a strange thing happened. There came a sudden tap upon my bedroom door, and without further warning there entered in a—a lady. She was rather a young lady, to be sure, some fifteen years of age, perhaps. And she was wearing a petticoat—a striped petticoat—and her hair was dressed into innumerable pigtails, and her top was covered by—by a—a—don't they call it a camisole? And she bade me "Good-morning," very calmly.

"G—G—Good-morning!" I responded. I hoped to heaven that I was not blushing.

"Don't trouble to scream," said the lady, in an off-hand manner. "It is all right: I have come for my stockings."

"Really," I began, a little hotly, "*I* haven't ta——" And then I stopped. A horrible thought presented itself to me.

Doctor Brink no doubt combined the practice of alienism with that of spot-

cash cures. And this lady was doubtless an "inmate." And——

The voice of the inmate interrupted me. "It's quite all right, really it is. I'm not accusing you of theft or anything else. I only want to get my stockings from this cupboard. Mrs. Gomm, our 'char,' she mixes things up so. And I want a brown pair, because this is my day for being respectable with my aunt at Ealing, and you wear your brown dress and a neat toque for that sort of thing; and where the devil that woman has—oh, here we are. Want darning, of course. Damn!"

Swearing seemed to be a widespread habit in this unusual household. I coughed—the sort of cough you use when children are present and your deaf Uncle David is reviving his recollections of India in the sixties.

"I say," protested my visitor, "you really needn't look so worried. It's all right, really. This is my room, you know; theoretically, you know. Only I always sleep in the bathroom (we've got a bath-room, you know, and there's a lid to it, and I sleep on that), and I always sleep there because it's a long way from Fatty, and I can't hear him raving when the night-bell rings. And Fatty——"

"Pardon me," I cried, "but who is Fatty?"

The lady looked at me a little blankly. "Who is Fatty?" she repeated, but then broke off, a light as of understanding in her eye. "I was forgetting," she said. "Of course, you wouldn't know. Well, it is like this, you see. This house belongs to a man called Brink, who is a doctor and——"

"I know all that," I assured her.

"Oh, you do know all about it, then," quoth she; "I wasn't sure, you know. Most of the strange people that I find in my bedroom if I happen to look in for anything don't know anything at all about us. Fatty finds them—gathers them up, you know—and brings them home and feeds them and converts them to Socialism and puts them to bed, and when they wake up in the morning they have to have it all explained to them. Fatty is Dr. Brink, you know. One always calls him Fatty, because his proper names are Theobald Henry de la Rue, and you simply haven't time in the mumps season. You're a reformer, I suppose? What do you reform?"

"Reform!" I cried, "what do *I* reform? Why, I don't reform at all. I've never reformed a blue-bottle."

"But surely you're against something or other. You *must* be against something!"

"Oh, well," I answered, "if it comes to that, I—I——"

"Just so," assented the lady. "Don't go into particulars. They *all* particularise. I could stand much from you—more than usual, I mean—because you are clean-shaven, and that is such a change from most of the other powerful thinkers whom one finds here in the morning. They are staunch, you know, and sound on the Education Question and all that sort of thing, and they are a useful hobby for Fatty to take up; but they're rather old and solemn, as a rule, you know. And

they *do* go into details! Now *you* seem rather jolly; and when you've got up and we've been properly introduced and I've boiled your egg, I'll show you my white rats. Do you like white rats?"

"I adore them," said your servant.

"Good. And, I say, I hope you won't mind, but you'll have to toilet yourself in the kitchen sink. Our 'char's' such a rotter, you know, and I see she hasn't filled your jug—she never does—and she doesn't come till ten, and I've got to finish dressing, and Fatty's out on a call, and there's all the breakfast to get; and when you've done your toilet *do* you mind just putting a match to the gas stove and sticking a kettle on? Thanks awfully." ... My fair guest flung herself upon the door. All of her, save a corner of the stripy petticoat, had disappeared, when I put in *the* important question.

"I say," I cried, "who *are* you?"

"Me," cried a voice from behind the door—"me? Oh ... I am James."

III
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

With breakfast came the opportunity of renewing my *entente* with James. That young lady appeared now fully clothed in the conventional garments of her age, even to a pinafore with seven pockets.

"What do you put in all those pockets?" I inquired, as she tripped in with the bacon.

"Most of them," she answered, "contain white rats.... I thought," she added, eyeing me closely, as I drifted in a thoughtful manner to the far end of the table, "I thought you *adored* white rats?"

"That is quite so," I responded. "The dear, dumb creatures! I—I idolise them."

"*Why* do you idolise them?" demanded James, putting on a very subtile smile.

"Because," I answered, "because they—they are so dumb and—and so white."

"Then why do you shudder at them?"

I explained my attitude towards white rats. "It is not fear which makes me seem to shrink," I pointed out, "only a sense of—of—well, you see, the white rats which I have previously adored were confined within a cage, which contained

a sort of treadmill, which they worked with their feet, and you watched this talented display from a distance, and wondered if they never grew tired. But——"

"Those wheel-cages," interpolated James, "are the most damnable contrivances which were ever invented. Whenever I see one I buy it and burn it. That is one reason why I happen to have so many rats. I think that the people who make those things ought to be devoured by locusts. I——"

"You also have the spirit of reform, then?" I ventured to suggest.

"Reform!" echoed James, with a bitter laugh. "Because one hates to see things tortured? *I* call it common decency. All of Fatty's friends have got some wonderful new name for being decent. One of Fatty's most particular friends is a rather awful man named Boag, and he is a public accountant, and he wears spats, and he calls himself a Conative Meliorist; and if you ask him why, he says it is because he believes in making people happy. 'Conative Meliorist'! Think of it! Sounds so expensive, doesn't it? He pronounces his name in two jerks—Bo—ag, and it always reminds me of Asheg, Mesheg, and Abednedgo.... He looks exactly like them, too! 'Conative Meliorist'! It is much easier to call yourself just James."

"Why *do* you call yourself 'James,' by the way?"

"Let us stick to the point," responded James. "It is so like a man to dodge your arguments when he can't upset them. What was the point?"

"Conative Meliorism," I suggested.

"That was merely a passing reference. There was something else which reminded me of Mr. Boag. Something which reminded me of something which reminded me of something which remind—I remember now. We were talking of white rats. You were pretending not to hate them. You were trying to deceive me. Your pretendings don't take me in the leastest bit, so you may just as well chuck them up. Be honest. Be a man. Stand up like an English gentleman. Say what you feel about them. Do not fear to shock my virgin ears because——"

"How old are you, James?" I hoped that my simple, honest, obvious wonder would disarm the question of its point.

The lady gazed upon me with an air of bland surprise. "That is a question," she answered, with great gravity, "which I never discuss. It isn't fair to Fatty. *Do* sit down. Was it sugar and no milk, you said; or milk and no sugar? And will you have hysterics if Sunshine joins the circle? He always breakfasts with his mother. Oh, de minna, tinna, tooney Sunshine, den."

Sunshine was a rat—the whitest and roundest and fattest of them all.

* * * * *

I, nevertheless, contrived to breakfast well. Sunshine's mistress was thoughtful enough to curtail the radius of that minna, tinna, tooney animal's accustomed

beat: with the result that I was able to keep my seat. And his mistress stayed him with dainties and prattled cheerfully upon a variety of strange subjects. It was no good waiting breakfast for Fatty, she explained, because Fatty's "call" was a "midder."

"And what in heaven's name," I demanded, "may a 'midder' be?"

"That," explained James, "is what Fatty calls an 'obstetric term.' When people have babies, you know. Do you know what 'B.B.A.' means?"

I didn't.

"That's another trade expression. It stands for 'Born Before Arrival,' and it's what you always pray for, because it saves a lot of time, and they have to pay you just the same. Our fee is half a guinea, and you can pay it by instalments if you like. But if it is your first baby we charge a guinea, because your husband is a lot more trouble to us, and he is not always sober. And whatever the fee, we do our very best for you, and pride ourselves on our results; but as we get about seven 'midders' every day, we are not able to make so many compliments as we did in Norfolk.... Fatty calls it his Automatic Delivery System."

The girl, as she spoke, looked very "nice" and English: she was feeding Sunshine from a fork. I began to wonder whether it was actually possible that she did not realise the horrible impropriety of her conversation. As an Englishman, I knew my duty. That duty was to represent to her in suitable terms that her conduct was abandoned and impure. But the religious duty of causing maidens to blush is one which is best performed by the Righteous, who perform it so well and often.... I concealed my horror.

And the maiden prattled on. "Some of them are fearfully grateful. Do you see that old stuffed owl in the dusty case, there? That's a present—to me. It only came yesterday, and it's a token of gratitude from a Jewish lady in the fish trade. This is her sixth, and the first five were all girls. She used to deal with our opposition—Dr. McWhite—but when the fifth female came along they changed over to Fatty, and this stuffed owl is what he calls a tribute to professional ability. And there's Fatty's key in the door. Seize his bacon, will you—it's in the fender."

I was rather annoyed with Dr. Brink for returning just then. I had mapped out a series of leading questions designed to elicit James's age and identity.

But when the little hungry man came in, I felt that these questions were unimportant and could wait. It was interesting enough to help that busy scientist to mustard, and to hear him curse the Liberal Government with his mouth full of bacon, and to watch the quiet motherliness of James.

"Regular multitude in the waiting-room," announced the doctor, as he gulped his coffee. "Got to get back there quick. You'd better pop down with me, youngster, and get a squint at it all."

"You sit on the gas-stove in the kitchen," explained James. "There's a win-

dow just above it which gives on to the consulting-room, and it's painted on the kitchen side, and I've scratched a little squint-hole in the paint.... I often go down there when the drunks come in—the *funny* drunks, I mean. Sometimes they are not funny. And Mr. Boag, the Conative Meliorist, sits there by the hour. He calls it 'supping with misery.'"

"You'll spend the day with us, I suppose?" suggested the little doctor. And, as it was Saturday, and therefore a holiday in my trade, I supposed that I would.

And then they introduced me to the gas-stove.

IV
SIXPENCES

I sat on the gas-stove, with James beside me, and we applied our eyes in turn to the squint-hole and beheld the Doctor earning sixpences.

Item: A young gentleman with the hiccoughs. Was feeling suicidal. How was his appetite? Shocking, shocking! Digestion in good order? On the contrary, it was shocking bad. What sort of nights? Shocking! Spirits low? Shocking low. Did his head ache? Shockingly. Food taste dull? Absolutely shocking. Young gentleman receives some advice on the subject of alcoholic excess and a bottle of water, fortified by harmless colouring matter. Young gentleman departs.

Item: Tired woman with baby in convulsions. Baby's dietary discussed. Woman indignant. "Why," she declares, "'e 'as the very same as us!" Baby dismissed with a powder.

Item: Slow-spoken man with a jellied thumb. "Door jamb," he explains. "Want a stifficut. Works at the Brewery. Want another stifficut for the Insurance. 'Urry up. 'Ow much? Good-day."

Then an old woman came in—a very old woman, with rosy cheeks and a clean apron, and querulous, childish eyes.

"I want some morphium," she says, "to soothe meself down. Not that I got a right to look for much—at my age."

The doctor became jocular. "What!" he cried. "A fine woman like you? Morphia for you? What? With those cheeks? *What?*"

"I ain't got no happetite," said the old woman. "And there's shooting pains in me 'ead, and I don't sleep proper, and I seems to feel lonesome, and I wants

some morphium to soothe meself down with."

"What's your favourite dinner dish?" inquired our inconsequent wag of a doctor.

"I ain't got no favourites," replied the woman. "I'm old, I am; what should I do with favourites at my age? I want some morphium to soothe meself down."

"What *is* your age—sixty?"

"I shall never see sixty again," said the woman. "Nor I shan't see seventy. Nor eighty. I'm old."

"And you mean to tell me," cried the doctor, with sudden heat, "that you do not care for tripe? Good tripe, mind you—tender tripe, very well boiled, with just a flavouring of onions?"

"And if I did," protested the woman, "who's to cook it for me? There's so many young women to get the favours now I find, and me so old. Can't I have a little morphium, Doctor: the brown mixture, ye know? To soothe meself down with."

"The young ones get the favouring, eh? Do you live with a young woman?"

"I lives with two on 'em—worse luck."

"Daughters?"

"Daughters? Me? No, sir. I'm a maiden, I am.... It's me landlady what I lives with."

"Doesn't she cook for you? I've got some tripe in the kitchen, and I thought—but, of course, if it can't be cooked, why—— What's all this about?"

The rosy-cheeked old maiden was crying, "I'm too old," she sobbed; "it's the young ones gets the favouring."

"Oh," said the doctor, "and so your landlady is unkind?"

"Not unkind, sir," said the woman, gently swallowing the doctor's bait; "she's a good woman, as they go, only I'm growed so old, and a young woman has come into our house, and I'm sorry to say, doctor, as she has 'leniated my landlady away from me. She is a young woman."

"Can't you get some other lodgings?" suggested the doctor. "You oughtn t to be neglected."

"I do not say I ham neglected, Doctor. That would be huntrue. I am not blaming anybody. I honly say I'm old. And this new lodger she's 'leniated my landlady away from me. She's young, you see. Well under seventy, she is."

They're all alike, these minxes," said the doctor, with a wistful smile.

"I got nothing to say agin her, mind you," protested the old woman. "Not agin neether. My landlady, she was very good and kind to me at one time; but now this young one 'ave come, and I ham sorry to say as she 'ave 'leniated my landlady away from me."

"I shouldn't fret about the matter, anyhow," suggested Dr. Brink. "You'll

make friends with your landlady soon again; I'm sure you will."

"We was never bad friends," explained the woman. "We're friends to-day, on'y not *sich* friends, if you understand me. This new lodger, you see, she has 'leniated my landlady away from me. That's what it is. She 'ave leniated her. She's a *young* woman, you see! ... Will you give me some morphium, Doctor; just to soothe meself down with?"

The maiden got her morphia.

The maiden was succeeded by another woman—a mother. She carried a bundle, partly occupied by a baby. She was a lewd and dirty woman, and engaged my friend in the following dialogue.

FEMALE: I warra soothin' surrup for my baby yere. 'E's fidgety.

DOCTOR: How fidgety?

FEMALE: Well: look at the little blighter. 'E's got the blasted jumps.

DOCTOR: Of course he's got the jumps. He's dying.

FEMALE: Warra mean—dyin'?

DOCTOR: I mean that he will soon be dead.

FEMALE: Whaffor?

DOCTOR: Because he's starving.

FEMALE: Warra mean—starving?

DOCTOR: I mean that he is squirming mad from hunger. Breast fed, of course?

FEMALE: Warra mean, ye bleatin' image?

DOCTOR: Breast fed, of course?

FEMALE: Ye bleatin' image! 'Oo the 'ell you think *you* are?

DOCTOR: Breast fed, of course?

FEMALE (*weeping wildly*): Me starve my baby? Ow, ow, ow, ow!

DOCTOR: Breast fed, of course?

FEMALE: Ow, ow—why cert'nly 'e's breast fed! 'Ow else d'ye think a pore workin' woman's goin' ter manage? And 'im not five months old. And one of yere own deliveries. Cert'nly e's breast fed.

DOCTOR: That's the trouble, you see. No baby can be nourished on gin and stout. He's starving, I tell you.

FEMALE: And I tell ye it's a dirty lie. I'm for ever feedin' 'im. 'E's for ever worryin'. Sich a happetite this little beggar's got. Warra mean, me starve 'im? Warra mean, yere gin and beer? I suckle the little dear meself.

DOCTOR: And what do you feed yourself on?

FEMALE: That's my business, ain't it?

DOCTOR: It's my business, too. If you want that baby to live, you'd best look sharp and feed him. Get sober. I can't cure the baby. The only person who can cure him is yourself. And to do that you must leave off getting drunk. You

must eat some decent food. You're living on alcohol at present. No baby can be nourished on gin and stout.

FEMALE: S'elp me Gawd, Doctor—s'elp me Gawd, young man, if I die this minute—s'elp me Gawd I ain't 'ad only two 'arf-pints since yisterday. I take them a-purpose for the boy's own sake, young man. 'E don't seem to fancy it, some'ow, unless I 'as me drop o' stout. See what I mean, Doctor? I takes what I do for the baby's own sake: 'e *will* 'ave it, bless 'is little 'eart.

V
THE HYPOCRITES

During a lull in the sixpenny battle Dr. Brink held parley with me, standing on the seat of his official chair and peering through the top of his consulting-room window. "Are you comfortable on that gas-stove?" inquired the learned doctor.

"The gas-stove," I said, "is very well; but—er—comfort, you know, is not exactly the word. It—it—I say, you know, that woman with the dying baby was rather quaint."

"This," said the doctor, "is a quaint sort of gas-stove. We often roast chaps on it. Do you like beer?"

"Not much," I answered, "but my brother plays the flute."

"Because," pursued my host, ignoring this effort at repartee, "my consultations are nearly over for this morning, and then I am going my round, and that is a short one, and I shall be back here by one o'clock, and after that I propose to brew some beer. Would you like to help me?"

The proposition was not without a certain suddenness, but I was getting used to this household, and did not betray my surprise. Also, I accepted the invitation.

"Righto! Come about yourself? How's your appetite?" said the doctor, in one breath, as he disappeared from the window and readdressed himself to business.

* * * * *

And in the afternoon we duly did this brewing.

”One brews in Baffin’s studio,” explained the doctor, with a slight yawn, as he led me through the kitchen door into his little yard, all bright with tulips. ”Baffin’s studio is really our washhouse, you know.”

”And who is Baffin?” I demanded.

”One of the Leicestershire Baffins,” replied the doctor gravely. ”His mother was a Pillbrook. His uncle——”

I begged the doctor to restrain his gift of humour. ”Where is Baffin? What is he?” I demanded again.

”Oh,” said the doctor, ”if you are really commonplace enough to be interested in a man himself when you ask, ”who he is,” I will expound this Baffin to you. He has red hair and freckles, and he is one of the Leicestershire Baffins, and he hates the Leicestershire Baffins, and he is a youth of great talents, who is supposed to live here, but at present he is reforming the Royal Academy, and reviving poster art in England. And he never puts anything where he will find it again, or shuts a drawer or folds his clothes. He is a genius. And—— Look out, I say, that’s Baffin’s bag.”

It *was* Baffin’s bag, and it assisted your servant in the performance of a complicated somersault. Baffin had left it on his doorstep.

Baffin’s doorstep led into quite the wildest washhouse which I have ever viewed. Baffin’s bed, consisting of three brown blankets strewn oddly upon a damaged ottoman, occupied most of the foreground, and behind this object lay, in some confusion, waistcoats, and easels, and broken chairs, and bas-reliefs, and unclean collars, and portfolios, and fencing sticks, and a rusty helm and vizor out of Wardour Street. And the walls were covered with crayon drawings and printed posters, all of them attached to the plaster by means of one corner and a pin, and all of them being curled at the edges and tanned with exposure. It was noticeable, also, that a bust of the Blessed Virgin, after Cinquevalli, was situated within the font or cavity of the copper. We removed this object in order to make room for the beer.

I observed also that Mr. Baffin’s studio was beautified by one mural design of a permanent nature. This consisted of a sum in compound arithmetic, performed by means of charcoal. I studied this inscription with interest. There was

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 £3  5
    20
 -----
£65  0
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A fairly obvious, if unconventional, piece of mathematical deduction. We were then faced with a new problem, somewhat more mysterious in its workings. Thus:—

```
      65
      98
      --
  13)163(12   Carry 3
      13
      --
       33
       26
       --
        7
      12
      ----
      12/7
      ----
Total £1 12s. 7d.
```

I must own to being strangely touched by this pathetic effort on the part of Baffin to solve the mysteries of an alien art. I also reflected that the result of his calculations, though wayward and inscrutable in itself, was probably touched with a profound and poignant importance to Baffin. It represented cigarettes and dinners—£1 12s. 7d. worth, more or less. A fellow-feeling made me fear it must be less. There was a hurried, insignificant, shamefaced look about the figures wherewith Baffin had recorded his results. They indubitably pointed to a debit balance.

Presently Mr. Baffin himself strolled in, and we were presented to each other, and he helped us boil the beer. He helped us in intention rather than effect, for Mr. Baffin possessed a thoughtful, halting, introspective mind, and, as Dr. Brink had observed, he did not put things where they could be found again. Also, he was rather wrapped up in me. "I say, you know," he had observed, "I wish you would sit for me. You would make a splendid model for my oyster seller. I am doing the New Cut by night, you know."

"Are you in love?" demanded Mr. Baffin, a little later. I said, "Of course." "Will you bring her round, then?" continued Mr. Baffin. "And to what end?" I

said. "I am collecting lovers," explained this talented and candid youth. "I want that rapt look. Paid models are no use at all, you know. Amateurs aren't much better, of course, because they all have prejudices against yearning in public. But I am hoping to find the exception in time, and you have a natural sort of expression—rather—and so I thought—I give you tea, you know, and drinks when there are any. All you have to do is to sit on the throne and embrace. I hope she's dark. Next Tuesday would be a good day."

I promised Mr. Baffin that I would submit his proposition to all the ladies with whom I happened to be in love.

And then the liquid in the copper arrived at a perfect temperature and we became all silent in the pursuit of brewing. And James came in to help us, observing that the attractions of brewing transcended those of her aunt at Ealing, and that she had postponed her visit to that respectable lady. And some of the doctor's friends looked in, including Mr. Pudsey, the lyric poet, and Boag (conative meliorist), who invited me to dine with him, and Jenny Brown, the painter, and Miss Blick, of the Women's Social and Political Union, and Mr. Webb, the local curate, who explained to me, with an air of bold originality, that Christianity and Socialism had points in common. And we partook of tea from Breton mugs, and were secretly amused at each other. And in the midst of it all a gas engine arrived at the surgery door, and said "Honk! Honk!" And the doctor rushed out and came back looking sad.

"It is Lady Budge, the new member's wife," he said with dolour; "and she has come in her motor to discuss the poor. James, old girl, I am awfully sorry, but you have got to be respectable. Her ladyship is waiting upstairs now."

A period of wild excitement followed, while we all helped James to comb her hair and climb into the speckled pinafore of a blameless life. "I will do my best," said James; "but I am sure I shall forget and call you 'Fatty.' Is it father or papa to-day?"

"Her ladyship," responded the doctor, "is, I think, the kind of ladyship who would prefer papa. Let her do all the good she wants to. Mention that we've got a curate here. Webb and I will come up in a little while and collect the cheque. Don't harrow her. She's the kind of ladyship who likes to do business with *respectable* poverty."

When, a little later, we went upstairs, James was sedately sipping more tea from a cup. And her ladyship was talking, and James was viewing her with eyes of innocence and wonder. "I quite agree with you," said James, "that alpaca is the most sensible thing for people of that class."

Baffin was dragged in, and the doctor loudly proclaimed him as being of the Leicestershire Baffins, and her ladyship suddenly looked interested and human.

"You are an artist?" she said. "How very charming!"

Baffin, who had done very well up to then, became suddenly ponderful again. "I say," he blurted forth, at last, "couldn't I persuade you to sit for me some time? You are the very thing I have been looking out for. For my angel's back, you know."

VI
CONATUS

I accepted Mr. Boag's invitation and dined with him—at the National Liberal Club. They wine you at this place in a manner which is singularly perfect. I cannot, at this distance of time, state exactly what topics formed the subject of Mr. Boag's improving conversation; but I can say that, regarded from the standpoint of Meliorism, his dinner was an emphatic success. And when it was quite over I found myself upon the Thames Embankment smiling cheerfully, as was becoming to the happy circumstance of my conversion to Mr. Boag's cheerful doctrines.

And thus it was that I came to take part, unofficially, at another dinner party; a repast *à deux*, with epigrams, and incident, all in the most approved style of romance. The *tête-à-tête* is consecrated to literature by a thousand charming precedents. I shall certainly offer no apology for submitting this one to your indulgent consideration.

They were dining off alabaster—or was it granite?—at the foot of Cleopatra's Needle; and I remarked particularly the singular blueness of Strephon's fingers. The glorious revelation, recently vouchsafed to me, of Conative truths, had so warmed my heart, had set up such a tingling within my veins (which were themselves protected from chill by several layers of wool and cambric) that the few degrees of frost prevailing at the moment had not yet become evident to my senses. Strephon, of course, was in another case, being appropriately clad in garments partaking of the nature of gossamer. And he, besides, had not been privileged to receive the truths of Meliorism. Wherefore, he must blow upon his nail, and pinch his scrubby cheek, and utter blasphemies, crying, "Christ, mate, but this wind ain't 'arf a nipper."

And she (the Chlöe of this story: the one whom he addressed as "mate") made answer thus: "Then do as I tell you, an' drink that up!"

"But 'ere, 'old 'ard!" cried Strephon, as she poked a little bottle at his lips—"that's your share, ain't it?"

"Not be rights," said the woman, blushing a little—or seeming to blush; for she was a battered, sodden thing, and her cheek had lost its quickness. "It ain't my share, be rights. I—I 'ad a sip at yourn. Besides, I've lorst me liking fur that Irish stuff. Give me Scotch!"

"This *is* Scotch, ain't it?" said the man.

"It is, bad luck to it," replied the woman quickly. "I've lost me likin' fur it, I tell you. Give me Irish!"

"Oh!" said the man, and he swallowed her share.

He pocketed the empty bottle with a little shiver of contentment. The woman shivered also, and plucked at an imaginary shawl. "Now then, boy," she cried, with sudden cheerfulness; "wake up, you ain't 'arf a eater. Why don't ye punch into that other 'am bone."

"So I shall," responded Boy, with a full mouth, "when I done this."

"Righto, dearie," said the woman quietly, with a sideways look at the ham bone and another little shiver. Then she drew closer to her companion and looked at him silently, with pity in her awful eyes. "It's a funny thing about you," she said at last; "you to be on the rocks at your age—a boy like you!"

"I'm rather independent in me nature," explained the "Boy." "I've stood fur me rights and suffered by it. 'Ad some good jobs in me time. 'Ad some money too. I was a bit lucky over cards. Retired for a year an' done it in. Ain't 'ad no luck since."

"Funny, ain't it," said the woman, still with that strange softness in her shameful eyes. "Funny, ain't it," she repeated: "a boy like you."

"Not so much o' yere 'Boy,'" protested Strephon; "I'm twenty-four."

"Ha!" cried the woman, crouching closer, "what price yere 'umble then? *I'm* turned forty-four."

Strephon looked lazily at her, munching his ham bone steadily. She made a queer figure, strange to see beside that world-old monument, with her swollen, bloodless face, and button nose, and greedy eyes, and ravelled, rusty hair, the colour of an old dog-fox's pelt. And that which was upon her head, a time-worn sailor-hat, set at a ridiculous angle, increased the queerness of her. "What price yere 'umble?" she cried again, with a shrill little creak of laughter; "turned forty-four, I am."

"Yus," said Strephon simply, "and you look it!"

He continued to munch at his ham bone, and she continued to leer at him, showing neither anger nor surprise. But the flat smile on her face grew gradually flatter, and again she shivered, plucking at the shawl which was not there.

Suddenly the man looked up from his ham bone and spoke to her. "'Ow

much did 'e give you for it?" said he.

The woman uttered a sequence of scalding oaths.

"The stingy swine," cried she, "'e give me a tanner; that's what 'e give me—a lousy tanner. See if I don't jolly well pop back there and 'ave a shawl's worf out of 'is stinkin' till—the stingy Jew."

"What!" said the man, evincing a sort of interest. "Are you in that line, then? Tills and ceterer?"

"I'm in any blessed line, I am," said the woman, "s' long as there's the price of a fag in it. Never 'eard o' Nottingham Kate, I suppose? That's me. I was well known in me time. 'Twas I what done that drugging affair at Weedon, when we put them orficers through it. They made a lot of that job at the time. I done five year for that."

"Well," commented Strephon, still gnawing patiently at his bone, "it ain't much to yere credit. I'm on the straight ticket meself. Per'aps if I'd knowed the sort of character you—but there: you ain't so bad as some on 'em. Harlot, or thief, or what not, you've treated me quite fair.... Gurrr! ... Christ, but it's cold!"

"Chronic!" said the woman, pressing her senseless fingers to her neck, in the way which women have.

"That 'am," reflected Strephon, "just sooted me all right. Wish I 'ad a fag now."

Without a word, the woman struggled to her feet, and descended the steps of the pedestal, half walking, half crawling, like a child. She peered into the darkness, and must have beheld a figure there; for she at once came forward, with stiff, uncertain steps, and having spoken to him, returned to her pedestal the possessor of all his cigarettes.

"Strike me now," cried Strephon, beholding her treasure with incredulous eyes; "you *are* a deep one. You don't 'arf know the ropes. Take one yerself, won't ye?"

Chlöe took a cigarette and lighted it; but Strephon, after fumbling hopelessly with a matchbox, threw the thing away from him in petulant despair. "See here," cried he. "Look at them things, there! Them's my 'ands; was once. Look at 'em. Gawd 'elp me, look at 'em. I can't bend 'em; I can't move 'em; Gawd 'elp me, I can't ser much as lift 'em. I——"

Chide, taking the cigarette from her lips, placed it between his, which silenced them. And then she took his hands, and with a little laugh—the same old creak of a laugh—she widened the gaping juncture of her bodice, and placed his senseless hands within it, where they lay warm beside her bosom. The sudden contact of the ice-cold substance forced a little shriek from her.

"That's a good idea, mate, that is," declared her Strephon. "'Ope you won't catch cold?"

"Co-old?" cried the woman, with a little tremor. "Co-ld be damned. Us women is different from you blo-o-kes. We kin sta-and more cold. We got more warmth be na-ature."

"I see," said Strephon, and he blew forth a fat, contented cloud of cigarette smoke.

There was a silence, disturbed by the chattering of the woman's teeth. Then, at last, with a sudden catching of the breath, she spoke again—

"'Ere," she said, "'ere"—and she uttered the familiar creak—"I'm doin' this because I like you. Wonder if you like me?"

"Ho," reflected Strephon, "you're all right—considering what you are."

VII
ON THE PROPERTIES OF WATER

"Doctor ... can you tell me if water is a safe thing for anybody to drink?"

She was a wizened, alert little woman, having bright eyes and an eager face. The back of the doctor's neck, which I spied through my peephole, grew red under pressure of the secret emotions occasioned by this question.

"As to that," replied the doctor, "I—ahem—er—I—well, in fact—er—ahem—you see, er—Mrs.—Mrs.——"

"Mrs. Skelp, sir," interpolated the caller. "Mrs. Skelp, of Peacock Street. You must remember me, sir. I've 'ad you in for me last three."

"Why, of course, I remember you, Mrs. Skelp," responded the shameless physician; "your name had slipped my memory. And how are they all doing?"

"Nicely, thank you, sir," said Mrs. Skelp. "Excepting," she added, as if with a sudden afterthought—"the pore little thing what died. Although I'm sure, doctor—and many's the time I said the same to Skelp—I'm sure you done *your* best. Though 'ow you made seven visits of it when the child was on'y ill five days is a thing I never could—but, there, let bygones be bygones. About this water now. You think that water's a safe sort of thing for anybody to drink, Doctor?"

"It's—ahem—it's a—er—a natural sort of drink, you know," suggested the doctor.

"Why, cert'nly, Doctor," admitted Mrs. Skelp. "On'y ... Well, so far as that

goes, you could say the same of milk."

"You could," assented Dr. Brink.

"And yet," pursued his patient, "it is well known to all of us what milk will do for the system. Look 'ow it puffs you out. Look at that baby of mine, the pore little thing what died. You did your best, Doctor, we all know, but we've often thought since as milk was at the bottom of it. It doesn't do for the likes of us to set ourselves up against the doctor, but you'll remember yerself that I had my suspicions about you ordering so much milk. 'What *I* think she wants,' I said, is one of your biggest bottles of good dark red, and—— But there, let bygones be bygones. What I really come 'ere for is about this water question. I says to mine last night, I says—'e's a drayman, you know, Doctor.'"

The Doctor nodded.

"Well," suggested Mrs. Skelp, "you know what *draymen* are. Water's no drink for a drayman, Doctor."

"I—I suppose not," ventured the doctor.

"And mine, 'e's a 'eavy, full-bodied build o' man. And so I says to 'im—but what's the good o' sayin' *anythink* to 'im. The long and the short o' it is, Doctor, as 'e's took to the water 'abit.

"I meantosay," continued Mrs. Skelp, having marked the doctor's grin, "I meantosay as 'e's sworn off 'is licker.

"'E's a great reader is mine, you see. 'E sets up in bed for hours o' a Sunday morning and gets through as much as three-pennyworth o' papers at a setting. Not that I 'olds with so much readin', mind you. 'Moody boys an' readin' gals,' we used to say—well, you know the rest, Doctor. It's a thankless 'abit.

"But, at the same time, mind you, I believe in the notion that Sunday is a day of rest. A man's 'ouse is 'is own of a Sunday, I always say. And so I ain't never raised no objections to mine amusin' 'isself; and I can't say that no 'arm 'as ever come of my good nature. Not till now. But now we see the fruits of it.

"You see, Doctor, 'e's bin reading up the subject o' his vitals. And the long and short of it is as 'e's took to what 'e calls 'is nature treatment. Not a tea-cup full o' beer will 'e 'ave inside the 'ouse, Doctor. Not a spoonful. It's water—water, always water. That an' cocoa. Fancy a drayman drinking cocoa, Doctor!"

"Cocoa is a very wholesome drink," asserted the doctor.

"For supper—yes," assented Mrs. Skelp. "I agree with you there, Doctor. But 'ooever 'eard of cocoa for breakfast and water for dinner and water for tea? And not a drop of beer from one week's end to the other? Fancy a drayman without 'is beer, Doctor!"

"He is probably much better without it," suggested Dr. Brink.

"*Better* without it?" echoed the visitor. "Without beer? A drayman? Workin' ten an' twelve hours on the stretch? You *live* with 'im, Doctor, and

see if 'e's better without it ... Not that I wish you no 'arm."

"And what," said the doctor, looking earnestly at his watch, "and—er—what——"

"Well, Doctor," interpolated Mrs. Skelp, "I really come to see if you could give me a stifficut. We must do something-."

"A certificate of what?" demanded the doctor.

"To say 'e needs it—fur the good o' 'is 'ealth, you know. We can never go on like this. A little stifficut, Doctor, to say 'e needs it."

"Needs what?" exclaimed the doctor, yawning wearily.

"The beer," responded Mrs. Skelp. "This water will be the ruin of 'im, Doctor, and me, too. 'E gets so down'earted, Doctor, so solemn-minded, so short-spoken."

"I have already told you, Mrs. Skelp"—the Doctor put on his heaviest consulting-room manner—"I have already told you that your husband is probably better off without the beer. How, then, can you expect me—especially since I haven't seen him—to give you the certificate which you ask for? And what difference would it make if I did?"

"'E wouldn't go against the doctor's orders, sir. Skelp is not that sort of man. 'E knows 'is place, sir. I on'y got to show him a brief from you, Doctor, to say that what he wants is so many pints to nourish 'is system, and there would be a end to all this nonsense. A drayman must 'ave beer, Doctor."

"A drayman must have nothing of the sort, Mrs. Skelp. What a drayman must have is plenty of rump steak and jam roll and a quiet life and a jolly time. Why do you want him to have this beer? Are you any better off when he does have it? The more he spends on beer the less there is for the home, you know."

"Mine ain't that sort," asserted Mrs. Skelp, with a touch of asperity in her tone: "*I* keep Skelp's money. What he wants—is beer. The man's got that down-'earted 'e isn't fit to live with. A drayman must 'ave beer."

Dr. Brink inspected his watch again. "Well, Mrs. Skelp," he said, "you've had more than your share of my time. Send him round to-morrow evening, and I'll tell you what I think about it. Good-night."

"My own idea, Doctor," said Mrs. Skelp, as she made her exit, "is a pint an' a 'arf—let us say two pints—of stout and bitter. But I leave the particklers to you, sir."

When she had really gone the doctor saw some other patients—droves of them. And the last of the drove was a large red man, who had called in to discuss his "constitootion."

"It's run down, Doctor," he explained. "That's what it is. Me constitootion is run down. Whenever I draws a slow, long breath, it is the same as if there was snakes and scorpions inside me. Very painful it is."

"Then take a quick, short breath," suggested Dr. Brink.

The patient ignored this obvious response. He did not pay his sixpence to be treated to the obvious. "Also," he continued, "it 'urts me when I whistle."

"Then don't whistle," said the doctor.

"The long and the short of it is," pursued the patient, again ignoring the voice of science, "that my constitootion is thoroughly run down.... I ... I was wondering, Doctor.... Can you tell me if water is a safe thing for anybody to drink?"

The Doctor started. "Water is Nature's beverage," he observed.

"But don't you think, Doctor," suggested the invalid, "that when a man 'as got 'is constitootion into a thoroughly onnatural state, the same as what mine is, that a pint or so of onnatural licker——"

"Oh ... a pint or so ... yes," put in the doctor.

"I bin drinking a lot o' water lately," continued the patient. "I thought I would give it a trial, Doctor, being Nature's beverage and what not, and so highly spoke of in the papers. But I come to the conclusion, Doctor, as it don't get on wiv my constitootion. I got a very peculiar constitootion, Doctor, and it is very much run down. Whenever I turn me eyes up, Doctor, a 'orrible sickly feeling comes over me."

"Turn 'em down then," said the doctor.

"You don't approve of all this water, then?" inquired the patient. "You think, per'aps, a pint or two of ale——"

"A pint or two of ale? Oh, certainly."

"Or stout, Doctor? Say stout and bitter. A couple o' pints o' stout and bitter, Doctor; what? To brace up me constitootion like. What?"

"Stout and bitter," pronounced the doctor, "has, in certain circumstances, a high tonic value."

"Thank you, Doctor. Would you be kind enough to put it in writin', Doctor? I'm a family man, ye see, and seein' as I shall be takin' this tonic for the good o' my constitootion, I thought per'aps—you see my meanin', Doctor?"

"Quite," said the doctor, reaching out for a half-sheet of notepaper. "Your name and address?"

"Skelp," responded the patient. "Samuel Skelp, of Peacock Street. My missus is one o' your oldest customers."

VIII

THE WAY OF THE EAST

We had eaten a belated supper and drunk of a belated cup, and the doctor, yawning cheerfully, had doffed the vestments of respectability, when there came a ring upon the night-bell. The doctor's comment on this happening is of no historical importance. It possessed but a topical interest. Myself, I stumbled down the darkling stairs, and, upon opening the street door, was confronted by a respectfully intoxicated giant, who gave the name of Potter. "Potter, of Mulberry Street," he added, as a more explicit afterthought. He demanded Dr. Brink, explaining the urgent requirements of Mrs. Potter.

"Have you your card?" I inquired in the cold, commercial tone which this occasion warranted.

Mr. Potter removed his cap—a peaked object, of nautical aspect—and from the lining of this he extracted a square of pink pasteboard. This voucher represented at once a receipt and a warranty, being in the first sense an acknowledgment of the sum of ten shillings and sixpence, paid to Dr. Brink in anticipation of certain services, and recording, secondly, a promise from the doctor duly and solemnly to render and perform those services. "And beggin' yere pardon, young man," said Mr. Potter, in a voice of gloom, "I was to tell you from me aunt that the pains is comin' on a treat."

I had scarcely conveyed this joyful intelligence to Dr. Brink, ere that gentleman announced himself as being ready to embark upon the enterprise demanded of him, having clad himself in a fanciful costume consisting of unlaced boots, slack trousers, a pyjama jacket, an overcoat, and the inevitable top hat. He cheerfully accepted my offer to bear him company upon his journey through the night-bound alleyways, and together we sallied forth.

But when we came to the first dim street lamp a sudden monstrous shape appeared within the circle of its radiance, and fawned upon us silently. I wondered, not too hopefully, whether the things which rattled within the doctor's bag were of sound and sterling substance. For we were not regularly armed, and this monster—but he spoke, and thereby set my doubts at rest.

"It is only Potter," murmured the monster, with an apologetic shuffle. "There's some funny birds as stands abaht the corners yere be night, and Mulberry Street is rather a confusin' street to come at, and I thought per'aps as you would be alone, Doctor, and so I took the liberty. It is a cold night for the time o' the year: what? I was to tell you, Doctor, that the pains is comin' on most beautiful."

Mr. Potter committed other information to our confidence. He was a steve-

dore, he said; and he described the trials of that calling.

"It is a 'ard life, a stevedore, what with the 'eat and 'urry and all. Me and my mates, we shifted two 'underd an' twenty tons o' sugar this very day. But I'm 'oping for a wink o' sleep to-night. What with the pains so good and all. I could do with some sleep. Not that I wish the pore woman no 'arm. She bin a decent wife to me. But I seems to want some sleep. We shifted two 'underd an' twenty tons o' sugar to-day, me an' my mates. I see you brought your tool kit, Doctor. I find it cold for the time o' the year. Christ, but I do feel sleepy."

"I think that I can promise you a wink or two," replied the doctor cheerfully. "You'll be in bed and asleep before two o'clock."

"Much obliged to you, Doctor, I'm sure, Doctor," said the stevedore gratefully. "Me aunt is certainly of opinion that the pains look very promising. I could do wiv a few hours' sleep. Bin shifting sugar all the day. Two 'underd and twenty ton we moved, and there's as much standin' by what I got to punch into termorrow. I'm 'opin' fur a gel."

We came to Mulberry Street, wherein the residence of Mr. Potter could be immediately detected, by reason of the fact that its door stood open—a certain signal in this land of an expected visit from the doctor. We entered the open doorway, and were greeted cheerfully by auntie—an old, untidy, work-stained woman, very drunk.

The stevedore conducted me into a dishevelled kitchen, musty and cramped and cobwebby. He accepted a cigarette, and spat into the fire, and looked at me stupidly. "Two 'underd an' twenty ton!" he exclaimed. "Don't I deserve some blessed sleep?" And there came from some adjacent place an answering moan.

I looked through the door of the kitchen and into the grimy little passage beyond it, wherein an open door gave access to another room. The doctor was in this room, and auntie, and also, I supposed, the stevedore's wife. There came from this apartment certain sounds as of joy and suffering commingled. It is but fair to state that most of the joyful sounds appeared to be uttered by auntie. Auntie had chased away dull care.

It was, indeed, a perfectly refulgent auntie who subsequently lolloped in upon us, carrying a bundle. "'Ere y' are, ole glum-face," chirruped auntie; "take young Joe. An' mind as 'e don't 'oller. Where you put that jug?"

Mr. Potter seized the bundle, and, loosening its folds, exposed a rather maculate small boy, having the paternal cast of feature.

"Look at 'is chest," observed the father simply. "This is ye're sort for punchin' into sugar. Auntie, where's the other one?"

"Alf," responded auntie, "is all right where 'e is. Alfie's old enough to be'ave 'isself. Mind young Joe don't 'oller. Where you put that jug?"

Joe's reply was drowned by a pitiful cry which came from the other room.

But auntie found the jug all right. "'Ere's to a gel, ole dear!" quoth auntie. But ... there came that cry again.... At which the old woman regretfully parted from us and the jug and returned to her pious duty of hindering Dr. Brink.

And Mr. Potter once more directed my attention to the physical perfections of his offspring. "I'm proud o' this bloke," he said. "My on'y longin' is to see 'im grow up straight and punch the coal abaht. I do not grudge 'im nuthink. Y' oughter see 'im of a Sunday: 'e ain't 'arf a nib o' Sundays. Velvets and all, ye know. I 'ope the Doctor 'll look sharp. I got a 'eavy day termorrer. My missus is a decent woman, and I don't wish 'er no 'arm; but Gawd knows as I want some sleep be this time. 'Ere's Fred."

Fred was a listless youth, kin to the stevedore. And he came in tired and pale, having "done a whack o' overtime at the pickle works." And he said no word to anybody, but set a saucepan on the sullen fire and sat beside it, stupidly, waiting for an egg to boil. "She don't 'arf sing about it." "What?" demanded the husband, almost savagely. "Ah!" responded Fred.

Then there rang out another sound—the voice of auntie, raised in raucous laughter. "My Gawd!" she cried, "'ow's that for a beauty?"

Mr. Potter shook the drowsy, silent child upon his knee. "Cheer up, Joe," he cried; "you're cut out now, me lad. You ain't the baby any more. D'jeer? Then gimme a bleedin' kiss."

Auntie appeared for a moment in the doorway. "Boy," said she.

Mr. Potter's joy was, for a moment, modified by this announcement. "It was a gel I wished for," he said. "It was a gel we wanted." He rubbed his chin upon young Joseph's yellow head.

"But," he continued, beholding suddenly a pleasant truth, "we shall get some blessed sleep at ennyrate.... Ain't it time that little beggar started in to cry?"

But the boy Fred, to whom Mr. Potter presumably addressed himself, offered no reply. He was engaged in boiling his egg.

"I *should* like to 'ear the beggar cry, though," said Mr. Potter wistfully, after a pause. He rubbed his chin on Joseph's head again. The boy Fred stirred his saucepan. "Funny, ain't it," mused the stevedore, "that the little chap don't 'oller?" But as he spoke, the little chap responded. "That's done it," cried the stevedore, and rubbed his chin on Joseph's head.

And then I clearly heard the voice of auntie. "That young man what's with you, Doctor, is 'e a doctor, too?"

"Not exactly a doctor," responded Brink; "but he knows quite as much about medicine as any doctor."

"Because," pursued auntie, "the young man might like to step in and see this baby. It's the biggest baby ever *I* see."

"So it is," assented the doctor. "So he would."

He thought, God help him, that it would please me to see inside that room.

And so he called to me, and I stepped forward and found myself in front of a reality. You know the thing, of course: a poor, white woman in a poor, white bed. And—— But need I describe it? You know it all, don't you?

You do not know it.

I know it—now. I know what is the way of the East. I will tell you what I saw.

I saw a bare brown mattress, and on it lay a moaning woman, fully dressed: *entirely* dressed. And at her head there lay the new-born babe, and at the baby's head another child—a child of six. And when I entered in this child made speech. "Auntie's gointer dress him soon," he said.

"This, my pure young friend," said Doctor Brink, "is a typical *mise en scène*. Every detail is correct."

"Correct?" squawked the triumphant auntie. "It's a double-adjectived marvel ... You're a genelman, Doctor!"

I ran away from this sick-room. I ran out into the rain.... I observed, as I ran past him, that the boy Frederick had boiled his egg and was eating it.

IX
THE 'POTHECARY

The curious establishment of Dr. Brink contained one curiosity which I have not yet described to you. His name was Gilkes—Samuel de Quincey Gilkes—and he was poor and unwashed, and angular and polite, and full of wonder.

He was Dr. Brink's dispenser, or, as the natives preferred to have it, the 'Pothecary.

Gilkes was a tall man, especially for a 'Pothecary, the races of 'Pothecaries being commonly little and round and complacent. But Gilkes was a giant of his species; albeit, he was timid and obliging, and carried his stature with an air of not wishing to create comment. He had long brown hair and a vague mouth, and very lean hands, with which he stroked the furniture when he spoke to you. His eyes were blue, but of an exceptional paleness, and they were restless, seeking eyes, which looked beyond you, as if they saw the sea with ships upon it. I think

that Mr. Gilkes deserves a little paper to himself.

I should have told you that he was not a very young man, having reached, perhaps, his fortieth year. But his heart was filled with a serene and youthful hope; for he cherished the belief that he would one day pass his final examination in surgery and medicine, and would take his degree and figure upon the rolls as a fully licenced practitioner. In the meantime he was humble.

I have often listened to his sorrowful reproaches when Dr. Brink, weary of the delays occasioned by his apothecary's interest in distant ships, would hurl himself into the little dispensary and concoct the bottles of light brown with his own hand.

"You shouldn't, sir," the 'Pothecary would say; "you shouldn't. You mustn't. It isn't fitting, sir. It isn't proper. It isn't the thing. I know I'm remiss. I know I'm slow. You ought to discharge me. You ought to discharge me. I must pass my final. I certainly must. You oughtn't to do it. Two grains calomel. Two grains calomel. I certainly must. Certainly. Certainly." And then, his utterance growing fainter and finally ceasing, the 'Pothecary would rest his chin upon a hand and look out once again upon the ships at sea, and somebody would go without his calomel.

Mr. Gilkes had also the habit of rising late—a detestable habit. And it therefore happened that the doctor's waiting-room would be filled with impatient women before his dispenser arrived to make up the "light browns" and "dark reds," upon which they lavished so much faith.

But when the 'Pothecary did arrive there was always an apology upon his lips—the same apology every time. "I'm late again, sir; late again. Forty minutes late. I'm awful, sir; awful. You will have to discharge me. I'm always late. I'm awful. It won't do. It isn't fair. I shall have to go. I must pass my final. Sach. Ust. For Mr. Jenner, sir? Yes, sir. Sach. Ust. Sach. Ust. I'm awful; awful."

The doctor and James invariably observed the form of asking him up to tea. But with equal regularity he would reply with a formula of plaintive, almost passionate protest. "Impossible, sir. Not for a minute. You mustn't. You can't. I'm not worth it, sir. It isn't usual, sir. It isn't the thing. When I've passed my final, sir—perhaps then. Perhaps then. I *will* pass my final, sir. I must."

And Mr. Gilkes would sight a sail and watch it eagerly with a little fluttering smile.

He always dressed himself in shabby black. This emphasised his stature and the exceeding leanness of him. It also served to disguise the unnatural colour of his linen, He did not smoke, and they naturally say that he drank. But I never saw him drunk. He would sometimes look out upon his ship with the gaze of one who is intoxicated with the splendour of his visions. But this is not the same as being drunk.

Wilfered, his successor in the post of 'Pothecary (for you will understand that Mr. Gilkes became impossible), has placed on record that "Gilkes fair give you the 'errors, a-talkin' to 'isself the livelong day and strokin' the bottles and seein' snakes." But Wilfered is young and strenuous, and efficient. His heart is in his work. He adds the water to the sugar with extreme exactitude, and, not being versed in the language of pharmacy, he is convinced that not merely the reputation of Dr. Brink, but the very lives of all his patients are bound up in the exact and scrupulous decoction of the liquids committed to his care. But he does not interest himself in distant ships.

For myself, I am sorry that Mr. Gilkes became impossible. I like dumb animals.

I shall always remember the evening when, coming unexpectedly to the house, I saw him sitting by a window with the light from the setting sun upon his face and shabby coat. He was talking to James. And James has the knack of making people talk much.

"He writes, does he?" said the 'Pothecary. (I think that the question must have applied to your servant.) "He would. Of course he would. Quite naturally. Just so. Of course. Some people can write. They have the trick. Some people can do anything. Anything. I must pass my final. They thought I was going to be a writer myself once. To write poetry, I suppose. 'He's half a poet,' they use to say, 'half a poet.'

"But I wasn't worth the compliment. I couldn't find the rhymes, you know. I could see it all—sometimes, you know; but I couldn't find the rhymes. Once I nearly reached it, but only once—only nearly. You see, I—I haven't even passed my final. Not yet. But I will. I must. I nearly did it last time—nearly. Nearly."

His voice dropped low; so low that you could hardly hear it. And he looked out to sea again; but not with gladness. I think he saw some sort of hulk or derelict.

X
THE MOTHER'S TRADE UNION

"My motter," said 'Ost 'Uggins decisively, "is 'Live an' let live.' We won't deny but what the young woman 'as acted wrongful. She 'as broke an important commandment, as we all know, besides puttin' my 'ole establishment to expense and

inconvenience. Besides upsettin' my good lady. Besides disgracin' 'er fambily.

"But at the same time I can't forget that my mother's father was 'isself a fondling. And we live in a Keristian age. And the one as is most to blame is the *man*, 'ooever 'e may be, the ugly 'ound. What'll you take, Doctor?"

"Ginger b——," began the doctor, having knowledge of the Mile End drink traffic. But he checked himself, yielding, I suppose, to the reflection that duty called for a more enthusiastic response to 'Ost 'Uggins's hospitality.

"I will have a glass of—of whatever you drink yourself," said the doctor.

'Ost 'Uggins favoured us with a heavy wink. His face and figure as he stood there behind the marble counter of his "saloon compartment" suggested coarseness and obesity and vulgarity and opulence and ignorance, and—and manhood.

They used to say that pigs could fly,
Oh, aye, oh!
They used to say that pigs could fly
A hundred years ago.

It is certain that *this* pig could fly. For "Live and let live" was his motto. The pig is an animal which is held in unwarrantable disdain by pious men.

Having concluded the wink, 'Ost 'Uggins inserted a ponderous hand into a nook concealed by a framed portrait of himself—it represented Mr. Huggins in the costume of an Arch Grand something or other of the Ancient and Vociferous Order of Somebodies—and produced therefrom a special, private, and particular bottle. This vessel, 'Ost 'Uggins was at pains to make clear, contained "real licker." He did not pour its precious golden drops into the muddy stream of commerce; but, on the contrary, he kept them tightly corked, and in strict reserve for the appreciative palates of his kindred and convives. "This is the real thing," said Mr. Huggins; "no sale for it yere."

"'Ere's to your 'ealth, Doctor," pursued 'Ost 'Uggins, "and to this young man's as well. And 'ere's wishin' that foolish young female well over 'er whack o' trouble. What's the missus 'ad to say to you *to-day*?"

"Same as before," replied the doctor. "She says the girl's a hussy. She says she always knew it. She says you are pig-headed and obstinate, and she *will* be mistress in her own house, and why don't you put up a notice saying, 'Beds for lying-in kept here,' and be done with it. And if the girl had done her duty and attended to business and kept the glasses washed instead of for ever gossiping with the Jew boys on the saloon side, this thing would never have happened. And if girls are to be petted and pampered for being bad, what is the use of having marriage lines and living decent? She also intimates that your attitude in this

matter is not becoming to a married man. If she were a jealous woman she *might* begin to wonder if——"

Mr. Huggins smiled broadly. "My good lady, as the sayin' goes," quoth he, "would talk the 'ind leg off a donkey. But we understand each other, 'er and me, and ... we've buried three. I bin in this business for forty year, man and boy. I know life. We understand each other, Doctor. What? 'Ave another.

"'Live and let live' is *my* motter. She bin with us three years, that silly kid. She could go further with the eighteen gallons nor any young woman as ever served in my bar. Where's she to go if my wife as 'er way? And the kid? We buried three ourselves, which is a thing what you might think would soften a woman's 'eart. But it don't, not in circs. like this. These good women they *got* no 'eart—not when it comes to bad women. It's a sort of—a sort of——"

"Trade unionism," suggested Dr. Brink. And 'Ost 'Uggins, who at first looked solemn and inquiring, gradually smiled his assent to Dr. Brink's suggestion.

"I s'pose poor Phoebe *is* a blackleg," he mused. "But my motter is 'Live and let live.' She was wonderful coaxing with the disorderlies. What else my missus say to you?"

"She said you were looking for trouble."

"What else?"

"She said, 'Minx!' 'Damned devil!' 'Disgraceful slut!'"

"Anythink else?"

"She said that either the hussy or she would leave this house."

"And what did *you* say, Doctor?"

"I said that the girl was not fit to be moved, and that SHE couldn't be spared."

"And what did she say to that?"

"She said that we had made up a fine old tale between us, I and her old man."

"Is that the lot?"

"That's the lot."

"Very well then," commented Mr. Huggins. "Do you know what I shall say to it all, Doctor? I shall say: 'Tut, woman; tut!'"

"Meaning?" queried the doctor.

"Meaning?" echoed 'Ost 'Uggins, as he thumped his fist upon the counter, not without menace to its marble surface, "meaning that I am a man of few words: that I *will* be master in me own 'ouse: that my motter is 'Live and let live.' That I won't see a pore girl drove to ruin not for all the cantankerous whims of all the cantankerous wives in all——.

"Below there! 'Ush!" he added, with a sudden dropping of his voice. "'Ere

is the missus!"

* * * * *

"Where you gointer, you George?" demanded the missus, as George prepared to leave us.

"Goin' to find that fat-'eaded boy, my dear," responded George. "There's a barrel wants tappin'."

"There's a lot more than barrels wants tappin' in this 'ouse," said Mistress Huggins, with an air which was evidently intended to be significant of much. "What you done with that gel?"

"Me, my dear?" responded the fist-strong Huggins. "Me? *I* ain't moved 'er."

"Time you did, then. When's she gointer leave this 'ouse?"

'Ost 'Uggins gently but firmly retreated. "I bin discussin' it over with the doctor, my dear," he explained, upon gaining the little glass door which led into their private parlour. "'*E'll* tell you all about it. That's right, ain't it, Doctor? You'll tell 'er all about it. Don't forget my motter, Doctor." And Mr. Huggins obliterated himself.

Mrs. Huggins, upon the contrary, and as it might be, intensified herself. "Look here, Doctor What-its-name," she said, "I kin spot the little game what is bein' played between the landlord an' you, same's if I was partner. You are gettin' up a conspiracy. See? *I* know it. *I* can't be fooled."

Mrs. Muggins was a mud-coloured woman, with a smouldering eye. She had rings on every finger and more knuckles than rings.

"*I* can't be fooled!" she repeated. "What you doin' with that gel?"

"Leaving her where she is," responded the doctor. "She really isn't fit to be moved." He added this information in the tone of one imparting confidences to a friend.

"Fit or not fit, do you suppose I'm gointer *let* 'er stop there? A low, ondecent 'ussy like what she is, to lie between my honest sheets! Take the gel away, I tell you! Do you want to make trouble between a man and 'is wife? Take the gel away!"

Dr. Brink assumed a highly authoritative tone. "It is my duty as a doctor, madam," said he, "to warn you that the girl is not fit to be moved. And your husband, who in law is the responsible head of this house, agrees with me that——"

"Why ain't she fit to be moved? Answer me that?" rasped the woman.

"Because," said the doctor, as 'Ost 'Uggins's expressive features came peeking round the doorpost, "because a poor girl of twenty who has just given birth to——"

"Given birth!" shrieked the woman. *"Given birth*! And in my 'ouse!

"The disgraceful, shameless thing! And me to be kept in ignorance! And now I think of it, I did seem to think or fancy as I heered a squallin'. In *my* 'ouse above all! May the Lord—— 'Ssh! What's that?"

"That," explained 'Ost 'Uggins, obtruding a further portion of his face, "is the little bleater callin' for 'is vittles."

Mrs. Muggins's face grew strangely red, her lip grew strangely tremulous. "It's a funny thing to me," she said, "to think as I wasn't allowed to know.... 'Oo's with 'er?"

"Mrs. Tuck, from the cabyard," responded 'Ost 'Uggins, "'as laid the fondling out an' that."

Mrs. Huggins stamped a foot. "You clumsy fool!" she cried. "What do we want your Mrs. Tucks for? A drunken piece like she is! Ain't you got enough to do in the bar without pokin' your nose into a woman's business like what this is?

"And me the last to 'ear of it! In me own 'ouse, too! Me that has buried three.

"Mrs. Tuck! Fools! Let me pass, you George! That child 'll 'ave convulsions in a minute! ... Mrs. Tuck in my 'ouse!"

* * * * *

"I wish," murmured the doctor hopelessly, as he mopped his forehead, "that I could understand the rules of their Society."

XI
THE DIAGNOSIS

I have heard it said by the enemies of Dr. Brink that he is surly, or, as some prefer to have it, brusque. I cannot too strongly express my disagreement with this view. I know the doctor intimately, and I can assert with confidence that in private intercourse he is the soul of courtesy, exactitude, and punctilio. If, during business hours, he becomes what Mrs. Duke calls "crisp"—and I won't deny that this thing sometimes happens—it behoves us, as an audience of Christian people,

to view this failing with the eye of charity, and to think of the temptations which the poor man has to face.

Bovingdon Street has many graces; but gifts of mind are not conspicuous amongst them. The capacity for giving evidence is possibly an instinct and possibly an art, and even more possibly it is both. But it is a certain thing that working a mangle makes you stupid. Which, of course, accounts for Mrs. Rafferty.

She called in yesterday—a little, jug-shaped woman, having a limp fringe and mysterious pains. She is a fine example of the sort of temptation which is always luring on the Doctor to display his horrible power of crispness. She is a fine example of the Bovingdon Street matron.

I happened to be helping James to make a pancake when she came along, and I was therefore privileged to overhear the particulars of Mrs. Rafferty's disorder. And if I record exactly the dialogue to which I listened, you will be able to judge as well as I or Mrs. Rafferty whether the Doctor's sixpennyworth of diagnosis was value for money. Behold, the chronicles:—

MRS. RAFFERTY: It's my pore back I come to see you for, Doctor: that and a sort of dizziness what takes me in the leg. And me throat is sore. And I gits sich 'orrid nightmares, Doctor, and I was goin' to arst you, Doctor, do you think it right for anyone to be always feeling thirsty? Because——

DR. BRINK: How long has this been going on?

MRS. R.: I don't say as the feelin' thirsty is a unpleasant feelin', mind you; but I wondered if it was nat'ral. That's all I'm wonderin' about, Doctor. You can't 'elp noticin' anythin' like that, and anybody would fancy it's a bit queer to be *always* feelin' thirsty. And then the 'eadaches, Doctor! They comes on all so sudden, Doctor—unexpected, like; and if it wasn't——

DOCTOR: How long has this been going on?

MRS. R.: You can see yerself 'ow pale I'm lookin', Doctor. I 'ad a drop o' stout for me breakfast 'smornin'—no more'n would fill a teacup, Doctor—and believe me or believe me not, it brought on the pains that fearful I was obliged to scream. What do you think is the matter with me, Doctor?

DOCTOR: I shall be better able to tell you when you've answered a few questions. In the first place, how long has this sort of thing been going on?

MRS. R.: It's the pain more'n the longness of it, Doctor, which I look to. And if I close my eyes and touch anythink cold with me 'ands I kin see a lot of funny green things all in front—floatin', if you understand me, Doctor. Me 'usband, when 'e was a sowjer abroad in Dublin, 'e got took with the same thing, along o' eatin' 'ysters in a onfit state.

DOCTOR: How is your appetite, by the way?

MRS. R.: I was wonderin' if me lungs is affected, Doctor. If ever I drink a cup of very 'ot tea I kin feel a funny sensation right down me froat. What I reely

want is change of hair.

DOCTOR: Do you drink much tea?

MRS. R.: It's good tea what we 'ave.

DOCTOR: Do you drink much tea?

MRS. R.: And besides, Doctor, I don't see as tea kin 'urt me, because me an' my 'usband we're rather partickler about the class of——

DOCTOR: Do you drink much tea?

MRS. R.: And then again, Doctor, why should me 'air be fallin' out? I'm not a old woman. Thirty-six is my age, and I ain't ashamed to own it. It's a pity me 'air is fallin' out because they say as I'm a young-looking woman for my age. And——

DOCTOR: When did you first notice that your hair was falling?

MRS. R.: I don't think that the state of me 'air is anythink to be ashamed of, even now, mind you. But still it ain't a very pleasant thing, especially at my age. Is it anythink to do with what I eat, do you think, Doctor? I often wonder.

DOCTOR: How is your appetite?

MRS. R.: It isn't the quantity I was thinkin' of, Doctor, so much as the class of food as we go in for. We both of us got a taste for 'am an' bloaters, and so forth.

DOCTOR: Do you enjoy your food?

MRS. R.: But if me 'air is fallin' out on that account——

DOCTOR: Are you a hearty eater?

MRS. R.: Of course, Doctor, I on'y want to know what's right.

DOCTOR: You say that your appetite is good?

MRS. R.: I was sayin' about us bein' partial to 'am and so forth, Doctor. If you think I oughter stop it, I kin easy do so. I on'y wanter do what's right. What's your opinion about me, Doctor? You can see I'm very ill.

DOCTOR: I'm giving you some medicine, Mrs. Rafferty—you've brought your bottle, I see—it's a strong tonic, and there are three pills with it, which——

MRS. R.: I forgot to arst you, Doctor. Do you think a drop of stout—as much as you kin get into a egg-cup—would 'urt a little boy of five years old what's got a poverty of 'is blood? There's a neighbour o' mine—a very nice woman—wh——

DOCTOR: About these pills, Mrs. Rafferty: I want you to take one when you get in, one before you go to bed, and one——

MRS. R.: Can I take a little slice of 'am, Doctor, or must I live on slops and that?

DOCTOR: You can eat exactly what you please. This medicine will put you right. It is a very strong, dark red tonic. Do you understand about the pills, now?

MRS. R.: She's a nice woman, and it's sad to see her strugglin' along by 'erself wiv that boy to keep. And so I told 'er——

DOCTOR: Send her round to see me. You'll get your medicine from the dispenser.

MRS. R.: About me wrists, Doctor: I find that one is thicker than——

DOCTOR: Come and see me again when you've finished that medicine. Pay outside.

MRS. R.: And, Doctor, is there anything more besides the physic? I thought perhaps you would give me a pill.

DOCTOR: I am giving you three pills. One of them I want you to take when you get in, another at night, and——

MRS. R.: About the money, Doctor: I s'pose as it'll do if I pay next week?

XII
THE TUSKERS

It has not been the fortune of the present historian to enjoy a personal experience of the state of matrimony. But he has never been lacking in awe for the wonders attaching to that institution. It has always seemed to him, looking upward, as it were, from the mire of bachelordom, that the married mind is subject to rare emotions, productive of a singular philosophy which one must view with astonishment, if not with envy.

In illustration of my meaning, permit me to cite the case of the Tuskers.

The Tuskers, as we were definitely informed by Mr. Tusker, have been tasting the wedded blisses for nearly eighteen years. And Mr. Tusker called in recently at Doctor Brink's in the matter, as he expressed it, of "any old bottles, any old rags; old bones, rabbit-skins, waste paper to buy," which somehow looks wrong. Let us try again—

Any old bottles?
Any old rags?
Old bones,
Rabbit-skins,
Waste paper,
To buy!

That is better. Mr. Tusker is nothing if not lyrical.

Also, he is a massy-jawed person in a muffler, having a dent over one eye and a limpy walk. Likewise, he is accompanied by an objectionable smell, arising partly from his trade, profession, or occupation. It is an impressionist sort of smell. The impression it suggested to me was that Mr. Tusker had been subjected to long, long years of solitary confinement in an over-heated chicken-coop.

Mr. Tusker, having recited his little poem, was rewarded by a "Not to-day, thank you," from Doctor Brink.

"What?" cried Mr. Tusker. "Not any old bottles; any old rags?"

"No," insisted Doctor Brink.

"Ho," quoth Mr. Tusker. "Right you are, then. One minute, Doctor. The missus. Ahtside. Can I trouble you?"

"How?" inquired the doctor.

"You know, mate," expounded Mr. Tusker. "Below par. Orfer oats. See? Jes' run the rule over 'er, Doctor; will ye?"

"Certainly," replied the doctor, the light of intelligence at last illuminating his eye. "Bring the lady inside."

Mr. Tusker accordingly repaired to the roadway, where his barrow was in waiting. It was a roomy barrow, filled to overflowing with bulging sacks, one of which, being pushed, came to life as Mrs. Tusker, and walked into Doctor Brink's consulting-room.

She was a tired old sack, was Mrs. Tusker, much patched, even as to her face, which was further distinguished by being bruised in several places, a fact which accentuated its native homeliness.

"Below par. Orfer oats," repeated Mr. Tusker, with a jerk of the thumb in the direction of the old sack. "Jes' run yere rule over 'er, Doc."

"Had a bad accident, hasn't she?" began the doctor. "That plaster——"

"Never mind the plaster," said the husband.

"No," repeated Mrs. Tusker, "never mind that."

"Orfer oats, see?" prompted Mr. Tusker.

"Ain't got no appetite," confirmed the lady.

"'Er system. See?" added Mr. Tusker.

"Yus," assented Mrs. Tusker. "Me system."

"Jes' run yere rule over 'er," said Mr. Tusker.

"Well," mused the doctor, "want of appetite doesn't produce itself, you know. I mean to say—— Her face now. It's very swollen. The lower part espec——"

"Never mind 'er face, ole man," suggested Mr. Tusker.

"No," said the patient; "never mind me face."

"*I* done that, ye see," remarked Mr. Tusker.

"Yus," replied Mrs. Tusker, "'e done that."

Doctor Brink, after staring hard at Mr. Tusker, resumed his inspection of the wife. "I don't know what sort of appetite you expect to have," he said, "with those four bruises. Her face is simply pul——"

"Oh!" reflected Mr. Tusker, "them marks is out o' date. They put me away for them."

Mrs. Tusker nodded.

"I—I don't quite understand," exclaimed the doctor.

"I done 'em of a Saturday night, ye see," explained the husband. "And they put me away to the Scrubs. Three weeks I was in."

"Three weeks," repeated Mrs. Tusker.

"They on'y let me out s'mornin'."

This statement was audited and found correct by Mrs. Tusker. "On'y this mornin'," she said.

"This is the state I find 'er in," continued Mr. Tusker. "Orfer oats. They put me away. See? And there wasn't no one to look arter 'er."

"Nobody to look arter me," agreed the wife.

"Her neck must be troubling her too," began the doctor. "I see she's been rather badly sca——"

"Never mind the scalding," protested Mr. Tusker. "Give 'er some physic, Doctor."

"Yus," echoed Mrs. Tusker. "Gimme some physic."

"You see," explained the husband, evidently determined that this important detail in the history of the case should not be overlooked, "I bin away. They put me away for three weeks. And this is 'ow I find 'er. She ain't 'ad no one to look arter 'er. See? Give 'er some physic, Doctor."

So they had their physic, and they went away.

I watched them passing up the road, Mr. Tusker limping behind his barrow and this peculiar old sack of his limping behind Mr. Tusker. And Mr. Tusker, as he limped, was declaiming a kind of poem—a rude sort of piece; but I've no doubt that in the ears of the old sack-thing at his heel, that which he uttered was as the music of the spheres. And the words of his poem were these:—

Any old bottles?
Any old rags?
Old bones,
Rabbit-skins,
Waste paper,
To buy!

As they receded into the endless perspective of Bovingdon Street, the sacks became confused in my sight, and I wondered which of them contained the rags and bones and bottles, or which was occupied by rabbit-skins and Mrs. Tusker.... Not that it really mattered.

XIII
ART LOVERS

Mr. Clarence Gordon Prince appeared first in the capacity of a patient. He came to have a tooth out. "Three teeth out, to tell ye the troof, Doctor," he added, and with the air of a man who had given a liberal order and knew it, he seated himself, throwing back his head and shutting both eyes.

"Want 'em all out now—at once?" demanded the doctor.

"Cert'nly," responded Clarence. "I'm a gunner."

Dr. Brink evidently perceived the point of this observation, for he made no further speech, but drew the teeth forthwith. And Clarence kept on smiling.

He performed his subsequent ablutions in silence, but, having completed them and deposited three sixpences upon the consulting-room table, he again spoke.

"Well, Doctor," he said, "I'll say good-night, and pop off," which he did.

But when he reached the door-step, Baffin found him, and Baffin rejoiced in the find. "You've been a soldier?" exclaimed Baffin.

"Gun-layer. 'Owitzer Battery, R.A. Nine year. Invalided." Clarence smiled again.

"I want you," said Baffin. "Wait there."

Mr. Prince accordingly waited, and his patience was rewarded by the reappearance of Baffin, with whom was Dr. Brink. "This gentleman," said the doctor, "is an artist. He wants you to sit for him. How tall are you?"

"Six-one-and-a-'arf."

"How much round the chest?"

"Forty-two."

"Round the arm?"

"Twenty."

"Got a shovel?"

Mr. Prince's smile gave place to a suspicious frown. "I could *get* one," he said, at last.

"Bring it along to-morrow," commanded the doctor. "We want you to sit. You'll be well paid. You're out of work, I suppose?"

"I'm out of work all right," responded Mr. Prince. "But—but ... what you want me to do?" demanded Mr. Prince.

"Never mind that," he was told. "Just come along. And wear your oldest clothes. And bring the spade."

To the surprise of both Baffin and the doctor, Clarence did come along, accompanied by the spade. He was very out of work indeed, it seemed, and had sold his medals to pay for the comfort of having his teeth out, and for subsequent treatment at the "African Chief." He wanted work, and was willing, but this yere sitting game—"what was it?"

Baffin took him to the "studio," *née* wash-house, and there he drank some tea, and was confronted by an easel, and was induced to seat himself upon the extreme corner of a small chair, whilst Baffin pretended to sketch him. This proceeding is technically described as putting your model at his ease.

At the end of an hour the soldier was asked to stand up and drink beer out of a jug, a function which he performed with very tolerable grace. He was then allowed to go home.

"But come here early to-morrow morning," said Baffin. "Do you think you'll like the work?"

"Work seems all right," responded Mr. Prince. "I'll come at nine o'clock."

He arrived at the time stated, having carefully attired himself in his Sunday "blacks," and a white turn-down collar. He had likewise operated with sand upon the metal parts of his shovel, so that that instrument glittered exceedingly. Also, he had perfumed his hair. And Baffin ordered him to go home again and reinvest himself with the habiliments of toil.

The spade we kept and improved upon in a corner of the doctor's little garden—a corner in which rare bulbs were buried. Clarence returned to us looking natural and dirty, and wearing a resigned expression.

Then he sat, or rather stood, in earnest, whilst Baffin "studied" him in pencil and charcoal and crayon, and in every other sort of pigment.

And when the artist had tired of this employment, Mr. Prince came down from his platform and studied the pictures with an air of cold reserve. He said that he thought he might as well be going. And he went.

The subsequent sittings were in all respects a repetition of the first. But at the end of the week, a strange thing happened. Mr. Clarence Gordon Prince permitted himself to give utterance to a remark. He had been paid his first week's

wages—a sovereign, and, having spat upon this coin and donned his jacket, he tapped Mr. Baffin with his knuckle and performed the feat in question. "One day—me lad," he said, "I'll show ye *my* pictures."

And on the last day of his engagement he duly fulfilled the promise. He had spat upon a sovereign and donned his jacket, just as before, and he had walked towards the door, but half-way there he stopped and faced his late employer.

"Look here," he said, as he quietly divested himself of his jacket and waistcoat, "look 'ere, ole man, you've acted very fair to me, and now I'm gointer show ye my pictures."

With this preface he removed his shirt.

The wondering Baffin was then confronted with a naked chest—a chest of many colours. "The Duchess of Gainsborough," said Mr. Prince. "There's eight weeks' work in 'er. Done in Ceylon. I was soldiering in Ceylon. If you look round the corner you will see a picture of Eve bein' tempted by the serpent. On me right arm there's 'Erod's daughter, and on me left a photo of Jim Sayers. 'Ow's all this for picture work?

"I was under the needle for pretty near a twelve-month, and time I left the service there was on'y one man in the battery as could show the 'arf of what I can. I always 'ad a fancy for colour work."

The model slowly resumed his clothes. "I love a well-done chest, I do," he said.

"Not, mind you, as I am one to turn 'is nose up at a picture on the wall, same's you might make yesself. Not at all. But me own fancy is for breast and arm work. That has always bin my fancy.

"And I look upon you as a very fair and civil-spoken young man, which is why I let you see me. I'm a bit particular 'oo I show my pictures to. I'll be getting along now. Good-night, sir."

On the threshold of the door he paused again.

"One more thing, young man. I ain't the sort of bloke to show me chest around; but you've treated me decent, man to man, as the saying goes. And, therefore, if ever the fancy takes you to show me to your friends, why say the word and—'ere I am.

"I'll say good-night now."

XIV
THREE BABIES

One of the disadvantages attaching to Dr. Brink's profession is its stay-at-home character. A doctor has not time to travel. And it is a well-known fact that travelling improves the mind.

Think, for instance, how my doctor's mind would relish the improvement associated with a short spell of travel on the London, Tilbury, and Something Railroad! I travelled on this system only yesterday—it is the direct route to Dr. Brink's—and I protest that one of my fellow-travellers—a baby—was really *most* improving.

This baby came into our compartment head downwards, and advertised his displeasure with this state of things by means at his command.

A little pale-faced girl who followed Baby uttered remonstrances, which were answered by the little rickety boy who carried him. I saw and heard these things but vaguely, because our carriage was filled with noise and smell, and its lights were dim. And many people had breathed within it, and the gentlemen about me were smoking shag tobacco.

The little pale-faced girl expressed herself with emphasis, coughing and gasping between each adjective. There was a great deal of fringe upon her forehead and a great deal of feather on her head, and some broken teeth within her mouth. She dug at her companion with a bony elbow, as they stood there, being supported in an upright attitude by means of other people's knees and also by means of a rack provided for light articles only. "You clumsy tyke, you!" shrilled the girl, by way of concluding her address.

"Hee-haw!" responded the youth, with satire. It was made evident by certain signs, such as the cheerfulness of his conversation and a sort of *négligé* as to his fringe, that he had spent his evening amid congenial surroundings. '"Old the kid yeself, then," he added. And his companion took the child.

"What you done with them suckers?" she then demanded; upon which the young man brought forth bull's-eyes from his trouser pocket. With one of these the little girl essayed to comfort Baby, holding the evil thing between his toothless gums. But Baby continued, as before, to moan and writhe.... "I fink that beetroot ain't agreein' wiv 'im," said the girl.

The little rickety boy made no reply. He was busy, having a handful of cigarette-ends to strip and bind anew with paper. "Why don't you stop 'is noise?" he at length demanded, applying his tongue to the completed "fag." "Call yeself a mother?"

The fact as to Baby's authorship I had, of course, suspected. I perceived, however, that our fellow-passengers did not mind.

The girl did not allow the young man's question to remain unanswered. "Never trouble," she said, "what I call myself. What do you call yeself? A man, I suppose. Funny sort of man, ain't you? More like a ape. More like a crab. Fine

'usband for a person, ain't you? 'Usband, eh?"

An elderly man at my right hand removed his pipe and grinned. The gentleman opposite to him winked; and a woman in the corner giggled rustily. You might have supposed them to be tickled by a sense of the deeper irony which underlay this mother's sarcasm. But, as a matter of fact, the reflections which moved them were not of this character. The elderly man at my right explained his sentiments publicly. "Puts me in mind," he said, "of my fust. 'E were jest sich a skinny one."

And Rickets spoke again. "Why can't you stop the beggar's noise?" he demanded. "Worse nor a waggon-load o' tomcats, that row is."

"What," demanded the girl, "d'you expect me to do? Put a muzzle on 'im? Why don't you take an' stop 'im yeself? 'Andy enough wiv yere tongue, you are. S'pose you show us 'ow to do the business."

"My way o' stoppin' 'im would be easy," said the boy, with a stupid grin. "I should lay a strap acrost 'is back."

His companion reapplied the elbow treatment. "You do!" she squeaked between the digs. "You do, you little ape. Let me see you. On'y let me see you. There'd be a strap 'crost your back blessed soon. Not 'arf, there wouldn't. You baboon, you!"

The girl looked helplessly at nothing, "hushing" the baby upon her breast by means of sudden, horrible, little jerks. Such a pitiful parody of rock-a-bye. She was too young and pale properly to know or understand the business of mothering, which is a difficult business to learn in your spare time, especially when they shut you out for a "quarter" if you are two minutes late at the factory. So that this London mother sucked at a bull's-eye, and yawned, and jerked, while the London baby lay in her arms and moaned.... "I fink it is the beetroot," reiterated the mother presently. "He looks so cold, Sam."

"It's wind," pronounced the boy, bringing forth a mouth-organ and carefully wiping it upon his sleeve. "Give 'im a tap, same's I told you. 'Seaweed,' mates." With which announcement the husband and father proceeded to wring out the melody of that name. We all tapped time with our feet, and the mother sucked her bull's-eye, and the baby moaned.

"He looks so cold," repeated the mother, as the mouth-organ subsided. "Give us 'Cock o' the North,' Sam."

Sam obeyed this summons with alacrity.

"If you will pardon me, young woman," observed the elderly man at my right hand, having duly applauded the soloist—"if you will pardon me, young woman, I will take the liberty of recommending a cold key. It catches the breath, if you take my meanin'. See?"

"No; I don't see," responded the mother sharply. It resented the preferment

of counsel. This reflected upon its competence: this offended its sense of dignity. It was a married woman.

The husband readdressed himself to his mouth-organ. But as he put that instrument of melody unto his lips, the girl reached sharply forth and stayed him.

"E—'e seems to be a-chokin', Sam," she said. "I think—I b'lieve—I—what you grinnin' for, you ugly ape? When'll we get to Bow? 'Ow many stations? You old 'im, Sam: I b'lieve—I—he looks so cold. He looks *so* cold."

"Give 'im another bull's-eye," suggested Sam. "There's peppermint in bull's-eyes. Next station's Bow. What are you grizzlin' for?"

"'E—'e looks so cold," explained the wife. There was a flame in her eye. A new flame—a flame of fear and joy. It was as though a match had been put to her soul. She was learning the business.

The woman in the corner left off giggling. She spoke to the mother. "You run along to bed with 'im, my gel. Never you mind about 'is looks. Run along to bed with 'im, so's 'e can be warm."

And the girl tightened her hold upon the parcels rack; and swayed her body gently, like a real mother. The boy, her husband, drew forth a series of discords from the mouth-organ. But she did not scream at him as before. She stood there, dumbly, rocking her baby like a real mother.

And the baby did not moan. The baby lay there on her bosom, silent and strangely still.

Then, with a jerk, our train pulled up. And the girl let go of the rack-rail and stumbled out. "Come on, Sam," she said, "we gotter 'urry. 'E looks so cold."

"Wait till I light me fag, then," said the boy. He struck a match on his boot-heel, and followed her, whistling cheerfully.

* * * * *

Our train moved on. And the elderly man at my right hand imparted a secret to me.

"That's their fust," he said.

I nodded, patiently.

"'E lay quiet enough when the music started. Did you notice?"

"Yes," I said, "I noticed."

”They’re funny devils,” said the man.

XV
INGRATES

”DR. BRINK. Important.

”DEAR DOCTOR,—Ther is a lady keeps on coming in a motor car, and her names is Mrs. Dudenay-Jones, and she is always at our place, and we think she ’as got a good intention, but my husband says he has had enough, and he thinks if we was to speak to you then perhaps you was to speak to her so perhaps she would stop it. She is a real lady, and always civil and polite, but my husband says we’ve had ennough. His mates has got to hear about it, and they call him Gordon Bennett, and he is a hardworking man.

”It is my daughter Kate she takes the interest in, the same what you give the light-brown mixture to for loosing her appetite. She wants to put her in a home at Margate, but my daughter has got a good home of her own, and she do not want to be beholding. And if a person goes to Margate you always bring back vermin, and there is enough work to keep a decent home without anybody need go to Margate and bring back vermin. And further and more, my Kate ’as got a bank book of her own, thank God, and when she wants to take a fortnight she can do it independent, and her young fellar the same, him what has the bottles of red from you for spots on the face.

”And so it is kindly to be hoped as you will kindly talk about it to the lady, you being reguly engaged by us for all these year, and knowing well that we are hardworking and independent, and not the kind as would wish to be beholding. And she come 4 times a week from Sat., and now it is only Tue., and she has been twice. It is no wonder as my daughter loose her appetite.

”And thanking with compts,
”Your faithl,
”SARAH BENNET,
13, Markham Street, over against the Dairy.

”P.S.—Boy got 6d. Please send a bot. light brown for my daughter. Did my

daughter ought to drink a wineglass full of vineger? They tell me it is good.

"The lady has always acted civil, so I hope you'll be the same.

"S. BENNETT."

* * * * *

It was this missive, reaching the doctor at his breakfast table, which caused a beautiful philanthropist to enter his surgery at tea-time. She came in immediate response to the doctor's invitation; she came with a rush, having been carried hither by her 80-h.p. 8-cylinder light touring car.

"And, oh, *dear* Dr. Brink," she said, "how simply charming it is to meet you! One has so often read your bright little speeches about this shocking poverty. One simply yearns to do something. How one envies you your strength, your power, your splendid opportunities. How you must *revel* in your work here, Doctor! It must be simply charming!"

"About as charming," said the doctor, "as keeping pigs and sleeping with them."

The beautiful philanthropist broke into appreciative titters. "*Pigs*, Doctor!" she cried, with the archest look. "*Pigs*! He! he! And you call yourself a Socialist! Of course, I'm not a Socialist myself. One's husband cannot be expected to approve of such extremes as that. But one need not be a Socialist in order to feel sorry for them. Now, need one, Doctor? But when one is a woman, it is all so difficult. Oh, Doctor, can one do *nothing*?"

"One *can*," replied the doctor; "but one won't. That, madame, is the difficulty."

"I don't quite understand you," said the lady.

"You ask me," explained the doctor, "whether one can do nothing. I reply that one can: that this is all we ask of one—to do nothing."

"To do *nothing*? *D-o-c-t-o-r*!"

"It does sound revolutionary, perhaps," admitted the doctor. "But it is really true. We ask one to do *nothing*. We ask one to be so kind as to sit at home and draw threads out of teacloths. And to draw cheques. But not to leave one's blameless hearth. We ask one to keep away. The pig-stye is a dirty pig-stye, and it's got to be cleaned by dirty people. Nice people—manicured people—-are best out of it. See?"

"I see that you want to be rude," said the lady, "but I don't—— What is it all about, Doctor?"

"This," said Dr. Brink. And he gave her Mrs. Bennett's letter. And she read it silently. And she stood up.

"Really, Doctor," she observed, "one doesn't quite know what to say. I'm sorry, I suppose. I will write and apologise to Mrs. Bennett. I'll go home and draw threads.

"Don't trouble to get up," she continued, as the doctor rose from his chair. "Don't trouble to get up. You are quite the rudest man I've ever met. Please don't trouble to get up."

She reached the door, but paused upon its threshold and turned to him again. "You are quite the rudest man I've ever met," she said again. "Quite the rudest.... I'll send you some money for your pigs."

XVI
BAFFIN'S FIND

Baffin came home one evening in a state of wild-eyed exaltation.

He had found *the* face for his "Mist Maiden." Its name was Prudence Croft.

It was coming to sit next day, and certain brothers of the brush were coming also to inspect and criticise Prudence.

Baffin's panegyrics quite interested me. I invited myself to join the party and my invitation was accepted.

So that I first saw Prudence under romantic circumstances. She was sitting on a sugar-box with her bodice off. The combination of her charms and a red flannel under-garment was startling to the eye.

Prudence was occupied, it seemed, in a proceeding called "sitting for the neck and shoulders." The process was not a restful one, for Prudence had "nerves" and "fidgets" and a constant flow of anecdote. Mr. Baffin made free with expressions of entreaty, disapprobation, and despair.

For myself, I sat and stared at Prudence, being consumed with a great wonder. It wasn't the flannel which provoked this wonder. Red flannel is a hideous material, and highly moral and depressing at that. And I am sure that the spectacle of a poor, anæmic rat of an artist's model seated in "half-costume" on a sugar-box is not (in itself) an attractive one. But Prudence fascinated me as no human being had fascinated me for many days.

If any of you have felt the poignant, horrible appeal of Ophelia during the "mad scene," you will know how I felt about Prudence. Her spare, consumptive

body was crowned by a neck and face and head as beautiful as any that ever were. But it was a beauty that was monstrous in its perfection, and that, therefore, hurt like some monstrosity of ugliness.

Prudence's beauty was the beauty of imbecility—that which Rossetti loved so much to draw. To look at her for long was like looking at some exotic, over-nurtured lily in a hot-house: one felt sick and restless and unmanned, and fell to longing for some robuster blossom on a hedgerow.

She had the genuine Rossetti neck—a thing which rose and swelled and died away in exquisite, maddening curves. She had the genuine Rossetti nose—straight, and small, and delicate, and sinful. She had hair, a full arm's length, that crept and clung and strayed and floated like the tendrils of a vine. She had wide, inscrutable eyes: wondering as a child's, yet filled with an awful something that was not of childhood. She had, above all else, a mouth which stung you with its beauty—blood-red lips that were open and moist and eager, like a lover's wound.

To all these charms she added the mind and speech of a mud-lark: the intelligence of a backward infant.

"Ow, Mr. Baffin," she was saying when I saw her first, "ow, Mr. Baffin, you *do* frighten me when you swear so. I *will* keep still: I will, reely. I won't fidget or move or talk—I won't even breathe—for a 'ole ten minnits. On'y I must tell you about me an' my sister an' the penny-in-the-slot machine. Mother give us tuppence, see, 'cos it was washin' day, an'—— ... Ow, now you're angry, Mr. Baffin. Down't be angry, Mr. Baffin. I am a wicked girl, I know I am, an' I *will* keep still: an' Gawd knows what's to become of me when my mother dies, an' everybody 'ates me, an' I *am* un'eppy."

The remainder of Prudence's observations were mingled with the sound of noisy sobs.

Mr. Baffin, that eminent painter, put down his palette and brush. "I'll wait," he said, "until you are dry again."

"Down't be engry with me, Mr. Baffin," moaned Prudence. "I'll be a good gel now—I will, reely—if on'y yew wown't be engry with me."

"Very well, then," answered Baffin. "You can begin to be a good girl now. I 'm not angry with you *any* more, and if only you keep still for five little minutes while I get in the curves of the chin, I'll let you talk and wriggle as much as you like for a whole ten minutes. Now hold your head up."

So Prudence ceased her lamentations, and held her head up—for five-and-thirty seconds. At the end of that period an interesting thought occurred to her.

"It'll be Christmas in four months," she observed, wriggling delightedly. "I'm gownter give my muvver something *sow* nice fur Christmas' I'm gownter give 'er a—— Ow, Mr. Baffin, you're angry with me agen. I *am* a bad gel, I know I am; but——"

"You can leave off helping me for a minute or two," said Baffin quietly. "I've got to do some scraping here, so you can have the wriggle now. What is this about Christmas?"

"I got two guineas comin' to *me* fur Christmas—per'aps. I sat to Mr. Baker fur 'is 'Birth of Wonder,' an' when 'e sells it 'e is gointer gimme two guineas!"

Baffin looked at me, and I nodded in appreciation of his glance. Everybody knows, of course, that Mr. Wilberforce Baker, the eminent Academician, disposed of his "Birth of Wonder" last June. It was his tenth annual contribution to that remarkable collection of pictures now being formed under a bequest of the late Mr. Bantry—Mr. Wilberforce Baker himself being a trustee of the fund bequeathed for that purpose. Baffin excommunicated that distinguished artist in dumb show.

"I shouldn't count on the two guineas," was all he said to Prudence. "... How long is it since you sat for Mr. Baker?"

"Ow, *ever* so lung!" answered Prudence. "Down't know why 'tis, I'm sure, on'y I down't seem to be able to get now sittin's *now*'ow. They all say I'm pretty an' that; an' they all rave about me neck: an' they all tell me to call agen; but nothink ever comes of it. Can't make it out at *all*, I can't?"

"You are lacking in the quality of perception, my dear," explained Baffin.

"Beg your pardon?" queried Prudence.

"I say," repeated Baffin, "that you are lacking—that you are damned slow at seeing things!"

"Ow, Mr. Baffin, you *are* a naughty man. Fancy usin' such wicked words. My mother says it is on'y bad people what uses words like that. My mother cut 'er finger yesterday, makin' toast. We got the drains up in *our* 'ouse. Ugly things, them little kittens, ain't they? I 'ates 'em when they're crawly, like those."

Prudence, making a wry face, pointed to a basket beside the sugar-box. This contained a family of illegitimate kittens which James had adopted out of Christian charity.

"I *'ate* cats," continued Prudence in her childish, sing-song voice. "I ate all animals. I like goin' to the theayter, though. I like goin' to church too. I like——"

She would have provided us, doubtless, with an exhaustive list of her enthusiasms; but the door of the studio opened, and gave entrance to those brothers of the brush whose coming was expected.

They looked upon Prudence, and were staggered.

"Where in Hell did you find her?" they inquired of Baffin, and discharged a volley of most wonderful expletives in evidence of their surprise and appreciation and envy. And they hanked her off the sugar-box, and turned her this way and that way, inspecting her "form" in much the same manner as that adopted by farmers when buying horseflesh.

"Chin up, please; more to the right. Now to the left. Ah! Get over there, under that top light. Profile, please. Ah! How about shoulders: salt-cellars, I expect; they always have. Pull that thing down. Ah! Not so bad as I feared. No good for the figure, but—but that neck! Trust old Baffin to find 'em, eh, John?"

There was to me something inexplicably delightful in the utter sexlessness of this admiration. To say the least, it was ungallant and sane. And Prudence evidently shared this feeling. The childish vanity in her eyes was unmistakable, and she walked back to her throne on the sugar-box with a strut that real queens might have envied.

Baffin tried to resume work on the picture; but Prudence's gifts of anecdote were as yet unexhausted, and she found it necessary to tell what Mr. Wilberforce Baker had said to Mr. Jerningham Jukes, and what Mr. J. J. had said to Mr. W. B., and what she had said to both of them, and what her mother had suffered under chloroform. And she giggled, and she wriggled, and she apologised, and she wept, and she wriggled and she giggled again. And Comrade of Brush No. 1 observed to Comrade of Brush No. 2 that this sort of thing would not be good enough at any price. Comrade No. 2 sniffed assentingly. "And what the blazes," he inquired, "does she want to wear that beastly flannel for?"

"Ah!" grunted No. 1. "I say, Baffin, why does she wear red flannel? Makes chaps sick."

Baffin referred the matter to headquarters. "What do you dress yourself up like a sore throat for, Prudence?" he inquired. "Why do you wear red flannel?"

Prudence's eyes were wide with amazement. "Ow, Mr. Baffin," she tittered, "yew *are* a funny men! ... I got pretty things at 'owm. But what's the good o' wearin' 'em out in the studios?"

"You are lacking, my dear girl, in the quality of perception." Baffin uttered these words with an oracular air.

The Comrades made their adieux. "Not if she *paid* me to paint her," whispered No. 1, with a jerk of the head towards Prudence. "But, Lord, *what* a profile! A tricky man could work wonders with that head."

"Pity she spoils herself," added Comrade No. 2. And they departed.

"Hear what those gentlemen said?" demanded Baffin, as the door closed.... "You are too talkative, and you giggle too much, and you wriggle too much. And you should leave off red flannel, and make yourself nice. You could make a lot of money if you took care of yourself. Think of the nice things you could give your mother then!"

"My mother's got a abscess," moaned Prudence, "an' I believe she'll die, an' then I'll starve, 'cause I'm a good-for-nothin' gel, an' I wown't sit still, an'—an' me figure's too flat. But I'm learnin' to croshy, an' I *will* be better. Shall I come termorrer, Mr. Baffin?"

"Come on Friday," answered Baffin. "And," he added, "come in a nice, unwrigglesome frame of mind. You shall have cream and tea and muffins if you are a good girl."

"Ooer!" cried Prudence. "I like muffins. And I like cream, and I like claret... 'Ere"—her face suddenly grew grave, grave as a child's at play with toys—"'ere, Mr. Baffin, do you believe in auctioneers?"

"Do I believe in *what*?" shouted Baffin.

"Auctioneers," repeated Prudence, with a pout. "Don't be angry with me; I won't ask agen, if you don't like.

"On'y ... what you want to look at me so queer for? I can't 'elp bein' silly. I *am* silly. On'y ... I wonder if a auctioneer is the sort of man that anybody ought to trust?"

XVII
MR. WEST'S WIFE

"Is this the young man?" said Mrs. West, of Mulberry Street, sitting up in bed and shading a very white face with a very hot hand. "Oh, I daresay 'e'll do! 'Tain't much, I'm told. No doubt 'e'll manage it."

That task which Mrs. West, of Mulberry Street, thus coldly confided to my management was the witnessing of her will. Dr. Brink had volunteered to execute this document for her; and a sniggering youth had haled me from the snugness of the doctor's waiting chariot to come upstairs and sign.

After my formal presentation to Mrs. West, there was an interval of silence, broken only by the scratchy-scratchy of the doctor's pen, as he hastily constructed a form of bequest.

I employed this interval in taking stock of the testator's estate, the whole of which was contained within her room. There were two bedsteads, one (a little folding thing) being devoted to the uses of the sniggering boy who, be it stated, figured in the document which was now being prepared as sole legatee. The other bedstead—that on which the patient lay—was obviously a veteran bedstead which had seen much of the world. It was a circumstantial, ponderous bedstead, and wore still a pompous air, although its ironwork was rusted and its lacquered parts had quite lost their complexion. This bedstead also bore a superstructure designed to carry a canopy; but all that hung there now were certain

moth-eaten petticoats. There was a chest of drawers among the assets, and a cork model of the Tower of London, and a wash-basin and two soap dishes, and two dumb clocks and the mechanism of another, and a work of art designed in multi-coloured wools, and having reference to the parable of the fig tree.

"Make it all over to 'im," said Mrs. West; "all what I, the undersigned, may die possessed of. I won't 'ave 'is stuck-up sister touch a stick of it. 'E's bin a good boy to me, Bert 'as. It'll be a 'ome for 'im.

"It's bin a near touch for me, what, Doctor?" pursued the testator.

"Pooh!" murmured the doctor, still writing rapidly, "you're not going this time."

"I know that," said the woman. "Not as I take any notice what *you* say—you an' your soft soap. But I know in *meself* as it's all right this time. On'y you never know what's gointer 'appen with the next attack, do you, now? And it'll be a 'ome for the boy. 'E's gettin' good money at the dye works now. 'E'll be all right if 'e's got a 'ome. You ain't puttin' it so's *she* can touch a share, I 'ope, Doctor?"

"Who's she?"

"'Er what I spoke about—what calls 'erself my daughter. 'Er what's married into the perlice. 'Er what's ashamed of 'er own father!"

"I am putting it," explained the doctor, "so that you leave all of which you may die possessed to your son Albert. It's quite definite. You may sign now. This gentleman and myself will witness your signature."

"Lift me up, then," said Mrs. West.

She signed her name in a shaky but accomplished hand. "Be careful, young man," she admonished me, when my turn arrived.

All the formalities being concluded, Mrs. West sank back upon her pillow with a grunt of contentment. "It'll be a 'ome for the boy," she said. "And if 'is father *should* turn up——"

"Has he got a father, then?" questioned the doctor, rather, I think, with the object of displaying an intelligent interest than from any genuine curiosity. You *are* apt to lose your genuine curiosity when this sort of confidence is thrust upon you ten times daily.

"Got a father!" echoed Mrs. West, with evident amazement at the doctor's ignorance. "Ain't you 'eard, then?"

"Heard what?" demanded Dr. Brink.

"About my 'usband. The Midland Malt Comp'ny, you know!'

"Well, really now," replied the doctor, looking painfully confused, "upon my word, I *don't* know."

"You must go about your business in a very funny way, then," reflected Mrs. West. "It's bin the talk o' Limus. 'E done 'em in for eight 'undred quid—'im an' another man."

"Done 'em in!" repeated the doctor. "Who? What?"

"The Midland Malt Company, same's I told you," expounded Mrs. West. "'E was night watchman, Mr. West was—'im an' another man—an' they took eight 'undred quid. 'E got away with 'arf of it, too. The perlice 'as bin investigatin' ever since."

Dr. Brink still looked a little puzzled. "You mean, in fact—do I understand that your husband stole eight hundred pounds?"

"Mr. West an' another man—yes," responded the woman, quite without feeling. "'Im an' 'is mate, they done in eight 'undred. On'y 'is mate, I'm sorry to say, 'e never got 'is share. The perlice got that. They got 'im, too. But they never got Mr. West."

"How did he escape?" demanded the doctor. And I held my breath. I wondered that the desperado's wife could talk so quietly. "How did he escape?" asked the doctor again.

"Mr. West?" queried the woman. "Oh," she said, with great simplicity, "'e went away.

"It was like this yere," said Mr. West's wife:—

"I was asleep, you see—in this bed yere, an' it was dark—all in the middle o' the night, you see. An' he struck a match an' he woke me up.

"'What's that?' I says, with a start like, an' when I see it was Mr. West I lay down again.

"'Ann,' 'e says, 'wake up. I've got some money 'ere,' 'e says. An' 'e lights a bit o' candle, an' I sits up, an' there on the table—that very table—there was a 'eap o' sovereigns what 'e'd rolled out of a sack. 'I've took these from the company. I'm goin' away,' says Mr. West.

"An' 'e gets into 'is Sunday shoot an' 'e shaves 'isself. An' 'e puts a lot o' the money more'n four 'undred pounds—into a little brown bag, an' 'e puts the rest in the coal cupboard. 'The perlice 'll come for that in the mornin',' says Mr. West. 'Let 'em find it there. An' you,' 'e says, 'you don't know nothink.'

"'An' what about you?' I says.

"'I'm goin' away,' says Mr. West. 'I'll write you when it's safe. Give my love to Rosa.'

"Rosa is my sister's niece, what 'e'd always carried on with—innocent like, in a jokin' sort o' way, if you understand me.

"'An' remember,' says Mr. West to me again, 'as you don't know a thing. They'll find the money in the coal 'ole, so don't you try to stop 'em.'

"An' then Mr. West, 'e kissed me same as usual, an' 'e blowed out the light. An' 'e went away."

* * * * *

"I suppose that the police turned up all right?" suggested Dr. Brink, when he had duly considered this simple story.

"The perlice," responded the woman, who had talked more than was good for her, and now looked paler, if possible, than before—"the perlice was very rude an' rough to me. They found the money in the coal cupboard, an' they took it away. But that didn't satisfy them. It on'y seemed to aggerivate them. An' night after night they come round 'ere, an' they was very rough to me. But they ain't got 'old o' Mr. West.

"'E's bin gone a year now, all but five weeks. An' they ain't caught 'im, an' they never will. I believe it would please that daughter o' mine—the wicked, vain, unfeelin' thing—if they *was* to catch 'm.

"Mr. West, 'e 'aven't wrote me, nor I don't suppose 'e will. Mr. West is a careful sort. I *did* send round the other day to a place where I thought there might be noos o' 'im; but there wasn't no noos o' 'im.

"Not that I worry meself about *'im*, if you understand. Mr. West would be all right, wherever it was. 'E's the sort that kin take care o' 'isself, 'e is. It's the boy—young Bert—I'm thinkin' of. Mr. West would be very cut up, 'e would, to think as Bert should come to any 'arm."

This reference to the nice paternal feeling of Mr. West affected us both strangely.

"But," continued Mrs. West, "I'm leavin' 'im the 'ome, at all events. Bert can't come to no pertickler 'arm so long's 'e's got a home.

"Mr. West 'isself was always a rare one for 'ome. The boy takes arter 'im."

XVIII
THREE DIALOGUES

The Mission of the Healer is a fine and a noble one, and I have often confided this original thought to my friend Doctor Brink, who declares that such confidences are helpful to him. And I now desire to record, without comment, three dialogues which drifted in to me at intervals one Sunday, when I was sitting on the doctor's gas-stove.

I.—MORNING

VISITOR: And 'e's ser fretful, Doctor, and 'is breathin's ser sick, and 'e don't appear to 'ave no appetite.

DOCTOR: Bring him to the light here. I just want—ah!

VISITOR: I give 'im a soothin' powder, too, last night—a large one. I bought it at the chimmis. They're supposed to be very good, them Parker's soothin' powders.

DOCTOR: I'm afraid that this is rather serious.

VISITOR: Down't you think they're very good, Doctor—them Parker's soothin' powders?

DOCTOR: I'm afraid there's not much doubt that this child has got diphtheria.

VISITOR: I bin very careful with 'im, Doctor. I give 'im a soothin' powder.

DOCTOR: Where do you live?

VISITOR: Fourteen Mulberry Street. It's next to the oil shop.

DOCTOR: How many rooms?

VISITOR: Was you gointer send 'im away then, Doctor? Oh, down't send 'im away?

DOCTOR: How many rooms?

VISITOR: Down't send 'im away, Doctor!

DOCTOR: I haven't said anything about sending him away—so far. Answer my questions like a sensible woman. You want him to get better, don't you?

VISITOR: I down't want you to send 'im away. I kin look arter 'im meself. There's on'y six of us, an' we got three rooms, an the other two boys kin sleep with me mother in the kitchen? Down't send him away!

DOCTOR: I'm very much afraid, Mrs.—ah—Mrs. Cooper, that it doesn't quite rest with me whether the boy is taken away or not. He's got diphtheria, that's certain, and I'm legally compelled to report the case. It is for the Public Health people to decide whether they take the boy or leave him. *I* think you ought to be glad to let him go. He'll be well looked after.

VISITOR: Down't send 'im away!

DOCTOR: But why not, Mrs. Cooper? You want him to get better, don't you. You can't possibly nurse him yourself. You have the other children to attend to, and the home to take care of, and your husband——

VISITOR: Yus, an' there's me 'usband, too. 'E won't let you take 'im.

DOCTOR (*very patiently*): I've said before that I don't want to take him. It is the health officers who will take him if he's taken at all. My duty is done when I've reported the case.

VISITOR: What you wanter tell 'em for? What you wanter put the little chap away for?

DOCTOR: I'm telling them because I shall be punished if I don't. But I think it's very foolish and ungrateful of you to make this fuss. I only want to do the best I can for you and your baby. You want him to get better, don't you?

VISITOR: Down't send 'im away! Let me send me 'usband round to talk to you. Never mind about the punishment an' that, Doctor. My 'usband won't tell nobody. I'd like you to talk to me 'usband, Doctor.

DOCTOR: And I would rather like to talk to your husband. I can explain things more clearly to him, perhaps. Send him round at once.

VISITOR: Very likely it ain't the diftheria at all, Doctor. I'm sure me 'usband won't 'ave 'im took away.

II.—MIDDAY

DOCTOR: And what can I do for *you*?

VISITOR: I come round yere to talk about the boy Cooper. I'm 'is father. The child ain't to be took away, see? 'E ain't got diftheria at all.

DOCTOR: I'm sorry to have to differ from your diagnosis, Mr. Cooper, but the child *has* got diphtheria. And I'm very much afraid that he's got to be taken away. It doesn't rest with me; I merely have to report——

VISITOR: If you wanter know the troof, Doctor, we've called in Doctor Popham. See? And Doctor Popham don't believe as the boy 'ave got diftheria at all. And 'e's sent the boy some physic. And 'e's gointer 'ave another look at 'im termorrer. And we've took the case outer your 'ands, see? So you needn't trouble to send in no reports to nobody. That child ain't bein' took away. You needn't trouble to interfere no more. The boy is stoppin' 'ome, along of 'is lawful parents. See?

DOCTOR: Did Doctor Popham examine the child's throat?

VISITOR: What's that gotter do with you? The boy ain't got diftheria. And 'e ain't gotter be moved.

DOCTOR: It has got this much to do with me—that I *did* examine the child's throat. I'm not suggesting to you that I think he has diphtheria; I'm telling you that he jolly well *has* got it. I *know*. When you go home you can see for yourself. Look in the little chap's throat and you will see a round white patch about the size of a sixpence. That, my friend, is diphtheria.

VISITOR: The boy ain't gotter be moved.

DOCTOR: That's not my business. Somebody else will decide about that. But I don't suppose he'll let you murder the child, even if you are its father.

VISITOR: 'E's my child, ain't 'e? And 'e's in my 'ouse. Nobody ain't gointer take my child away without I tells 'em to. See?

DOCTOR: It isn't only this one child we have to consider. What about your

two other children? What about all the other children in the house?

VISITOR: Let other people look after their own, same's what I'm willing to do fur *my* own. A man's got a right to 'is own children and nobody ain't gointer touch no child o' mine without I lets 'em.

DOCTOR: You stand on your rights, do you?

VISITOR: That's it. All the corpuscular 'ealth orficers in England ain't gointer take my lawful child away from me. See?

DOCTOR: I don't know whether it's ever been mentioned to you before, but you are rather by way of being a Social Problem.

VISITOR: It ain't your place to be saucy. I know me rights, and neither you nor any man is going to tell me as it's right to rob a person of their lawful child. And I don't want none of your sneers nor I don't want none of your nicknames. You're out o' this job, see? I've called in Dr. Popham. You and yere Latin nicknames!

DOCTOR: I can put it into English if you like. You're a pudding-headed fool. Good-day.

VISITOR: What about my child? Are you gointer promise to leave 'im alone?

DOCTOR: Of course I am. You can kill your whole family for all I care. I've sent in my report to the authorities, and there's an end of it. Good-day.

VISITOR: You've reported, 'ave ye? Oh, very well, then. We'll see. That boy ain't gotter be shifted. See?

DOCTOR: All right. Get out.

VISITOR: We've called in Dr. Popham, and 'e's weighed *you* up. See? The boy ain't got diftheria at all. Nor 'e ain't gotter be shifted.

DOCTOR (*in simpler terms*): May Heaven administer to your requirements. Get out.

III.—EVENING

VISITOR: If you please, Doctor, I come round ere about the boy Cooper. I'm the father, sir. We want you to come round and see 'im. 'E's very bad, sir.

DOCTOR: Made rather fools of yourselves, haven't you?

VISITOR: We ain't give 'im none o' Dr. Popham's medsun, sir; not a drop. We want you to come round, Doctor. 'E's very bad.

DOCTOR: All right. I'll be round in half an hour.

VISITOR: Can't you come round at once, sir? 'E's very bad. 'E don't seem able to swaller, sir, and there's lumps in 'is neck. And the man from the 'ealth orfice ain't ser much as bin near us.

DOCTOR: That's your fault. I told him you were going to make a fuss, and

I suppose he's busy and has put it off until to-morrow.

VISITOR: Can't you make 'im come to-night, Doctor? The boy is very bad. And one of the other boys is sneezin', and the other one 'e says there is a funny feelin' in 'is thumb. Can't you come at once, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Wait one minute, then, till I've written these prescriptions.

VISITOR: Go' bless you, Doctor. We ain't ser much as looked at Dr. Popham's physic. We ain't, straight. The boy is very bad. 'Is face 'as gone a very funny colour. 'Ot this evenin', ain't it? Much obliged to you, I'm sure, Doctor. Think you kin put it right? The boy *is* bad. It's a 'ot evenin'. What they playin' at in the 'ealth orfice, Doctor—leavin' a man's child to die?

XIX
CURING THE CURER

"Yes, Aunt Isobel," said James—"I quite agree with you. The silly old duffer ought certainly to take an anti-something. He's as down-hearted and high-tempered as possible."

"Certainly," quoth Aunt Isobel—a thin and very definite lady, with a wire-woven manner—"*something* ought to be done. Your father is looking very unwell. I attribute his condition to overwork and undernourishment."

"Nourishment's all right, Aunt Isobel," protested James. "He eats enough to fill an ox."

Aunt Isobel winced and raised an arresting forearm, as if to ward off some physical menace. "You really do employ the most trying phrases, my dear," she said. "Personally, I am a stronger believer in Anti-Nervo. Two tablets, three times a day—one before each meal, and one after. It is really a quite remarkable remedy. Poverty of blood is one of a great number of complaints for which the makers themselves especially recommend it. Poverty of blood is, of course, your father's chief trouble. He is much under-nourished."

"You ought to see him walk into a steak," said James.

"If," pursued Aunt Isobel, "he really does receive a proper quantity of food, then I'm inclined to fear that it is food of poor quality. If, indeed, both the quality *and* quantity of his food should prove to be adequate, I can only suppose that he is suffering from insufficient sleep. Or is it brain fag? It *might*, of course,

be liver or weak heart. Or some secret trouble, perhaps. Anti-Nervo is strongly recommended for all these complaints. He must certainly be made to take some Anti-Nervo."

"He must certainly be made to do something violent," admitted James. "He's certainly got hold of a most phenomenal hump."

Aunt Isobel was again forced to push off imaginary assailants. "Where *did* you learn, my dear," she inquired, in a poignant sort of tone, "to use such fearfully emancipated expressions? Another remedy in which I have the greatest possible faith is Sal-Toxine. Do you know Sal-Toxine? But, of course, you don't; it is quite a novel remedy. I myself have only—why, here is your dear father."

And here, indeed, that gentleman was; wearing the gloomiest possible air, and a very dirty collar. He blundered heavily through the door, and cast himself heavily upon a chair. Having disembarrassed himself of a hat and a stethoscope, he delivered an original and entertaining monologue.

"May my bones burn in hell," he said, "if I conduct this profitable enterprise for another damned minute. I've got the largest and dirtiest and sickest collection of common drunks in London. I've got all the Phthisics from here to Limehouse. Every pre-ordained son of a witch of a bricklayer within hail of the parish has broken his bandy leg, and called me in to set it. Every single woman that ever worked in a jam factory is 'expecting' to-morrow, and there isn't a pint of milk or a handful of coal between six of 'em. I haven't slept a wink since yesterday morning, or sat down since last night. I haven't had a wash since Monday, or a drink since last April. I'm fed up."

This speech was listened to by James with polite attention, but perfect calm. Aunt Isobel, upon the other hand, was unable to suppress a loudish shudder.

"Hullo!" cried Dr. Brink, with evident surprise. "Here's Isobel. How are you, Isobel? Hear you've changed parsons again. What a rabid young flirt you are."

"We have been discussing the subject of your deplorable poverty of health," responded the flirt. "We have decided that you must be made to take a tonic—Anti-Nervo, say, or Sal-Toxine. We have the very greatest faith in them, especially Anti-Nervo. You take two tablets, three times daily: one before and one after each meal."

"Can't I have one in my bath, as well?" asked Doctor Brink.

"The directions," responded Aunt Isobel, "are very explicit. Two tablets three times daily—one before and one after each meal. It is a wonderful remedy. My own doctor at Chiswick—a *really* clever man—is perfectly charmed with it. He has analysed it several times. He has the most perfectly refined voice that I have ever met with in a man. *He* takes his profession quite seriously. He is an M.B. of Edinburgh, and a surgeon as well, and they say he is quite the youngest

man who has ever attempted the two things at once. He plays the banjo most delightfully."

"Good at cracking nuts, too, isn't he?" suggested the doctor in a tired voice.

"Of course," continued Aunt Isobel, "we don't want to insist upon Anti-Nervo if there is any other genuine tonic in which you have more faith. I know many extremely intelligent people who simply swear by Sal-Toxine; and then, of course, there is Pherantidote. I have heard that Our Queen uses that. What is your opinion of Pherantidote?"

"Well," responded Doctor Brink, "it's a dam small bottle for one-and-eight. Do you really think I'm seedy, Isobel?"

"We are both agreed that you require——"

"What I require, old girl," said Doctor Brink, rising slowly to his feet, "is a job in the City. I want to try a new system of exploitation. My game's too deadly simple: I'm tired of pumping aniline dye and water into hungry bellies for a thousand a year. I'm tired of the filthy working-man—tired of seeing him so close. He smells of beer, and his hands are so cold. His eyes are awful, and they give me nightmares.... I want to kill the cad more profitably. I want to start a trouser-button works, or some chutney mills, or something. I can't stand it any longer—this deadly boredom: this watching the dumb beast die."

"Well," said Aunt Isobel, "I can seriously recommend you to pin your faith to Anti-Nervo. You take two tablets three times daily."

XX
MILK

I have long been interested in Mr. Binney. He is the only milkman I have ever seen who looks any different from other milkmen. His very voice is different; for, whereas other milkmen are sudden and shrill of utterance, Mr. Binney has cultivated a profounder, more scholarly method, and he has a voice of deep bass quality.

I have sat at an upper window of the Bovingdon Street dispensary and watched this tradesman closely when he has been conducting milkcans to the houses opposite. I have observed his slow, deliberate tread, so thoroughly in keeping with the fulness of his girth and stature. I have noted his extensive face,

so plain and wise and red. I have remarked his drooping eyelid and crimson neck, his scant white locks, and row upon row of chins—features insignificant in themselves, but, when combined, imparting to his countenance a strangely judicial character.

This effect of power (such is the individuality of the man) receives additional strength even from the trivial business of his calling. Mr. Binney, when handing a milkcan through some parlour window, looks less like a milkman than any other imaginable human thing. He handles the pewter vessel gingerly, daintily, as if it were a precious casket, and a sort of trembling eagerness is sometimes to be observed in his demeanour.

There is nothing commercial in Mr. Binney's manner.

He does not seem to sell his milk. He bestows it.

To see him gingerly proffering his battered cans is to see, as it were, an earthly Providence—a conscious benefactor, distributing Nature's bounty to her helpless children.

He accepts the copper tokens which reward his ministrations with an air of gracious calm as far removed from any taint of barter as are his actions. You might suppose him to be a priest receiving offertory.

The same spirit of gentleness distinguishes his method of proclamation. Mr. Binney does not use the cry of "Milk-ho!" which his fellow-milkmen favour. I have already stated that the tone of his voice is deeper and more profound than that which they employ. Pushing his little handcart before him, he causes his utterance to correspond with his gait—which is majestic.

"Milk! milk! *milk!*" he exclaims—or, rather, utters—in a tone which is at once appealing and authoritative.

Mr. Binney so interested me that I reported him to the doctor. "What is the mystery of this unusual milkman?" I said. But the doctor only smiled.

A day or two afterwards, however, when I was seated in anxious expectancy at the upper window, Doctor Brink came up and brought me my answer. "Waiting for your milkman?" he said.... "Ha! I've just been sent for to him. Come round with me now and see him in his little home.... I shall want some help."

As we walked along, the doctor carried his explanation a little further. "We shall have to take his clothes off," he observed. "If once we can get him undressed he's fixed for a week, because he cannot hold things steady, and he's fat, and his trousers are tight, and—oh, here we are."

A perfectly quiet and collected old lady received us on the doorstep. "He's cut 'isself this time," she announced; "fell agin the railings by the church. But he's very jolly and 'igh-sperited, Doctor, and I'm sure the sewing won't be any trouble to you. Is this your assistant?"

The doctor nodded. "Where is he?" he demanded.

"In 'is own old armchair," replied the woman. "Per'aps you'll get 'is clothes off, Doctor. It's on'y the trousers that matter. They'll puzzle 'im till Sunday *this* time, they will."

We found Mr. Binney in the situation reported. He received us with cheers and a poetic outburst.

"Dr. Brink,
Full of chink,
I *don't* think"—

he exclaimed; adding a personal couplet—

"I'm old Binney,
Not so damned skinny."

"Doctor," he continued, "'ave a drink?" Upon the doctor declining this offer, Mr. Binney chuckled loudly and extended—or tried to extend—an arm. "Feel me pulse, old buck," he shouted. "Let's see if you know yere business. If ye can feel old Binney's pulse I'll give you 'arf a dollar, 'cause I'll be damned if ole Binney kin feel it 'isself."

"Loss of feeling, eh?" said the doctor, in his suavest tone. "Ha! you'll feel *this* all right." With which words he inserted a surgical needle in Mr. Binney's cheek.

"Oy!" cried Mr. Binney, "keep orf the grarse!"

But the doctor continued to ply his busy thread, and Mr. Binney, being temporarily incapable of performing any but the most elementary movements, was constrained to endure this treatment. When the doctor had completed it—Mr. Binney having several times admonished him to "keep orf the grarse!"—and we had removed that garment which exerted such a powerful influence upon the question of Mr. Binney's freedom, that gentleman once more expressed himself in verse, saying—

"Doctor Brink,
Tip 'im the wink,
Give 'im a drink,
I don't think.
Put 'im in clink,
Tiddely-wink,
Tiddely-wink,

Give 'im a drink.
Give 'im a——

Good-bye, old pal, an' come agin termorrer."

We went again upon the morrow, and Binney expressed himself as being glad to see us.

"I dunno 'oo your soft-lookin' friend may be," said Mr. Binney, "but I know 'oo you are, Doctor, an' you done me a power o' good, an' I'm grateful to you. Gettin' on fine, I am."

"That's *right*," exclaimed the doctor, looking as if he believed it. "Keeping off the drink, of course, as I advised you?"

"Keepin' orf tadpoles!" cried Mr. Binney, with disdain. "I've 'ad five brandies auready this mornin', an' not you, nor the ole woman, nor the King 'isself would stop me. I know the cure for *my* complaint."

The next morning Dr. Brink paid his third and last visit to this patient. The patient willed it so, having reconstructed the frame of his mind.

"Look 'ere, me man," said Mr. Binney upon this occasion, "I'm grateful for what you done for me, and so on. See? But I've 'ad enough of you. See? I'm very much obliged to you, and all that; but I don't want you. I'm better now. I'm all right now. *I* don't want no blinkin' doctors. See what I mean? You're a clever fellow, no doubt, and I quite agree, and you 'ave my thanks. But you can 'op it. See?"

Dr. Brink accordingly hopped it. But that his treatment had not been wholly useless was testified by Mrs. Binney, who, when calling in that evening for some more dark brown, announced, with a sigh of satisfaction, that "'is trembles" was as bad as ever. "It'll be another week 'fore ever 'e can put them trousers on," she cried triumphantly.

That was a week ago. This very day has witnessed Mr. Binney's return to public life—properly habited and full of dignity.

I have been watching him, as, with his finest and most benevolent air, he bestowed a can of wholesome, grass-fed nourishment upon one of the numerous Barnstein children, who live opposite.

His hands, I thought, showed signs of more than usual eagerness as he hooked a trembling finger round the handle of the can. There was an expression as of reverence upon his face, and he yielded the liquid into Miss Barnstein's keeping with a hesitancy, as of one loth to part from his treasure.

His lips moved, and I could almost have believed that he had breathed a blessing—a Latin blessing. Then I heard him speak—in deep, impressive tones he spake.

"Be careful with it, missy," he said. "If you spill some, what'll mother say?

Now do be careful!"

With that he returned to his little hand-cart and pushed it slowly up the road, walking with a measured gait and uttering, in rich and reverent tones, his exhortation:—

"Milk! Milk! *Milk!*"

XXI
TWO PATIENTS

My friend, Mrs. Isadore Muntz, has been very ill, poor girl.

She is always rather ill, of course; there would not otherwise be much point in being married to so rich and elderly a man as Isadore. But the illness which I now have to record was a real one—a horrid one. It involved the use of a surgeon's knife. It involved the complete collapse of Isadore, whose world-famous bill-brokery was carried on without the stimulus of his presence for nearly fourteen days.

For more than seven days of that period, it is said, he kept to his chamber, and cried without ceasing. And he admitted, between his sobs, to my aunt Elizabeth, that Sir Marmaduke Wilkins's fee for the operation had amounted to a hundred guineas, besides an additional charge of twenty guineas for the anæsthetist.

But Mrs. Isadore—Constance she used to let me call her—is getting slowly better. Because she used to let me call her Constance and because—because I am sorry for her, I went to the "At Home," which was held at West Hampstead, in order—I suppose—to celebrate the result of Sir Marmaduke Wilkins's efforts.

Less than eight weeks having elapsed since the occasion of Sir Marmaduke's skilful treatment, she was still forbidden to be very active. So she lay on a sofa, embowered with blossoms, and we rustled up and cried over her. Isadore, the faithful creature, stood fast by her right hand. This was perhaps responsible for Constance's notable depression.

It is also possible that she thought of all those low-necked gowns hanging useless on their pegs upstairs.

"You don't mean to say *you've* come!" Constance exclaimed when I took her hand; "I thought you hated Hampstead."

"And so I do," replied the tactful guest. "But I heard a funny story yesterday,

and——"

"That's all right," she said. "I'm sick of funny stories. Tell me something tragic. Haven't you fallen in love lately?"

"Yes," I said, "and I've bought another dog."

"Tell me about the dog," she said.

So I described the dog for nearly twenty minutes, much to the enragement of many mourners, who were waiting for an audience. When the laws of decency compelled me to retreat, she was so kind as to ask me to convey a form of greeting to the new dog.

"I will come and see him one day," she said. "But they won't let me move for weeks yet, and when they do I've got to go to Bournemouth and be wheeled about in a bath-chair. Isn't it horrid?"

"It is," I admitted, and I turned away to meet the cod-fish eye and collected expression of Sir Marmaduke Wilkins, M.R.C.S. That scientist was eating an ice with relish.

* * * * *

You may wonder what connection I trace between this episode and the life of Bovingdon Street. There is a connection; but it traced itself. I left the Muntz's stately mansion feeling in need of distraction, and that distraction I sought from Doctor Brink and James. And James was full of news.

"I've begun my professional education," she said. "I administered chloroform to a case last week. Fee sixpence. Fatty still owes it me."

I turned to Fatty for his explanations.

"Pity me," said that gentleman, "I have a hussy for a daughter. One who makes sport of her poor old father's need. I do owe her the money. I shall continue to owe it. I am entitled to owe it. I only got half-a-crown for the whole thing—anæsthetist's fee included.

"Men like Marmaduke Wilkins get a hundred guineas for the same operation. And then the patient has to pay another ten or twenty for the anæsthetist. When a high-class, if modest surgeon, like myself, consents to perform these things for a wage which would offend the dignity of a dustman, why, damme, it is his *duty* to swindle the anæsthetist. Why——"

"What was your patient?" I asked.

"The patient? Oh, a girl in Mulberry Street. Works at the pickle factory. Pretty girl, only eighteen. James cried. Rather unprofessional, what? Now she has the cheek to ask for sixpence!"

"What was—er—the result of your high-class surgery? Is the girl alive?"

"Alive! Why, my insulting young friend, she's back again at the pickle

works. Went to work on the sixth day. *My* girls don't die."

"At work again in six days—after—after *that*! And you let her!"

"Better work than starve," said the doctor brusquely.... "How did you enjoy yourself at Hampstead this afternoon?"

XXII
LOST!

It isn't often that Dr. Brink permits himself to have emotions during business hours, but even the doctor looked astonished when O'Flannigan came into his consulting-room. We called him O'Flannigan, because he did not leave a visiting-card, and we had to call him *something*. And he spoke with a trace of the Irish accent. He was a very tall man and very stout, having dead-white hair, which he wore in curls, and a very red face. His clothes were all of them black, and they shone in places with a sort of oily lustre. He wore black gloves and a black tie, and he carried a black umbrella.

"Evenin', Doctorrr," said he; "ut's a fine place ye got hearrr!"

The doctor bowed.

"Ut is a fine place," repeated the visitor, tapping the oilcloth with his umbrella point; "but, begad, 'tis a mericle how you kin do ut. Privut inkum purrhaps?"

"Why, yes," acknowledged Dr. Brink, "my income is certainly a private matter."

"The divil ut is!" commented the visitor. "Me own's so damned privut Oi've lost sight of ut this ten yeers past. Midwifery connection is good, Oi onderstand. Ut's a sound, domestic practus, Doctorrr?"

The doctor nodded. Wonder had made him speechless.

"That's good now," ejaculated the visitor, holding tight to the mantelpiece as he fished with his umbrella for a chair. "Give me a sound domestic practus. It's these damned Alcoholics and so forth which Oi deprecate, Doctorrr. They're no use to a man. They nevorrr pay up, they nevorrr git bettorrr, and, be jabers, they nevorrr damned well die. Ye put the takuns at three hunderrrd, Doctorrr? Begad, 'tis a poor inkum. Faith, Oi've known a man do bettorrr cuttin' corns. 'Tis a cash trade, is ut not, Doctorrr?"

"It is," said Dr. Brink. "What can I do for you?"

"Do for me?" echoed the visitor. "Whoi, if tis a drink yure profferin' me, Doctorrr, Oi will name the ush'll. Three hunderrrd, eh? Begad, 'tis a paltry inkum—a damned dirrrty, snivelling sneakin' wasp-waisted inkum for a gentleman to live upon. But 'tis a cash trade, to be shure, and there's no anxiety, to be shure. If they die, why, dammit, they die. You take yure thruppence and they take their chance. A veterinary trade, in fact, Doctorrr. Do ye walk yure rounds, Doctorrr?"

"Cab 'em," snapped out Dr. Brink.

The visitor held on to the mantelpiece with both hands. "Holy Motherrr!" he cried. "A cab is ut, ye say? On three hunderrrd? And Oi been surgeon-majorrr in th' Army! Whoi, begad, Doctorrr, I have known the toimes when half a dozen of us in th' Eightieth could drink yure cab away at a sittin'. Cab did Oi say? Be the grace of Heaven, there was gentlemen with us would dispose of a pair-horse brougham in the same period. Cab? To the divil with cabs. Oi must stump ut. Stump ut on me ten old toes. Meself, moind ye—a retired surgeon-majorrr of her late Majesty's Army. And me over sixty, Doctorrr! It is thus that Britain treats her warriors. Begad, they've even stole me pension from me. When do Oi take overr, Doctorrr?"

"Take over what?"

"Why, dammit, man," began the visitor, but his flush of anger suddenly died down. A look of bewilderment took its place. "Will ye pardon me, Doctorrr," said the visitor slowly, in a voice which sounded husky. "But tell me am Oi roight in assuming that I was privileged to meet ye hearrr lost noight?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Then," cried the visitor, moved this time by an evidently powerful emotion, "then tell me, man, for God's sake, tell me, is this not the practus I bought from ye last noight?"

"You certainly haven't bought *this* practice," responded Dr. Brink. "It isn't for sale."

"Begad," mused the visitor, slowly rubbing his chin, "begad, Oi might have known as much. It is a fine place ye have hearrr. Ye wouldn't be for sellin' ut. Not be any means. 'Tis a fine place and a fine practus. Indeed you would be foolish to part with ut, Doctorrr. At any rate, for the sum Oi paid ye yesterday. But, begad, Oi never paid ut ye. Indeed I didn't. Was I so drunk then? Oi doubt ut.

"Hearrr am Oi, an honest, Christian man, a professor of the healun art, the noblest art which—— Begad, Oi *know* Oi paid ut ye. And be jabers, hearrr's—hearrr's the front-door key—yure front-door key—his, Oi should say, Doctorrr, which he gave me when Oi, when Oi——

"For the love of Hiven, Doctorrr, tell me—tell me truly, Doctorrr, where in Satan's name is the dirty little practus which I bought and paid for yesterday?"

XXIII
THE SURVIVOR

Everybody must still remember the sensational explosion at Stoat's cordite factory in Limehouse. It was quite the talk of last year's gooseberry season. I may remind you that one departmental manager, one bookkeeper, one lady typist, and eighteen hands were utterly and instantaneously atomised; that the managing director himself sustained a shock; and that more than seventy operatives had to be removed in ambulances at the company's expense.

It will be remembered that very High Personages sent telegrams of sympathy. A sum of money was publicly subscribed for the relief and burial of the sufferers. The great heart of England was touched, though it did not leave off beating.

But those whose recollection of that horrible, soul-thrilling catastrophe is as keen as mine will remember that, viewed from the broad and enlightened standpoint of news-value, its most important feature was Mr. John Boyle. This honest artisan went up with the gentleman book-keeper and the lady typist and the hands. But unlike them he came down unbroken and almost unhurt, being so fortunate as to alight upon a providential mound of cotton-waste.

Few people will need to be reminded how this clever action was rewarded. A special (*D—— M——*) collection, amounting to nearly £300, was raised in three weeks and presented to Mr. Boyle in recognition of his courage and ingenuity. Pictures of Mr. Boyle in all varieties of dress, attitude, and employment were published in the journals. I have an especially vivid recollection of one picture, appearing in a Sunday newspaper. The photographer had caught the noteworthy features of Mr. Boyle at a particularly happy moment; and with consummate art he had represented our hero as emerging from a bad fog with a patch on his chest. This study bore the following inscription: "John Boyle at Home: He nurses the baby."

The next stage in Mr. Boyle's development, or (to state it more correctly) in the development of the public attitude towards Mr. Boyle, was his engagement

to appear at the Shoreditch Hippodrome in a dramatic entertainment called "The Man Who was Blown Up."

But by the time he had reached this altitude of greatness the fame of Mr. Boyle was already well established; his name had become familiar to the national ear. For months before the day of Mr. Boyle's historic decision to blend his destiny with that of the national drama it had been a common thing to hear men say to other men: "'Ullo, Charlie; been 'avin' one with Boyle?"

This oft-repeated sally, which never failed to provoke laughter, was popularly supposed to embody a charge of alcoholic excess.

In these days, when Mr. Boyle as "The Man Who was Blown Up" has enjoyed three hundred consecutive nights of fame, it is regarded as a silly thing to joke about him. He is now a solemn National fact.

But it was my own particular good fortune to meet Mr. Boyle at a period when the hand of Fame had barely touched him. I made his acquaintance within twenty-four hours after the tremendous moment which had so exalted Mr. Boyle and his fortunes.

Mr. Boyle, having been detained for a brief period at a local infirmary, was anointed with surgical balm and dismissed; when he immediately came round to the sixpenny surgery of Dr. Brink, demanding a certificate of injuries which should enable him to extract some monetary compensation from the coffers of Stoat's Cordite Works, Limited. Mr. Boyle was not then prognostic of the public rewards which awaited him.

Mr. Boyle having stated his business, the doctor became excited and summoned me to leave the hiding-place and join him openly in the consulting-room.

"This chap," he explained, "is John Boyle, who was blown up with other employed objects at the cordite works, and who is still alive. If you are a real journalist you will get 'copy' out of him."

I took Mr. Boyle by the hand and I said to him—

"You have had an awful experience, old chap. My God, you have lived through an awful thing."

Mr. Boyle said: "I believe you, guv'nor. Now this is a funny thing, ain't it. I was 'it on the leg by somethink; and whatever it was, it went right through me trouser but never 'urt the sock. Funny thing, that, ain't it?"

"Quite extraordinary," I admitted. "All the other poor chaps in your shop are dead, aren't they?"

"Twelve chaps and four females; all dead," admitted Mr. Boyle. "Funny thing, wasn't it? Right through me trouser and never touched the sock!"

"Eighty injured from the other shops!" I reflected. "What did you think—how did you feel, when—when you realised it all?"

"I never thought much abaht it," responded Mr. Boyle. "Me leg was 'urtin'."

"It isn't a matter one need encourage him to think about," suggested the doctor.

"I can't 'elp thinking about one thing, though," interpolated Mr. Boyle. "Such a funny thing: Right through——"

"It must have been an awful moment," I hazarded, "when you came to your senses and looked about and saw the—the awfulness of it. What did you do?"

"I don't remember, not clearly," responded Mr. Boyle.... "I know I laughed. It seemed so queer for anything to rip right through a person's trouser-leg and not go near 'is sock."

XXIV
MORE OF PRUDENCE

Prudence and midday post arrived together at Baffin's washhouse on the day appointed for her second stance.

"Oo-er, Mr. Baffin," was her greeting: "*I* got your letters. Gimme the stamps, wown't you? Me an' my friend we allus c'lect stamps. We ain't gointer stop till we got ten thousand, and then we're gointer make a bonfire when my mother's out. 'Ere, an' I ain't bin 'avin' *'arf* a lark with your postman, Mr. Baffin. Oo, an' the conductor on the bus what I come by, 'e wasn't 'arf drunk, I tell you. I was frightened, I was, 'cos my father useder git drunk, an' once 'e bit my mother. 'E *was* a bad man, my father, an' they made 'im go out an' be a soldier in Egypt, an' 'e got the fever in 'is 'ead, an' we got a picture of 'im at 'ome before 'e was buried, an' you ought to see the funny black man a-settin' alongside of 'im. 'Ere, I'm all in a knot at the back, Mr. Baffin: arst your friend to undo me. An' don't you foget to keep them stamps, an' I spoge it's the chin agen, an' I 'ope you've remembered the muffins!"

"Yes," responded Baffin, "I remembered to get the muffins, and I've also remembered to get an empty flour-sack. Know what that's for?"

Prudence shook her head—gravely, wonderingly.

"To smother up tiresome girls in that *will* wriggle and *will* talk," explained Baffin.

"He! he!" giggled Prudence. "Wown't tie up *me*, I know. 'Cos if you was to do that you couldn't paint me. See?" She gurgled with triumph.

"And now," said Baffin, "it is time to leave off playing. Sit up, like a good girl, and keep quiet. Get rid of that bull's-eye."

"Yes," said Prudence. And the lollipop was "got rid of" of by a simple and effective means. "I *should* laugh if someone was to tread on it," observed Prudence. "If my mother was to see—— Oo-er, Mr. Baffin, down't 'oller at me, please, Mr. Baffin. I *will* be good, I will; on'y, if you look like that I shall cry, 'Cos you frighten me."

Silence reigned for a little space, whilst Prudence, with clenched hands, maintained an attitude of strenuous repose. Baffin's actions alternated between brief and seemingly motiveless dabs at his canvas, and a critical inspection of his model, for the purposes of which he spread out his legs and wagged his head—slowly and pensively, from side to side—like an elderly cockerel surveying the domestic landscape. This proceeding terminated in a sigh that had all the eloquence of a shout, and Baffin pounced, as it were, upon his canvas.

Prudence selected this moment in which to throw up both her hands, and wail with sorrow. "Ooh," she moaned, "ooh, I am a bad gel, I am. Ooh, what will my mother say when I go 'ome? She give me a letter to powst, she did, an' I never powsted it, an' it's a letter for our landlord, it is, an' I promised faithful to put it into the first box I come to. An' now I've fogot it, I 'ave, an' my mother 'll be cross. An' I love my mother, I do, an' she's got a bad place on her arm, an' I am a bad, wicked gel to tease an' trouble 'er, I am. Oo-er, I must get up and go out, Mr. Baffin. I must, 'cause I fogot to powst my mother's letter."

Baffin did the philosophic thing: put away his canvas, and put on the kettle, and invited his sitter to unsit and rejoice. That young person responded to this invitation by sitting wonderfully silent—strangely still—for ten minutes. It was only at the very end of this unique performance that we perceived her to be shedding tears. Real tears, this time.

It was possible in that moment to realise that Prudence had passed her twenty-second year. Baffin touched her shoulder, and she shrank from him and shuddered. She spoke, and her voice was the voice of a woman. "Lemme alone: lemme alone. You donnow what a un'eppy gel I am. You—you——"

It finished in a gurgle.

Then, with the laudable motive of clearing the air, Baffin referred in a tone of banter to the still visible presence of red flannel. The success of his experiment amazed us both. All in a moment the whims and capers of infancy possessed her again, and she succumbed to an ecstasy of wriggles.

"Ooh, 'ere, 'ere, Mr. Baffin; 'ere, I say, what do you think some man 'as done? Some man 'as sent me a—a something: a underneath something, all white. Yes, reely!"

"An' my mother says it didn't 'arf cost somethink, neether. But ain't 'e got

a cheek to do it? 'Cos it ain't right for a man to send presents like that to a gel when she's grown up: 'cos my mother says it's takin' a liberty. Whoever sent me it, 'e must 'a' been a artist because of the tasty yoke. My mother says as I'm a grown-up gel now, an' I got to be very pertickler.

"Oo, it is pretty, though, I tell you: pink ribbon on the shoulders, an' my mother says 'ooever 'e is 'e oughter be ashamed of 'isself, an' all my gel cousins from Catford are comin' on Sunday to 'ave a look, an' when I find out 'oo it is, my mother says I can tell 'im what I think of 'im."

Stimulated and cheered by the thought of this exciting prospect, Prudence fell upon the muffins. Her appetite, at any rate, was thoroughly grown up, and, having performed a veritable gastronomic feat, she curled herself up on the musty old curtain which carpeted Baffin's "throne" and—went to sleep.

Whereupon, the unauthorised kittens—they crawled everywhere—you found them in the milk jug—promptly employed the skirts of Prudence as a playground.

"Move those kittens away, like a good chap," Baffin called out to me. "They'll worry Prudence when she wakes up. Hates the silly beggars, you know."

But to our surprise, when Prudence did wake up, she stretched forth a foot, and began to tease the plumpest of them with the point of her shoe.

"Funny objec's, ain't they, when they're fat and soft, like this?" said Prudence. "Breakable, ain't they? No strength in their legs. On'y fit to lie on their backs an' be tickled."

And Prudence stooped down, and lifted the plump one into her lap.

"Ooh, my! 'is little pores ain't 'arf soft!" She spoke in the woman's voice that we had heard but once before. "'Is little pores ain't 'arf soft; you could bite 'em."

She kissed a paw.

"Ain't 'e got a funny morsel of a nose. Sich a cheeky nose; such a teeny one. You could bite it. You—you——"

She lifted the absurd little animal to her face, and rubbed her cheek against his cosy side, and she kissed his impertinent nose.

"Oo's a precious, then!" continued Prudence. "Oo's a sleepy precious. My, 'e's a sleepy little 'elpless little lump of fat! Ain't you, boy? What price a see-saw, fat boy?"

She held him so that he hung by his shoulders in an attitude that was not suggestive of dignity. And she dandled and bounced him in a manner with which kittens are not familiar. She lifted him to her face again, and made as if to kiss the nose once more.

But the lips, half bunched for that purpose, parted suddenly, as if with pain—as if with wonder—as if with horror. The kitten slipped from her fingers,

and fell with an indignant mew into the soft, warm haven of her lap. And Prudence's hands went up to her startled face, and her hair fell over her like a shroud, and she sobbed as women sob.

"Oh, Gawd!" she cried; "its eyes, its eyes! Its little, winkin' eyes! Oh, mother, *mother*!"

XXV
A TALK WITH JAMES

I had extinguished the flame of the doctor's gas-stove, and was warming myself on the lid, when James burst in and interrupted me.

"Come off it, like a dear, and listen," said James. "I've had a proposal!"

I wondered, for a moment, whether this flippant manner of stating a serious fact did not call for some form of fatherly rebuke. But all that I actually said was: "Well, I hope you think you've started soon enough."

"Started!" echoed James, regarding me with an air as of dignified amazement. "My dear young man, I *started* years ago. Why, Baffin was my third; and Baffin began to woo me before I was eleven."

"How long ago was that?" I meekly inquired.

"Don't you be rude," said James. "I take a grown-up size in almost everything. If Baffin perseveres, I suppose I shall really have to accept him—if it's only to make him leave off wearing those New Art ties. But, really and truly, I'd rather not be married at all. I don't believe I've got a married mind. I'm much too fond of rats."

"But," I ventured to point out, "people have been known to combine the two interests."

"Not successfully," asserted James. "Rats require a fearful lot of attention. Another thing about Baffin is his hands. I really *couldn't* be married to them."

"Why 'another' thing?" I inquired. "You haven't stated any firstly."

"I daresay my grammar isn't quite correct, but I haven't noticed that yours is perfect," rejoined James. "And, anyhow, my ideas are sound even if my grammar is weak. Of course, one could *train* him to take care of his nails; but with rats you have more to show for your trouble. He really was most touching."

"Baffin has a fine vein of sentiment," I admitted.

"Why Baffin?" demanded James. "I was talking about Mr. Grimsdick."

"Pardon me," I said. "You think so rapidly, and my hands are cold. Who is Mr. Grimsdick?"

"The one I was telling you about," explained James. "He's our grocer."

"But you never were telling me about him," I protested. "He is quite a new character."

"Nonsense," cried James. "Why, the very first thing I said to you was that Mr. Grimsdick had proposed to me. At least, I take it as a proposal. He held my hand and——"

"Excuse me," I ventured to observe, "but do you think it quite correct in the daughter of a respected family physician that she should go about the country holding hands with grocers? Now had it been——"

James cut short my speech with characteristic impatience. "Mr. Grimsdick," she said, "has been holding my hand for years."

"Does he sell lard?" I inquired.

"He is a very religious man, and when his wife died, when I was about seven, he used to give me raisins and pat my head to comfort himself. And this afternoon, when he gave me my change, he held my hand and he said, 'R! Miss, I expect we shall soon see you round yere shopping on your own account. How time do fly, to be shaw. You'll be having your hair up soon. And yet it don't seem no time since the days when you used to sit on the cheese barrels and swing your little legs and heat my raisins. 'E'll be a lucky young fellar whoever 'e is. They'll 'ave to 'urry up, miss, some of 'em—what? I on'y wish I was a young man—*I'd* give some of 'em a lead.'

"So I said, 'Never mind, Mr. Grimsdick. I shall always come to you for my soap and tea.'

"And he laughed. And he said, 'R! We shan't see much of you round 'ere, I reckon, miss. You'll be marrying into the aristocracy and goin' to live at Herne Bay or Clacton.'

"So then I gave him Fatty's well-known speech about the Idle Rich.

"And he said, 'Oh! If that's your way of thinkin' there's a chance for all of us. Well, miss, there's a empty chair in my parlour and a seat be'ind the cash desk.' *I* call that a proposal."

"A most definite and unequivocal proposal," I agreed. "What did you say next?"

"Oh," said James, "there was nothing else of importance. We got off on to the subject of Carlsbad plums: they were beauties, but too dear. He wouldn't reduce them."

"Pooh!" I cried. "And he calls himself a lover!"

"*All* men aren't like Baffin and other people, thank goodness," said James disdainfully. "Mr. Grimsdick thinks about the future. But I'd rather go in for rats,

I think. There's Baffin, for instance: he never shuts a door after him."

"Rats don't either," I submitted.

"But cats don't open them," argued James, not without logic. "And then there's always having to be at home on the second Tuesday. Really, I can't decide about my future at all. Most girls haven't any difficulties, because they can make up their minds to be nurses and relieve the sufferings of the poor. But I've been brought up to that sort of thing, and it bores me. Of course, you can always get an opium-eater, or drunkard, or something, and devote your life to reforming him. But then, again, they always smell of it. Really, it's very hard. And Baffin's so irritable. Look at the way men fuss over trifles. And if you get one who is clean and not fussy, and not a grocer, and decently young, he is sure to be ugly and a bore."

I said, "You are referring now, I suppose, to Boag, the Conative Meliorist?"

"No," replied James. "Mr. Boag is a bore, but he isn't downright ugly. As a matter of fact, I was thinking of *you*."

"Oh!" I said.

"Yes," said James. "I know you like one to be frank. Apart from everything else, men make me sick. It will really have to be rats."

XXVI
THE APRIL BARGE

I set out, sedately enough, one April morning, to rescue James from her aunt at Bayswater. I set out grandly enthroned upon a 'bus.

But I came quite unexpectedly upon this April Barge, and James and her aunt were forgotten.

The April sun had come out sharp to time, you see, and was winking fitfully upon all of us, like the unsettled, rakish fellow that he is. And a girl with two great baskets full of wondering daffodils had come out, too; and some conscienceless vagabond was extracting melody from a cornet. So that even the Regent's Canal, with its sombre vicinage and sulky craft, seemed, as if by some surprising effort, to have taken on an air of sweetness and youth and hope.

You could consider this fact at leisure as our 'bus toiled slowly up the rise of a road which spans the canal. There was a public-house in front of us—the public-

house and the cornet seem to be inseparably united in this neighbourhood—but the canal was to one's left, and appeared, somehow, to convey that air of refreshment which the tavern so conspicuously lacked.

As one looked down upon the face of these waters, so strangely heartened by the sunlight, a sort of certainty grew upon him that they would break suddenly into perspective; that their vista would cease to be obscured by coal wharves and cranes and hoardings; that somebody's whisky, commended to your notice in large white letters on a blue-enamelled background, would fade and fade and fade, until it merged with the white clouds and the blue sky behind it. Then need you but sigh and sit back, beholding a silver streak set snugly between hills, and flowing, flowing, flowing to the edge of the world. Instead of which——

Pooh! There was no instead. The April sun kept winking at the daffodils, and the daffodils kept staring at the sun, and the cornet-man made music by the waterside. So that even a poet might have smiled at it all. For here, I'll swear, was none of your mere "waterways," created by syndicates for profit; here was none of your world capitals. Just a little old river, sunning itself gratefully in a little old town that God had made.

And, as if to strengthen this conceit, a woman came up through the hatchway of a barge that I was looking at. She was wearing a sun-bonnet, in accordance with the custom of barge-women, and she stood up gracefully, one hand on her hip, the other before her eyes, to seek out the cornet player.

We are the boys of the bulldawg breed
What's made ole Hengland's Nime.

Those were the words which had inspired the melody which the cornet-blower was blowing. The woman tapped her foot in time with the notes.

Her husband came up then, accompanied by tobacco clouds and a baby. He seemed to be a fortunate sort of husband, for I noticed that the woman laughed appreciatively at some joke which he made.

Then the man's eye wandered to the canal-side, and he caught sight of the daffodil-girl, who was standing there. And what must the fellow do but throw kisses to her, which gallantry was reciprocated by the flower-girl. The barge-woman laughed at this new jest with even more good humour (if that were possible) than that which she had shown before. The man shouted some message or other to the flower-girl, and she replied, whereupon he handed the baby to his wife, saying, "Catch 'old, Fatty!"—an utterance which I heard without hearing, as one can when an April sun is shining on men's hearts. And, advancing to the side of the boat, the man held out his arms, and the girl threw daffodils towards him.

The first bloom fell into the water, and the second; the third he caught. One more poor daffodil was drowned, and he caught the two next. So that there was one for his cap, and one for the missus, and one for the baby, who, being now safely delivered from the paternal arms (which were not built for cradling babies), needed but the additional stimulus of a yellow thing to marvel at ere it smiled as largely as any of them.

And upon my word I smiled, too, and could, indeed, have laughed outright. But I sat in awe of a fat man on the adjacent seat. He did not belong to that order of lunatics who laugh for nothing in the sunshine. "What we want," he was saying to his companion, "what we want," he said, with his eyes fixed tight upon this April barge, "what we want is a total *change of Government*. Nothin' won't ever be right again till we get it."

I had a heavy parcel of books on my knee, and to drop them heavily upon his foot had been, as it were, the accident of a moment. But the sweet temperance of springtime had stolen into my blood, and I forbore. Besides which there were the barges and the daffodils, and they were better worth a man's consideration than this fool.

So I looked over the side again, and saw that the barge-man had turned his attention to the cornet-blower, with whom he was exchanging highly flavoured sarcasms. With a view, probably, of adding zest to his humours, and because a springtime madness was upon him, he had changed headgear with his wife, and stood there in her sun-bonnet, grimacing and laughing. He had a long barge-pole in his hand, and somehow—I don't quite know how it happened—in assuming to hurl that weapon at the cornet-blower, he overbalanced himself, and fell sideways into the water, striking his head as he fell against the side of another barge, which was moored close to his own in that jumble fashion which is peculiar to barges.

He came up again almost directly, looking queer in his wife's sun-bonnet (for he had tied the tapes beneath his chin), and then immediately sank again. The nerveless ineptitude of it all made one angry with the man: it seemed to be wilful.

As for the wife, she looked wonderingly over the side, and realisation came to her so slowly that a laugh still flickered faintly on her face when he came up again. Even then, the sound which she uttered was as much like a chuckle as a cry. And when words came to her, they were few enough. "Oh, my pore man!" she moaned. "Oh, my pore man! Oh, my pore man!"

And the baby lay on its back, and chuckled knowingly into the petals of a dishevelled daffodil.

Our 'bus had made the bend of the canal bank by this time, and now was parallel with the water, and exactly opposite to this barge. Under the united stimulus of instinctive curiosity and instinctive horror, the driver pulled up sharp;

and so the 'bus stood still, and we passengers sat there, gaping at that funny thing in the sun-bonnet as it came up for a second time and sank again.

"Oh, my pore man! Oh, my pore man!" moaned the wife.

And the cornet-blower, pale with horror, still applied himself automatically to the cornet. He had changed his tune since first I heard him, and the aquatic feats of the man in the sun-bonnet were conducted to music, the strains of which, being interpreted into words, ran as follows—

Hi! Hi! clear the road
For the rowdy, dowdy boys.

It came up again for the third time, and the woman on the barge grabbed frantically at nothing, and tore her arm in the effort, so that a crimson splash mingled with the eddying waters as he sank again.

And then the cornet-blower remembered himself, and dropped his cornet hastily, as though it burned him. And, of all queer things for a cornet-blower to do, he blubbered weakly, like a woman found out.

And the mischievous sun cast his shadow upon the water, and caused it to dance joyously thereon, so that you would have deemed it to be the shadow of one consumed with joy.

"Oh, my pore man!" cried the wife. "Oh, my pore man! Oh, my pore man!"

And the fat person from the next seat said to his friend, "I saw it comin'. The giddy fool was larkin' about like a ape." And, in the meantime, the giddy fool did not come up again.

Suddenly the flower-girl spoke. "My Gawd!" she screamed, struggling feverishly to disentangle herself from her shawl and the straps of her basket and her fringe; "my Gawd! where's all the blarsted men got to? What's 'appened to you? For Christ's sake find a *man*, you fools!"

The 'bus emptied itself, and men ran into each other along the roadway, and somebody ran for a policeman. So that there was a great deal of noise and bustle shorewards. But at the same time certain male persons of a much more silent and effective character made their appearance upon the barges adjacent to the April barge. They did not shout, and they did not run about much. They fetched poles and produced ropes, and one of their number climbed into the water at the end of one; and presently, after much probing and searching and jerking (and not a little swearing), they brought him up at the end of a barge-pole, with a slime concealing all of him except the sun-bonnet, which had slipped upon one side, and looked more comical than ever.

"Oh, my pore man!" cried the barge-woman, who by now was surrounded

by a stimulating coterie of other barge-women.

"*E's* done for!" said my fat neighbour, and spat contentedly.

And the baby snatched at its mother's head, which was still covered with her husband's hat, from which a single daffodil was dangling.

In the meantime, they laid him down upon the deck of a barge, and relays of men, acting under the direction of a policeman, jerked at his arms, and pulled his legs, and pummelled his chest. But, as the fat man had said, *he* was done for, and these exhausting efforts only made the baby laugh. So they lifted him hurriedly, with a change of manner, as befitted a changed burden, and conveyed him to the shore, where he was placed upon an ambulance and deported.

The fat man formed himself into an impromptu committee of inspection. He returned to his friend (and my side) after a lengthy dalliance by the ambulance, and spoke as one well pleased.

"Crack in 'is 'ead as long as my 'and. 'Orrible! Never noted afore that blood 'ad such a salty smell to it. Quite sickly, ain't it? To think of it, poor fool! ... And on a day like this, too!"

And he took off his hat and sunned himself. "I'm for a drink arter all that," he added; and, his companion agreeing with him, he walked over to the tavern, in company with many other of the 'bus passengers, and the driver and conductor of that vehicle, and most of the barge-men.

They took the cornet-blower with them, and somebody collected a store of coppers in that musician's interest, with which he was presented upon the understanding that he should "bite off a yard o' somethink lively" to cheer the mourning host withal.

So while the woman on the barge was being carried below deck by her sympathisers; whilst faint gurgles issued from the daffodil-girl, standing over her baskets by the water-side; whilst the sun winked down upon all of us—the cornet-blower threw out his chest with an air something at variance with the muddy tears upon his cheek, and blared out a song of mourning.

Leave off tickerlin', leave off tickerlin',
Leave off tickerlin', Jock!

sang the mourners; and the jolly young sun must have winked itself into a headache.

By the time our 'bus went on again every note of tragedy save one had departed from the scene. That solitary note was supplied by the daffodil-girl, who stood by her garden dabbing disconsolately at her nose and eyes with an apron-end.

Nought was stirring on the April barge, save one plump little figure, which

squatted all by itself in the centre of the deck. They had forgotten the baby in this coil. But the baby was quite happy—happier than any of them. For it sat there, eating its father's cap, and smiling amiably at the sunshine, as who should know that there is a benign and beautiful purpose in everything, even unto the falling of a sparrow.

The daffodils upon the waterside, pressing each other close within their baskets, stared up into the heavens more wonderingly than ever.

XXVII
THE CASE OF MRS. ROPER

"Beg pardon, young fellar," said Mrs. Roper, "but ain't you the young fellar from the doctor's?"

Mrs. Roper is a sullen-eyed lady with very many chins. She is, *vide* her shop sign, a dealer in antiques, and, to quote the same authority, old metal, old teeth, old glass and china, and every variety of new and second-hand wearing apparel are bought and sold by her. She is not the cleanest woman in London, nor is her shop the cleanest in Bovingdon Street. But there is charm in the variety and abundance of Mrs. Roper's assets, which are the working parts, as it were, of our complex civilisation, amongst which tokens Mrs. Roper is always sitting, silently, mournfully, by day and night, like a lonely widow on a coral reef, surrounded by mementoes of a shipwreck.

I hastened to reply with civility to Mrs. Roper's question, for that lady had just sold to me for ninepence an ancient brass tobacco jar, which expert opinion has since valued at half a guinea.

"Then," said Mrs. Roper, "I will thank you to send the doctor round 'ere. Tell 'im that the stuff what 'e calls medicine is makin' me worse."

"Madam," said I, thinking rather of my benefactress than of my friend, "the doctor is outside now. Shall I——?"

"I thought I seed the shadder of 'is 'at," said Mrs. Roper; "call 'im in."

I called the doctor, as directed, and he came in with a brisk and cheerful air, kicking me brutally upon the shin in passing. I then, very naturally, prepared to retire; but Mrs. Roper held me back.

"*You* needn't run away, young man," she said. "I ain't ashamed for anybody

to 'ear *my sufferings*.... Doctor, what's to be done about me? I'm very ill."

"Where?" said Dr. Brink, a little brusquely.

"It's a funny question for a doctor to ask," responded Mrs. Roper. "I thought we paid you to find things out. But we do not want to waste each other's time, and so I'll tell you.

"What's the matter with me is that I'm dying. That yellow medicine what you sent me 'as brought the pains on worse than ever. You will 'ave to try me with some red. Not that I look to that or any other doctor's stuff to cure me now. Nothing can't cure me now. I've been neglected too long. The on'y thing I got to look forward to now is me little wooden ulster. It'll be a great pleasure to some people, I know, the day the undertaker comes to measure me for it. What are you laughin' at?"

"I wasn't laughing," protested the doctor. "I was yawning."

"Then what are you yawning at?"

"Up all night," explained the doctor.

"Ah!" quoth Mrs. Roper mysteriously, "I see, *you're* one of the jolly sort.... What you gointer do about me?"

The doctor equivocated. "Where's your husband?" he said.

Mrs. Roper closed both eyes and shook her head. "Wherever the man may be," she responded, "you may be sure as it ain't be the bedside of 'is dying wife. '*E's* one of your jolly sort, likewise. 'E's one o' them good-tempered, popular fellars, 'e is. *'E* don't want no medicine."

"I was not proposing to give him any medicine," explained the doctor. "I would like to talk to him concerning the painful state of—ah—health in which—ah—you find yourself. When will he be in?"

"Ain't you got some more riddles you would like to ask a person?" responded Mrs. Roper, with a bitter laugh. "How in gracious do *I* know when the man will be in? 'E's one of these *pleasant* men, I tell you. The sort as is always ready with a laugh or a joke or a funny remark. 'E ain't got time, bless you, to trouble 'is jolly self about no wives. 'E's one of your 'appy men—the sort that makes friends, and so on. 'E would rather be out with 'is friends, 'e would, listenin' to their flattery, than sit at 'ome 'ere with 'is lawful wife and 'ear the *truth* about 'isself. 'E's a plain man, too, and stammers 'orrible."

"I think," suggested Dr. Brink, "that I shall have to call again when he is in, and talk things over with him. I can see," added my excellent and ambiguous friend, "that what you want is more attention."

"What I want," retorted Mrs. Roper, "is me wooden ulster. The sooner the better. Attention won't save me now—even if I could get it. I'm gone too far. And what is the use of a 'usband's idea of attention? If you want to see the kind of attention 'e gives me, just cast your eye on the table there. Them things in the

corner is supposed to be lemons. '*E* sent them in. *Look at 'em*! 'E on'y sent 'em 'cause I asked 'im, mind you. Is it much to ask, d'ye think, Doctor? And me at death's door! Look at 'em, I say. They're furrin lemons."

There was a pause. Then said Mrs. Roper again, "They're furrin lemons. I would say it to 'is face. I ask 'im on me death-bed for lemons and 'e sends me them! Furrin ones! Don't you think they're furrin, Doctor?"

"I'm sure of it," replied the doctor.

There was another pause, during which Mrs. Roper applied a variety of new and second-hand wearing apparel to her eyes. But the gift of articulation soon returned to her.

"I," she explained, with biting irony, "am on'y 'is wife. *I* ain't jolly. *I* don't flatter 'im. *I* don't make a fuss of 'im. *I* don't make meself agreeable. *I'm* on'y 'is wife. *I* on'y tell 'im the truth. What does 'e wanter give good lemons to *me* for?"

"If you could let me know when he returns," submitted Dr. Brink, "I would talk these matters over with him. In the meantime, I will send you round some medicine, which——"

"What's the good of medicine to *me*?" demanded Mrs. Roper. "I'm on'y 'is wife. You go round to the undertaker's, Doctor, and tell 'im to send me round a wooden ulster. That's the on'y thing as'll bring *me* any peace. I ain't one of your jolly sort, you see. *I* don't go round to me cousin Alfered's and make meself agreeable and play nap. 'Is cousin Alfered's, indeed! It isn't 'is cousin Alfered as 'e goes to visit, Doctor; you take my word for *that*, Doctor; I s'pose I'm blind, eh, Doctor? An' deaf an' dumb an' parulised? I s'pose I ain't aware that cousin Alfered 'as got a wife? *A wife*! That's what 'e calls 'er! If she's a honest married woman, Doctor, 'ow d'you account for 'er bein' ser very lovin' to 'er 'usband?"

"I have left off trying to account for these things," explained the doctor. "About your medicine now. I want you——"

But Mrs. Roper had struck a more fascinating theme than that of medicine. "Married!" she ejaculated. "Ha! Married! And she ser jolly! Ser good-tempered, ser fussy, ser full o' compliments! No wonder as my man likes to play nap at 'is cousin Alfered's. There's two or three jolly ones together in *that* 'ouse.

"She's a 'igh-spirited lady too. Ser full of romps an' all. She reads the papers, too, and listens to their jokes, *and laughs*.

"Well, well, Doctor, it's time that wooden ulster come. It won't arrive before I'm ready for it. This world ain't no fit place for me.

"I ain't jolly enough.

"I'm only a honest wife, I am, what sits at 'ome all day an' tells the truth while other people makes theirselves ser popular. This world is no fit place for honest wives.

"The other ladies are ser jolly; they makes theirselves ser pleasant. They

fuss about and flatter you, and laugh at all your jokes. They makes theirselves ser pleasant....

"What's a respectable married woman to do, Doctor?"

XXVIII
THE BLACK HAT

"What I like Banking Day for," James had privately informed me, "is because *then* Fatty always puts on a cap. He looks so plain and friendly in a cap."

At which I pondered deeply.

That which I pondered was the important problem of Dr. Brink in his relationship to moral authority and the top-hat.

I had to admit to myself that James's aphorism was justified by facts. The doctor did look more human in a cap. Upon the other hand, he did not in the least look like himself.

"Banking Day" is a solemn occasion in the Brink household. It happens once a fortnight. It affords the doctor an excuse for making holiday—a two hours holiday—the only regular holiday in which he permits himself to indulge. And of this regular and recurrent festival, the cap is an outward and visible sign: the cap and golfing shoes and a poacher's jacket. And a solemn black bag. The solemn black bag is filled with sixpenny pieces. Thus equipped, the doctor goes into the City—"giving'em a treat in Gracechurch Street," he calls it—and deposits the toll which he has extracted from human misery upon some banker's table. He then returns to Bovingdon Street, wearing your right usurer's leer and a shilling cigar. And having in his right hand—the hand he pulls the teeth out with—a fat, white book. It is his vulgar custom, upon such occasions, to publish loudly a statement of accounts, as thus—

"Forty-eight pounds fourteen and sixpence. Do you hear that, my friend? Do *you* hear it, Baffin? One thousand nine hundred and forty-nine sixpences. Does this compete with literature, young man? Does it equal the material gains of your art, Mr. Baffin? Nineteen hundred sixpences, James, my dear, nineteen hundred and forty-nine. All screwed out of the working man. Damn the working man. What's he made for? Where's that bottle of Burgundy?"

The doctor, in this mood, presents an absurdly human appearance. His

cap—-it is an old-fashioned neck-freezer, and a trifle small for him at that—sits usually upon one side, and he rolls the cigar between his lips in an unctuous manner, and has even been known to wear his feet upon the mantel-piece. It is always his pleasure under these circumstances to toy with Baffin, who, being so closely related to the Leicestershire Baffins, is quite unjustly credited with a secret sympathy for despotism. In point of fact, however, Baffin has no time to sympathise with anything, except the Baffin School of Impressionist Art. But the doctor, when his cap and the cares beneath it sit lightly on him, chooses to exhibit a cordial sympathy for the supposed convictions of Baffin.

"Dirty beggars, these working men: what, Baffin?" the doctor will observe. "Have to be kept in their places. Eh? What? Sixpence a go, Baffin. Nineteen hundred and forty-nine sixpences. A very reasonable tribute, Baffin; a tribute to education and elegance and the cultivated mind. The feudal system, Baffin, was a fool to our system. You must write and explain it all to the Leicestershire Baffins. What, Baffin?"

Baffin always offered the same reply—

"You *are* a silly fool, Brink."

Even the surrounding helots recognised and responded to the psychological significance of the doctor's City costume. I shall always remember an observation uttered by Ma Levinsky, who kept the fish shop at the corner.

It was Banking Day, and the doctor, suitably apparelled and accompanied by the bag, was walking West, accompanied by your servant, to whom he had promised to exhibit the interior of a real bank, and also to show how one conducts an operation called "paying in." And when we passed her, Ma Levinsky spoke to us, saying, "Cheero, Doctor, ole love. Got a baby in the bag?" This to THE DOCTOR, mind you! You perceive the weird magic of this cap.

But even the two hours of holiday which the doctor "stood himself" on Banking Days would come to an end, although it was not the least remarkable fact connected with the whole absurd proceeding that the two hours in question began at two o'clock and did not end till half-past six. But when they did end, the doctor's sudden masquerade would also end. The poacher's coat, the golfing shoes, would vanish, and in their place appeared the solemn calf—gent's heavy walking—the not less solemn morning coat—a somewhat tarnished vestment, but of undeniable solemnity—and, lastly, the solemnest thing of all, the final token, the apotheosis—the doctor's black silk hat.

It was a profoundly aged hat. A hat of many lustres, the which had swallowed up its own. But it was a *hat*—a black silk hat, and being such it complied with all the conditions: it sufficed: it left no room for criticism. And you did not catch the doctor looking human when he had that hat on.

I will not pretend that the doctor loved his hat. "It's the price which I pay

for my soul, this damned thing," he once explained to me. "I hate to have to take it out with me, but Democracy insists. Democracy has a sense of what is due to it. In Norfolk, you could wear what you liked—your mother's bonnet if you wanted to. But you couldn't think what you liked or love what you liked. Dammit, you couldn't even swear at what you liked. Here, you are at liberty to do what you jolly well please; but as to wearing what you please—why, that's another matter. The doctor is known by his hat. They look for the hat. They expect that. They *pay* for the hat. And being an honest sort of chap (at bottom), I give them what they pay for. This one cost me ten-and-sixpence."

Neither Ma Levinsky nor her rich relations would dare to bandy chaff with the doctor when he was the doctor—when he wore the hat. Even the leisured classes, airing their minds and matter as they propped up the fabric of the "African Chief," forbore to utter even a whisper of native pleasantry. Even the Jew-boys reserved the shafts of their wit for meaner quarry. The black hat awed them all.

I remember a certain Banking Day when I persuaded the doctor, cap and all, to enter a public-house. It was called by the name of the "Four Soldiers," and a board outside its windows proclaimed that Devonshire cyder could be had within. But when we got within we found that somebody had won some money at somebody else's expense, and that this event was being celebrated. And our advent was accordingly received with criticism and comment: wherefore we departed—quick.

But hardly had we arrived at the surgery when a messenger appeared—a rather anguished messenger, not very lucid. I answered his ring myself, and can therefore speak authoritatively.

"Dockeratome, young man?"

"Yes," I said.

"Telms wanted, quick. Ole Joe Black. Up the pole. Barmy. See? Murder, see? Telms wanted."

"Where?" I inquired.

"Never mind where," responded this helpful emissary. "Telms wanted.... Dockeratome?" he finally demanded, after a reflective pause.

I called the doctor down to him at that stage; and the doctor helped him to unlock his bosom. We found that old Joe Black and his complicated infirmities were to be found at the "Four Soldiers"—the very house of cheer which had so cheerfully exported us about five minutes ago.... I—I wilted. The doctor smiled. He also put his hat on.

When we arrived at the "Four Soldiers" I found myself entering the public-house parlour of that guesthouse a few paces ahead of the doctor. And I also found that a seafaring gentleman with a broken nose had marked my entry.

"'Ere's our little love-child come in again," observed this mariner cheerfully. "Drop Jim a 'int aside the 'ead wiv yere belt-end, Bill." But then——

But then—he saw *the hat*! Bill saw it also. Twenty other merry gentlemen shared also in the vision. And a silence, a sticky silence, thick as treacle, suddenly manifested itself. And we all looked up at the ceiling.

There was a hook on the ceiling, and a piece of rope and a man was hanging there, the rope curled round his body and one leg. The man was addressing the world beneath him; and now that the world had grown strangely silent, his words were plain to hear.

"Call yerselves *men*," the man was saying, "*I* call ye caterpillars. Stand by, ye greasy toads, and watch a true man 'ang 'isself. 'Ang 'isself, d'y'ear? 'Ang 'isself. I *will* 'ang meself. I'll 'ang meself dead as dogs' meat, and there's not a swab in Limus dare stop me. Not one in this room. Not a god-forsaken son of a lady in this room. Not even you, Tom Tinker."

Tom Tinker being thus addressed made answer. He happened to be the landlord of the inn, and a regard for his own future caused him to be solicitous for that of the man on the ceiling.

"Don't you be silly, Joe, me lad," he answered. "Don't you be rash. You'll regret it, you know; you will that. Come down, now, when I tell ye; come down before ye forget yeself. D'y'ear me? Come down. You'll make a fool of yeself in a minnit."

The man on the ceiling replied to this suggestion by removing a boot and hurling it at the prophet's head. In so doing, he obtained a view of the solemn countenance and black hat of the doctor.

The strained and tragic expression of our gymnast's visage immediately gave place to one of nervous greeting.

"Evenin', Doctor!" he said.

"Evening!" replied the doctor. "Come off that hook."

"Whaffor?" demanded the man.

"Because I tell you to. Come off, quick."

The man began to whimper. "I can't," he said. "The rope's broke. 'Ow can I?"

"Jump."

"Jump?" echoed the man.

"Yes," said the doctor, "jump. I'll catch you. Jump!"

The man jumped.

We passed out amid a silence more than ever obvious. I remember one thing clearly. The door was held open for me by an effusive, smiling sailor-man—a sailor-man with a broken nose.

I walked out stiffly, with confidence, with pride. I walked in the shadow of

XXIX
ON EARNING SIXPENCE

Behold our doctor on crutches and having his foot in a sling; deprived also of all burgundies, by the heartless mandate of another doctor. Behold him also in controversy with his daughter.

"You are perfectly insane," said that lady. "Doctor Beaver said quite distinctly that if you so much as moved your leg for the next three days, he wouldn't be answerable for the consequences."

"Haven't I been saying for the last three years that Beaver is an ignorant old quack?" inquired the doctor.

"And now," pursued his daughter, "because a drunken old woman comes round and raves at you, smelling of gin like a—like a cistern, you calmly propose to crawl out and go all the way to Burbidge Street, because her daughter happens to object to the locum. I'm quite sure he's a very decent locum; quite the nicest we've ever had. He's engaged to a school-mistress, and he knitted that waistcoat himself."

"The locum is a blasted young pup," responded Doctor Brink.

"Heavens!" cried his daughter, "whatever is the matter with *this* locum?"

"He's giving 'em *real drugs*," said the doctor, with gloom.

"What if he is?" argued James; "I don't suppose it'll kill 'em."

"Still," mused the doctor, "when people aren't used to that sort of damfoolery—— I don't want my statistics mucked up. Besides, there's the expense. And——"

"Oh, blow the 'ands,'" replied his little daughter. "You've engaged the man, and you've got to keep him. And you've got to pay him. He's come here prepared to do a week's work, so for goodness sake let him do it. I'm sure he's willing enough, at any rate."

"Willing?" repeated the doctor; "my dear girl, he is the ultimate thing in eagerness. I——"

But the doctor's further observations on this head were interrupted by the entry of the subject of them—a young gentleman in correct dress, with fair hair and a face, who was introduced to me as Doctor Tewksbury.

"I am sorry to say, Doctor," remarked this young man, "that that old woman in Mulberry Buildings is dead."

"What!" cried Doctor Brink. "Poor old Mrs. Thacker? I'm sorry. She was a nice old thing."

"Yes," assented Doctor Tewksbury, "an interesting old hag—such marked symptoms. I wish I'd exhibited bromide."

"It wouldn't have made any difference," said Doctor Brink.

"Of course not," responded Doctor Tewksbury. "She was quite hopeless; but still bromide was clearly indicated. Hullo—foot hurting?"

"Not—not more than usual," answered Doctor Brink. "My back was tickling. That's all. Any news?"

"Nothin' particular," replied the locum, "exceptin' a woman in Burbidge Street. Mrs. Groat, I think the name is. Had a sort of row with her. It's the daughter's case really—a confinement; but when I got there the old cow came to the door and she wouldn't let me in. Said her daughter had engaged with you, and she didn't want no blasted schoolboys. She was rather offensive."

"After all," said Doctor Brink, rising clumsily to his feet and holding hard to all of us, "she *did* engage with me. It's a damnable nuisance; but I'll have to go round."

"Oh, rot," cried the locum. "Let the old fool rip."

"Wait till Beaver catches you, that's all," observed his daughter.

"You *are* a fool, Brink," said I.

"She's been round here twice already, while you were out, Tewksbury," continued Doctor Brink. "All the family's been here, in fact; they're much excited and very drunk. I expect they've been working on the patient, and unless we do something she'll get into a frenzy and croak. I shall have to go. Where's my damned hat?"

"Now look here, Fatty," expostulated James, "you simply aren't going to be *allowed* to go. You——"

"Old girl," said the doctor quietly, "subside. I'm going."

So saying, the doctor grasped my shoulder in a grip that was not all of friendship. "You come the other side," he said to James. "Tewksbury, you mind the shop. Now we're off. Steady, now. Slowly. That's good. Steady, now. Steady. Good again. Oh, Kreisler!"

It was an exciting journey across the sitting-room, and that down the stairway even more so. And when at last we gained the street, the bulk of the journey lay before us. We accomplished it somehow—it lasted less than a year, at any rate—and when we had at last arrived at the interesting residence of Mrs. Groat, and had deposited the doctor on its doorstep, the lady herself came out to greet us.

"'Ow," she said, "yuv come at last, ye bleedin' makeshift!"

We pushed him inside, and the door was closed behind him, and we walked about and waited. When, nearly an hour later, the remaining fragments of my rash friend were restored to us, Mrs. Groat came after them and made further speech.

"Ye spiteful old crow," she cried. "Ye didn't 'arf make 'er 'oller, did ye? I'll show ye spite. I'll pay ye out for bein' ser spiteful. Jes'you see. I'll pay ye out."

Which she did. For when, after making the homeward journey in such a fashion as to cause amazement and amusement to the whole neighbourhood, we did arrive at the doctor's own house, it was to find that a medicine bottle had found its billet on the consulting-room floor by way of the consulting-room window.

Tewksbury came down and helped us to carry the doctor up. And when we had flopped our burden on to a couch, and Tewksbury had leisure for reflection, he said—

"You will never convince me that this was all produced by burgundy."

XXX
DIALOGUE WITH A BRIDE

She was rather a juvenile sort of bride: so much so, in fact, that a civilised inquirer might have supposed the baby on her breast and the ring upon her finger to be mere playthings.

It was to be gathered, from her opening statement, that she was inured to the married state, and that it held no terror for her.

"If 'e comes it over me," she explained, "I gives 'im a shove in the marf."

She was an attractive child—rather freckled and very shrill; but having cheerful eyes.

"What you recommend me to do about Mine, Doctor? 'E's queer."

DOCTOR BRINK: How queer?

THE BRIDE: Queer in 'is 'ead. Won't talk to nobody. Won't eat. 'E's learnin isself to write short'and.

DOCTOR BRINK: But I think that's rather sensible.

THE BRIDE: More sensible if he was to bring 'ome some money. 'E's

a chair-packer's labourer. What's the good o' short'and to a chair-packer's labourer?

DOCTOR BRINK: Perhaps he has ambitions.

THE BRIDE (*gloomily*): Not 'im. 'E's got the sulks. If you go an' give it a big name like that, 'e'll never get better. I ain't even let 'im know I've come to you—'e's ser easy encouraged. What 'e wants is a dose o' your pale yaller—even my ole gran'ma can't drink that, and she's been takin' medsin since *so* 'igh. That's what 'e wants: a dose o' your pale yaller and a flip be'ind the ear.

DOCTOR BRINK: How old is your husband?

THE BRIDE: Old enough to do some work. 'E'll be eighteen in March.

DOCTOR BRINK: He's out of employment, then?

THE BRIDE (*stiffly*): Well, 'e ain't out of employment, on'y 'e don't go to work. There ain't no call for 'im to go, not unless 'e wants to. We're independent.

DOCTOR BRINK: Indeed?

THE WIFE: Yus. We've 'ad some luck, through the misfortune of losin' 'is father. There's a matter of two 'underd pound at the lawyer's, and more to come, they say.

DOCTOR BRINK: It's a pity he can't find some work to do. Two hundred pounds won't last for ever, you know.

THE WIFE: There ain't no call for 'im to look for work. When the money comes we're goin' inter business.

DOCTOR BRINK: Oh! What sort of business?

THE WIFE: The 'ardware, Doctor: joiners' bits and carpenters' tools, and knives and 'and-saws. It's bin a fancy of 'is'n since boy'ood up. That's the meaning of this short'and. 'E's educatin' 'isself for the position.

DOCTOR BRINK: Well, of course, an ironmonger isn't bound to know shorthand; but——

THE WIFE: Not ironmongery, Doctor—the 'ardware: fine edge tools and joiners' necessaries, and so forth.

DOCTOR BRINK: But why object to this shorthand? After all, it keeps him out of mischief.

THE WIFE: It ain't the short'and I object to. It's him. Forever at home: forever makin' his scratches. Forever lookin' sulky and cleanin' 'is nails. Never a word to say to me, nor so much as a look for the child. 'E was 'armless enough when I married 'im. Full of life 'e was in them days. Many's the 'idin' 'e's give me!

DOCTOR BRINK: Cheer up! He'll get lively again one of these days, and give you another hiding. Even shorthand ceases to amuse people after a time.

THE WIFE: Short'and don't amuse 'im. It on'y makes 'im stupid. 'E don't wanter learn it, not reely: 'is 'ead ain't good enough for learnin'. 'E likes to

make me wild, that's all. As for hidin's, it's *'im* what gets the 'iding now: I don't believe in a girl takin' any o' that when you're married. Walkin' out it's different. Besides, I earned it then. I was a devil arter the boys in them days.

DOCTOR BRINK: Oh, well: you were only a young thing then, of course.... About this husband of yours; what is it you want me to do? I can't cure shorthand, you know.

THE WIFE: Well, Doctor, I don't see's there's anything you *can* do, reely. Only, I wish 'e'd go back to the chair-packin'. 'Ome ain't 'ome with your man always in it. And 'e's ser sulky and ser pertickler. 'E says we gotter go to church now that we've retired from work. We're goin' ter have our shop front painted red.

DOCTOR BRINK: I always look upon red as one of our leading colours. As you say, there is really nothing which I can do. Anyhow, we've had a useful little chat.

THE WIFE: I like a little chat. It's a thing I don't seem to get very orfen, nowadays. Me and my mother, we don't know each other. She says we killed 'is father. She says I don't manage my baby.

DOCTOR BRINK: I shouldn't argue with him. He'll get used to this money in time, and then he'll be as noisy as ever again.

THE WIFE: Argue with 'im? Me? I don't argue with 'im. When I got anythink to say to 'im, 'e gets it aside o' the 'ead. I don't care, even if we 'ave retired from work. I go on the same now as what I did before; and so I shall when we've started the 'ardware. Sometimes I wish this misfortune to 'is father 'ad never 'appened. I liked 'im better in the chair-packin' days. I didn't see ser much of 'im. 'E wasn't ser pertickler. 'E took a pleasure in his tea them days. Sometimes he useder catch 'old of the kid.... And sometimes he useder lark about with me.... I liked the look of 'im them days. Sometimes, I wish we wasn't rich.

XXXI
AN INTERLUDE

One result of my acquaintanceship with Doctor Brink is not entirely pleasant. I have developed a sort of interest in poor people.

I am always lighting, in odd corners, upon what I call "Brink cases." Such

experiences pursue me even into respectable places. I bumped into one, lately, within a stone's throw of the Houses of Parliament, to which place I was bound at midnight.

The clouds were showing heavy and black upon a moonlit sky as I turned on to the Thames Embankment by Hungerford Bridge, so that I shivered extensively. These September nights, at best, do not add much to the pleasures of a promenade. But this night was especially unconducive to philosophic loitering. There was wind, and that constant, dull foreshadowing of rain which is worse than a deluge. There were those hurrying, hump-backed clouds, and their indefinite reflection upon the greasy surface of the Thames. And the clock struck twelve, and a policeman by my elbow spat and swore. And some vessel far up stream gave harrowing expression to its feelings by means of that dismal instrument which is humorously called a syren. Like the mysterious stranger in the story books, I drew my travelling cloak around me, and shuddered at the windy vastness of it all.

And then I fell to smiling. For away yonder, in the mirk, figures were moving and bobbing, and, by all the saints that care for vagrants, it seemed to me that their movements suggested mirth.

"These must be weird people," thought I to myself, as I went towards them, "who can find anything to laugh at in this place?" As I drew close up to them their figures stood out more clearly against the great wall of the Embankment; and I saw that the prime cause of this apparent joyfulness was a girl—a girl who was very young, and rather graceful.

She wore an old straw hat and a heavy shawl, after the manner of her kind, and one end of the shawl was much longer than the other, and was caught up into a bundle beneath her arm. So that I guessed her to be carrying a baby.

One of her companions was a middle-aged man of round and rather stupid build. As I came up he was moving slowly from one foot to the other, and wagging his head. He wore a ragged overcoat, which was buttoned to his ears, and he was waving an arm about in a manner which appeared to be admonitory.

The group was completed by a second man, younger than the other, and taller. He was holding a hand to his face, which the girl had evidently buffeted. The young fellow was saying something which I could not catch in a plaintive voice, and the girl—jocund creature—was leaning against the wall, swaying and shaking with silent laughter.

That mournful syren still jarred upon one's ears, and set a cog-wheel running up one's backbone; the dark clouds jostled each other as before, and were reflected in the oily sludge beneath them; the wind blew from every quarter at once, and the fallen leaves that lay upon the footway rustled in it like a shroud. And this girl leaned up against a pillar and shook herself with laughter.

Then I went closer still and perceived my folly. The girl was not laughing at all. That which I had supposed to be mirth was really its opposite. The girl was *crying*—crying silently and effectively, and without ostentation. When feminine lamentations are conducted with this sort of restraint there is usually a reason for them.

The stupid man spoke to the girl. "Why don't you take 'eed to what 'Erb says?" he demanded. "Why dontchew go 'ome? There's sense in what 'Erb says."

And then the young man spoke, saying, "That's right, ole Emma. Come along 'ome, ole Emma."

The girl crept closer to the wall, flattened herself against it, as if she sought protection there. "I—I wown't gow 'owm," she said, between the sobs. "I wown't move from 'ere, I wown't, till it's nine o'clock. The gentleman said, 'Come back at nine o'clock.' 'Come back at nine o'clock,' he said. You 'eard what 'e said, 'Erb. I wown't move from 'ere, I wown't."

'Erb went closer to her. They were all so occupied with this discussion that I am sure my presence was not observed. It was as though I wore some mantle of invisibility. I could have danced a hornpipe, I believe, without attracting notice.... "What's the good of talkin' like that?" said 'Erb to the girl. "Come along 'ome, Emma."

"I wown't move a *step* from 'ere, I wown't," responded Emma. "You 'ear what I say? I wown't move, I tell you. The gentleman said, 'Come back at nine o'clock,' an' at nine o'clock I'm goin' back—to see my baby.

"... If you *was* a man you'd take me over *now*"—she pointed, vaguely, in the direction of Charing Cross Hospital—"you'd take me back and fight 'em, you would, till they let us in. What they want to turn us out till mornin' for?

"I wanter see my baby, I do. My baby'll die afore it's morning.

"'Come back at nine,' the gentleman said; and all its pore arm turned stiff, an' white, an' swollen. What you wanter move that lamp for, you fool? Why did you open the door? Did you 'ear 'im 'oller? Oh, Christ! did you 'ear 'im 'oller? We'll lose 'im, 'Erb: my Gawd! we'll lose 'im. Did you 'ear what the gentleman said? 'Come back at nine to-morrow mornin',' 'e said. What'd 'e want to turn us out for, the swine? What you want to go 'owm for? My baby's *there*, you ape: over there, with the nurse an' the gentleman. Think I'd go 'owm wiv the likes o' *you* an' leave 'im? What you wanter move that lamp for? Did you see it runnin' all over 'im, an' 'im 'ollerin', an' cuttin' 'is feet in the glass of the chimbly?

"Did you—did you? Go away, I tell you. I wown't move, I tell you. The gentleman said, 'Come back at nine.' What you wanter worry me for? What you wanter stop for? I want my baby—I—I—you makeshift, you, I *'ate* you."

And the young man twisted his cap between his fingers, and drew a little closer to her, and said, "Come along 'ome."

"Yus, go along 'ome," supplemented the stupid man. "You can't stop out 'ere all night. And what's the good o' worryin'? People's got to pay for bein' married an' that in *this* world. It might be worse, you know, young Emma——"

"Ah!" interpolated the younger man. "It might be worse, you know, ole Emma!"

"What is it, after all," pursued his stout companion, "what is it, after all, to bury a baby? I remember well when we was nailin' up our Number Three——"

The stout man's reminiscences ended suddenly. It was the fist of the younger man which ended them. "Chew that, ye one-eyed wind-bag," observed its owner.

Then, drawing Emma gently from the wall, he placed his arm about her, and whispered something in a voice which aspired clumsily to be hopeful. Now that the girl was facing me, I could see that she did not carry a child, as I had at first supposed. It was merely an end of shawl which she carried—a rude sort of nest or pocket, pressed close to her bosom, as if in waiting for some tender burden.

"Come along 'ome, ole girl," the young man urged. "What's the use o' dawdlin'?"

"Go away!" replied the woman. "Leave a girl in peace, can't you? I'm waitin' for my baby. I'm waitin' for nine o'clock, like the gentleman said.... I wonder if 'e's sleepin'? I wonder if they've 'urt 'im? ... I wonder if he's dead?"

"Ain't you comin' 'ome?" pleaded the man.

"Ain't you goin' away?" the woman answered. "What's the good o' pesterin'? Can't you 'ear what I tell you? Do you wanter send me mad—fussin' an' pesterin'?

"There's a clock; one, now, an' the gentleman said nine."

"That was 'arpas' twelve struck then," observed the stout man.

"And the gentleman said nine," sighed the girl.

"Think e'll 'ave 'is mind back be the mornin', 'Erb? 'E never knowed nothin' when we left; never knowed nothin' when I carried 'im out from 'ome. Did you see 'ow fast 'is teeth was? Did—— The gentleman said, 'Don't worry.' Must be a fool. What did you wanter move the lamp for?"

"Table was so full, an' the cloth was draggin'. Anyone might 'a' stepped on it. I never meant no 'arm, ole Emma."

"Bin all right if the door was shut. Might be nursin' 'im now, 'Erb, in yere overcoat, 'stead of 'im—— Did you see ow drored out 'is fingers was when the gentleman come to look? 'Ow long before nine? Think they'd let us in before? It's all through that door bein' open. That curtain it—— Gawd's Truth, 'Erb, it was the *noo* curtain what I put up yesterday. It was *my* curtain. *I* done it, I killed my baby."

"'*E* ain't killed," asserted the fat man. "Be as right as I am in a twel'month."

"I put up that curtain to show off; that's all I put it up for. And it blew on to the lamp, an' it—it—Gawd blind me, I've killed my baby."

"That's a lie!" shouted the man. "Didn't I leave the door open? Didn't I shove the dam thing right under the curtain? Begod, I did. Don't tell lies to yeself, ole Emma. It was me as done it. It was me as burnt that little beggar's arm. Wish to Gawd I'd burnt me eyes out first."

"Go' bless my soul," observed the stupid man, "what *is* the use of quarrellin' over trifles? Whatever does it matter whether the lamp moved the curtain or the curtain moved the lamp? Thing's done, ain't it? Boy's arm's all charred up. Why argue? Take an' get a good night's sleep. Ain't we all 'ad trouble? When my first went down——"

"I 'it 'im to-day," said the woman. "For eatin' coal, it was."

The man drew her hand into his, which was not more rough and shapeless. "'E thought the world o' you, ole Emma," he observed.

"'Ow long to nine o'clock, 'Erb? 'Ow long afore they'll let us see 'im? The gentleman said, 'Don't worry.' ... We was mad to leave 'is cradle there."

"It's all so full in the room," replied 'Erb. "I was gointer move next quarter. Allus next quarter, Gawd strike me! If we'd took that room we was lookin' at Easter time, there was gas there an'—an'——"

"I *wanted* to 'ave it," whined the woman.

"When," pursued her husband, "when I was puttin' them rockers on the sugar-box, I *did* say as we'd 'ave a 'ooded top, to finish it. But I changed me mind. Devil take me! I changed me mind."

"It'd 'a' saved 'im, that would," observed the woman. "We'd 'a' found 'im sittin' up an' laughin' at the fireworks.... Remember that day when the water come in?"

"R!" answered the man. "Rare tickled 'e was. Remembers it to this day. I'll lay any money 'e was tryin' to tell me about it when we was in the park o' Sunday. 'E——"

"Oh, Christ! my baby," cried the woman; and she lay sobbing in his arms.

He led her to a seat, and she cried silently upon his shoulder for a long, long while. When she next spoke it was to wonder about the time. "Is it *very* long to nine o'clock?" she inquired. And the man said, "Not so very. You lie still, ole Emma: you're all right; you lie still."

Then Emma remembered that by moving the tin trunk which stood by the wash-stand to an empty niche beneath the table, a place of security might have been provided for that sugar-box. And they discussed all the other might-have-beens: and his beauty, and cheerfulness, and the surprising precocity of his speech. She trembled, and sobbed and sobbed, and her husband swore. They

talked about all the other might-have-beens again; and the stupid man faced them, scratching his head, and saying:

"What *is* the use of all this argument?"

After which the constabulary arrived, and flashed lamps upon them; and they rose heavily, and moved away.

But I found them, presently, upon another seat. Emma's blue-white face was upon her husband's shoulder, and her lips were tightly clenched as she spoke to him. "'Ow long we got to wait till nine o'clock?" she asked.

"Not so long," replied the man.... "You lie still, ole Emma."

She sighed, very slowly. And I noticed that a hummock of shawl was caught up close beneath her arm.

XXXII
LOW FINANCE

He was a self-complacent, ox-voiced man, and being clothed on with his Sunday blacks, he looked objectionable. He surged into Dr. Brink's consulting-room all frothy and foamy with fellowship. "Evenin', Doc.," he gurgled. '"Ow's yeself?"

"Let me see your tongue?" said the doctor, who was tired and absent-minded. This was the ninety-seventh tongue which he had clamoured for that day: a fact which perhaps accounted for the absence from his manner of that sympathetic and anecdotal touch which distinguishes those learned men who follow the reputable or credit branch of his profession.

"It ain't about meself I've come, ole man," explained the visitor. "Least-ways," he added, with an air as of scrupulous exactitude, "it ain't about me present self. I come to thank you for all your goodness to me during my accident."

The doctor responded with a wondering stare.

"I come to thank you for all your goodness to me, Doc.," repeated the man. "And," he added, as one giving utterance to a careless afterthought, "to see about my little bill."

"When did I attend you?" demanded the doctor.

"When did you attend me?" repeated the patient reproachfully. "Why, you attended me twice. I am that serious driving accident what you was called in to look at four weeks ago. And I bin round to see you once since then."

"Serious driving accident," mused the doctor. Then—with an acid smile—"I think I remember now. The accident suddenly showed itself in your shoulder, didn't it, five days after the occurrence? And I couldn't find the place, could I? Not even a bruise."

"It was very painful, Doctor," explained the invalid; "one of them inward bruises. They do say as that's the worst sort o' damage as kin 'appen to a man, getting a inward bruise, same's what I did. I bin layed up fower weeks 'long o' that accident."

"And it took five days to mature. Ever heard of a disease called 'afterthought'?"

"Can't say rightly as I 'ave," admitted the sufferer.

"It is a curious sort of complaint," the doctor explained; "attacks a man very often in cases like this. Quite small things aggravate it, too; talkative friends, for example."

"Will you make the bill out, Doctor?" requested the victim of this strange ailment.

"No need for a bill, is there?" said the doctor. "I can tell you what you owe me out of hand. One visit to your house, one consultation here: total, eighteenpence."

"I'd prefer a proper invoice, Doctor," admitted the maimed one. "And look 'ere, ole man, make it out fur a sovereign, will ye? I ... I want to show it to my firm."

"With pleasure," said the doctor. "Have you brought the sovereign with you?"

"Eh?" snapped the man.

"I asked if you had brought the sovereign," repeated the doctor. "If your firm is prepared to pay me a sovereign for my services to you, I shall, of course, be delighted to make out a bill for that amount."

"But you on'y seed me twice," protested the visitor.

"That is what I wish to point out. My proper fees amount to eighteen pence. But if you want to pay me a p——"

"I *don't* wanter to pay you a pound," bellowed the petitioner angrily. "Nothing so ridiculous."

"In that case," responded the doctor, "let us say no more about the bill."

"Do you call yeself a genelman?" demanded this martyred soul, with a choke in his voice. "Do you call yeself a genelman to stop a pore drayman from earnin' his honest compensation? 'Ow'm I goin' on for compensation?"

"Compensation for what?" inquired the doctor.

"Fur me accident," replied the man. "I bin laid up fower weeks."

"One day of which," the doctor pointed out, "you spent in bed. Did they

stop your wages?"

"Well, no," admitted the martyr. "They paid me me wages all right. But I ain't drored nothink fur me accident."

"You drew a very comfortable holiday, at any rate," suggested the doctor. "A four weeks' rest cure on full wages. And that shoulder, you know, it was not what one could call a permanent injury: it hardly amounted to disablement. Do you think so?"

"Words," stated the sufferer, "cannot describe the agonies what I bin through."

"You surprise me," murmured Dr. Brink. "Anyhow, you've been strong enough to do a lot of standing about outside the 'African Chief.'"

"What if I 'ave?" submitted the injured man. "Ain't I still entitled to compensation fur my accident?"

"It seems to me you've had it," argued the doctor.

"That I ain't," asserted the indignant claimant; "not a blighted 'a'penny."

"Four weeks' rest, full pay," recited the doctor, with an air of monotony.

"Wiv me shoulder-blade all to Bucklesbury," added the claimant. "And not a brazen farthing fur me accident. I 'ad the corpuscular accident all right, I suppose? Ye don't deny it, do ye?"

"By no means," exclaimed the doctor. "Didn't I myself attend you for a unique complaint in the shoulder-blade?"

"Very well, then," pursued the invalid, somewhat mollified by this admission. "In that case I demand my rights. I demand the rights of a honest workin' man. I ask for compensation for my accident, same's what I'm entitled to accordin' to lor. Will you write out that invoice fur me?"

"Certainly: for the exact amount which you may care to pay me."

"Do you call yeself a man?" demanded the visitor, with heightened colour. "What the scarlet letter do ye reckon I engaged ye for? Think I wanted ye for the sake of yere filthy physic? Ain't ye got no 'eart? Make out the invoice like a fair-minded man. Never tell me as you'd 'ave the 'eart to rob a pore man of 'is money.... They've refused to give me compensation fur my accident, and now 'ere's you—a genelman born, as oughta be above sich actions—you're gointer rob a pore man of 'is doctor's bill.... Besides, I *tole* 'em that I owed a sovereign to the doctor, and they tells me to produce the invoice.... What am I to tell my firm?"

"Tell them what you like," replied the doctor. "I certainly shall give you no receipt for money which I haven't had."

"Then 'ow do I go on?" queried the visitor.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

'"Ow'm I goin' on fur compensation—fur my accident?"

The doctor repeated his shrug. "It seems to me," he said, "that your firm

has treated you well. You don't know much, you know."

"I may be a fool," admitted the afflicted one, "but I know my rights. I oughter be paid some compensation fur me accident.... You won't do nothing to 'elp me, then?"

"I can't," replied the doctor. "What you want is a new head."

"Do I?" retorted the caller, flourishing his wounded arm. "That's the very thing as *you'll* be needin', ole sport, if ever I meets you outside. Call yeself a man? *I* call you a swindlin' 'pothecary. I tell you one thing, Mister Whatsitname. Whenever I 'as another haccident, I takes it to the bloomin' 'orspital. I do know *that* much. See?"

XXXIII
THE MOTHERS' MEETING

The morning callers at Dr. Brink's dispensary are all of them women or little children. You may suppose that the waiting-room wears then a strange and wistful air, for the men being absent, with their hoarse, funereal pleasantries, and the shuffling young boys being absent too, and the girls likewise, having carried their titters and squeaks to the factory, there is not much to amuse folk in the waiting-room.

You cannot expect a married woman to be very cheerful at the best of times, and when there is the place to tidy and the rent man expected, and the children will soon be coming home for their slabs and what not, and you have slipped out just for half a tick to get that dizzy feeling seen to, it is more than usually dull to be sat in a row with twenty other females, similarly cursed—some of them having babies at their breasts or little squalling things what hold fast to their skirts, and the place that stuffy and all, and a stink of iodine coming out of the doctor's room. Taking one consideration with another, it is not to be wondered at that the morning patients do not wear that air of curiosity and pleasure which a visit to the doctor should properly occasion.

The morning patients have an absent-minded look—a dull, foreboding look, as of people who are too busy really to enjoy themselves. Some of them, also, are accompanied by their button-holes or other objects of light and profitable home employment, at which they work with assiduity whilst waiting for the doctor's call. Others, upon the other hand, bring peppermint drops. One lady has brought

some literature—the outward wrapper of an ancient issue of a paper called *The Pilot.* So there they loll, all silent, many of them yawning—out of rudeness, or boredom, or fatigue, or something, one supposes.

If you sit upon the gas-stove, you can watch them all as they come into the consulting-room. You can watch, for instance, the experienced matron, who enters with the baby that *won't* get well, and dumps it down, in a business-like manner, upon the doctor's table.

"There you are," she says in the manner of one who has successfully completed a conjuring trick, "look at that tongue. Did *ever* you see sich a thrush?"

"M'yes!" admits the doctor. "It's pretty bad. I'll give you a powder and some syrup."

"Powder? Syrup?" echoes the matron. "H'm! Pity you can't give 'im a corfin. That's the on'y treatment what'll give any peace to *this* pore little swine. What mercy, *I* say, is there in letting a thing like this live on? Look at it."

When, to your great relief, the experienced matron goes away, you will be very lucky if you do not wish her back again, for it is ten to one that she will be followed by an apprentice to the trade, a poor wild thing whose senseless, shiftless, screaming mother-agony will hurt you ever so much more than the grim philosophy of the veteran.

"It seems to grip 'im, Doctor," the apprentice will say, "and throw 'im down, pore lamb, an' wrestle with 'im, Doctor, same's there was a fish-bone in 'is little throat, and 'im so weak, 'e don't have strength enough to 'oller, and 'im so blue and mottled, Doctor, and strangled-looking in the face, and the powder, that ain't doin' 'im no good. The Irishwoman down below, she dreamt she seed 'im in a shroud, and, Doctor, I see meself as 'e gets thinner, and I believe me milk 'as got some poison in it, along of some oysters what I eat one Sunday, and so I see 'im gettin' thinner, Doctor, and there's the strangled look a-comin' *now*! Won't you give 'im somethink, Doctor? What did you say I was to take 'im to the breast for? I tell you my milk 'as got the microbes in it. Oh, Christ! what can a woman *do*? And Mine he comes 'ome late and stands and swears at me wiv no more feelin' than a 'og. Me gran'father Murphy's eyes 'e's got. There, then, sonny; there, then. What'll you do for 'im, Doctor? I seed a black cat on our winder-sill last night. My Gawd!—see 'ow it grips 'im!"

By the time you feel disposed to come back to the gas-stove again it will be seen that the apprentice mother has given place to a grandmamma, who has looked in, as a friend, to mention that much gossip is arising in consequence of the extreme youth of Dr. Brink's apothecary.

Far be it from her—Elizabeth Tebbings—to be one as would carry idle tales or utter idle plaint, but the fact remained and could be very solemnly attested by many honest witnesses from Mulberry Buildings that the medicine which she,

Elizabeth Tebbings, had last Tuesday week received from the apothecary possessed a strange, unusual, and forbidding flavour—a nasty-nice sort of flavour which gave you shivers down your back.

"Far be it from me," protested Mrs. Tebbings, "to cast no slur, especially when the parints of the party has been friends and neighbours along with anybody—good neighbours, too—'is father especially being the 'andsomest man in the Customs service—but the truth is the truth even though a young man's parints *is* beknown to you, and to tell you the truth of *this* affair, Doctor, young Wilfered Crage 'e *is* young—a mere boy, Doctor, if you understand my meanin'. And, unwilling as I am, 'avin' come to a motherly time of life, for to kerry tales, still I must say—speaking friendly, mind you, Doctor—that the medicine *did* taste ugly. Me brother Joseph tells me there was stricknyne in it."

The doctor, having closely examined the water-tap in Wilfered's official laboratory, is heard to assure Mrs. Tebbings that her fears of strychnine poisoning are groundless, and that lady goes out with her confidence partially restored. "At the same time," she insists from the threshold, "the boy *is* young. And you got to remember that some of your patients *'ave* died sudden, Doctor. Look at that girl wiv 'earts disease what lived in our basement!"

The next woman to enter has come to "engage." "I expect about the first week in September," she says. "An' if you please I'd like to pay a couple o' shillin' orf me ticket now. An', if you please, Doctor, will you give me the ticket with the two shillin' wrote orf? On'y will you give me another ticket, too, without nothink wrote orf? I want one so's I kin show it to me 'usband, see, Doctor? 'Cause if 'e see as I bin able to pay orf any, 'e'll say as I kin pay the lot orf, and I want to git a little 'elp from 'im, Doctor, so's to 'elp me over it all."

This mild and unreproachful statement will probably provide you with a subject of thought. But your attention is diverted from that theme by the sudden appearance of one more mother—a hearty, stalwart, red-faced mother, with an ample bosom.

This mother produces from behind the door a hearty, stalwart, red-faced boy. "'Is teef is rotten, Doctor," she explains. "I brought 'im round to 'ave 'em out. There's three wants coming out. They're all the same side. See 'em?"

"I see them," replies the doctor. "But three teeth at—er—one sitting! Isn't that *rather* a tall order? Don't you think, perhaps, now, that we'd better take out only two to-day and leave the other one for treatment later on?"

The mother grins extensively, shaking her jolly head.

"Never mind, Doctor," she says, "let's 'ave 'em all out. It's on'y eighteen-

pence."

XXXIV
THE WOES OF WILFERED

Wilfered, the 'Pothecary, hath a sorrow, or rather two sorrows, if not more than that.

Some of these sorrows have reference to his master's interests; and it was in the capacity of Doctor Brink's familiar friend that I was privileged to learn some details of Wilfered's private and professional afflictions.

We were in the dispensary, Wilfered having just explained that there were limits to the things which even he could stand; that the affections of a man and a 'Pothecary could be toyed with once too often, when a little maid came in. She was quite a little maid—some four to five spans high—the top of her dishevelled head being scarcely on a level with the ledge of Wilfered's peep-hole—that mysterious recess through which he views and governs the multitude within the doctor's waiting-room. The little maiden, having rapped authoritatively upon the wainscoting, held up an arm with a penny at the end of it, and a face enamelled over with soot and treacle. Said this client, speaking quickly—

"Penny powder for a baby six months owld."

Wilfered's expression of general discontent changed to one of immediate and particular disgust. "What do you say?" he demanded of the client.

"Please," murmured that lady, with the air of one triumphantly conscious of that which was expected of her.

Wilfered solemnly shook his head. "Never mind about yere manners," said Wilfered. "What d'ye want?"

"Penny powder for a baby six months owld," repeated the child.

Wilfered turned from the client to me, a look as of despair upon his face.

"This is the sorter thing you gotter contend against," he complained.

Then addressing himself once more to the child, he uttered a sort of formula which he keeps for these emergencies—

"We don't sell powders yere. If you wanter powder, go to the chimmis."

The infant looked at him hopelessly. "Mover told me to come yere," she said.

"Under the circumstances," responded Wilfered, uttering another formula, "we will let you 'ave the powder. We won't sell it. We'll *give* it you. Nex' time, go to the chimmis."

"That's the sorter thing you gotter contend against," said Wilfered again, as the client departed.

He was about to repeat this observation for the third time, when his thoughts were distracted by the entry of another juvenile client—an older and taller girl than the last, though hardly a cleaner one.

"Penny soothin' powder for a baby eight months owld," demanded the newcomer. She was the possessor of a wide, immovable smile.

Wilfered bestowed another of his speaking glances upon your servant. And to the client he repeated his formula: "We don't sell powders yere, my gal. If you wanter powder, go to the chimmis."

The lady listened to this statement with an attentive air. Then she spoke again, saying, "Penny soothin' powder for a baby eight months owld."

"We don't sell powders, I tell you," responded Wilfered.

"No," said the girl, "but you give 'em."

Wilfered extended his head a further inch through the peep-hole. His nose and that of the client almost touched each other.

"This is a noo game, ain't it?" demanded Wilfered.

"What next? 'Cause we 'appen to give you a powder once, out of our generosity, seem to think you on'y got to come in yere to get one on the nod atenny minnit. Go to the chimmis."

"Ma towld me to come yere," protested the client.

"Then," said Wilfered, "you go 'ome an' tell yere Ma as I refuse to serve ye. Seem to take us for a 'firmary. We don't sell powders, nor we don't give 'em—except first time to a reg'lar customer what does not know our rules. And if we was to sell powders, it wouldn't be for a penny, me gel.

"These powders," continued the loyal but shameless 'Pothecary, "are made up outer the very best drugs. They cost *us* frippence. You go 'ome an' tell yere mother *that*."

The lady went home, to be followed, in the course of nature—this being, as it were, "the children's hour"—by another lady, younger and smaller than any of her predecessors, demanding "A penny powder for——"

"'Oose baby?" demanded Wilfered.

"Baby four months old," replied the messenger.

"'*Oose* baby?" repeated Wilfered.

"My baby," said the child.

"You bin 'ere afore about your baby?" inquired the 'Pothecary.

"No," said the messenger.

"Oh," mused Wilfered. "What name?"

"'Ilder," said the messenger.

"Mother's name, I mean," explained Wilfered.

"Mrs. Bates, Mulberry Street," said Mrs. Bates's emissary.

And Wilfered repeated his formula: "Tell yere mother as we'll *give* 'er the powder this once, but nex' time you must send to the chimmis. We don't sell powders yere."

Mrs. Bates's daughter, having received her powder, and being as yet without a proper understanding, deposited the penny with which she had been entrusted upon the ledge of Wilfered's peep-hole, and bolted from the waiting-room.

Wilfered gazed upon this coin with an air of indecision. Finally, he picked it up (between a finger and thumb) and flung it into the till. His actions said plainer than words that he possessed a professional sentiment which was outraged at the thought of accepting this tainted money.

And then—for events move quickly in Bovingdon Street—who should come bouncing in again but the big girl whom he had previously dismissed—she of the immovable smile.

"Penny soothin' powder for a baby eight months owld," said the big girl.

Wilfered was at first unable to speak; but when he did so, it was with point and emphasis.

"I suppose," he said, with scorn, at the end of his address, "as you kin understand plain English? We *down't sell powders.* And if we did, we couldn't sell 'em for a penny. These powders cost *us* frippence. Did ye tell yere mother that?"

"Yus," responded the girl, "but mother says she can't 'elp *your* troubles."

Wilfered held on to the pill-tub and looked wildly about him. Then, with a deep-drawn sigh, he held out a powder and took the penny.

"What is the use o' arguin?" he demanded of your servant. "Look what you got to contend against."

XXXV
STILL MORE OF PRUDENCE

Baffin came bouncing in one morning and bounced me off the gas-stove.

His hair was ruffled and his face was flushed and his eyes were flashing sparks.

"My God!" he cried. "I—I've made a weird, a wild, a terrible discovery. Good God, who would have thought it! That child, mind you, that imbecile. 'God, sir, if this were a humane and Christian country, I should be allowed to call the damned beast out and carve patterns on him."

"You are referring to——"

"Prudence—Prudence," responded Baffin, with agitation. "She HAS TOLD ME ALL. Come in and see her."

Prudence had flung herself down upon a grimy sugar-box, and lay there, still and bruised and broken. There was an awful quiet in the room.

Baffin resumed his remarks in reference to the subject of damned beasts. I hushed him with a grave, paternal glance.

"Think of poor Prudence," I said.

Prudence rose slowly to her feet. She thrust back the hair from before her eyes.

"Oh, my Gawd! Mr. Baffin," she said, "you do gow in for the funniest talk ever! 'Ere—I say, when I was down there, do you know what I see? I see as there is a crack in that sugar-box; I do believe that's where I dropped that picture powstcard what I lorst 'ere last sittin'.

"Oo-er, it will be all right if we can find it there, wown't it, now? I 'ave missed that card, I can't tell you! 'Cos my mother give me that card, an' I love everythink what my mother gives me. You dunnow *what* a good mother I got, Mr. Baffin. She's working 'ard all day to bring me up proper, she is, an' the place on 'er arm is *ever* so bad still. If on'y I could learn to sit still, I could earn a lot of menny to give to my mother, couldn't I, Mr. Baffin? 'Cos you said so, didn't you, Mr. Baffin?

"See if I don't learn to sit still; people that try can always succeed, can't they? My mother often tells me that. Be a dear, an' move the box, Mr. Baffin."

We moved the box, but the card was not there; and Prudence succumbed to a fresh outbreak of tears, and had to be comforted with condensed milk, which she relished in spoonfuls direct from the tin. We rescued this stimulant from Prudence in time to avert the tragedy of an overdose; and then she departed. "I got a friend waitin' for me," she said, "an' my mother said I was to be 'ome early. An' this is my mother's ironin' night.... 'Ere, Mr. Baffin—was you laughin' at me when I come over funny on the box there? 'Cos I won't sit for anybody what laughs at me. I'll go out charrin', an' spoil me 'ands, that's what I'll do. Don't you think I could learn to do charrin' if I wanted to? I can learn a lot if I try."

"Don't spoil your hands," said Baffin; "they are beautiful hands."

Baffin did not flatter her. Prudence's hands were as the hands of a lute-

player—slender and white and sensitive, flowing from wrists which carried themselves subtly, like a fair swan's neck. Such hands, I believe, may be produced by the simple process of being folded gracefully for ten generations. We often wondered, Baffin and I, whence Prudence derived those hands. That much-talked-of lady, Prudence's mother, had never been presented to us; but—frail hands and a frail spirit! Which of these was the mother's gift?

"Hee! hee!" giggled Prudence, as she spread the little hands before her, "yew ain't 'arf a tease, are yew, Mr. Baffin? ... Funny 'ands fur charrin', ain't they, though? ... May I flap your letter-box as I go out? It don't 'arf rattle. Oo, I *em* a silly girl, *I* em! 'Ere, I say—when I come to sit agen, shall I bring my mouth-organ, and show you 'ow I'm learnin' meself to play 'The Bluebells of Scotland'? An' you'll look for my picture card, wown't you, 'cos my mother give it to me? And please let me sit agen soon. Oy revoy."

When it became quite clear, from the silence of the letter-box flap, that Prudence had wholly departed, Baffin sat himself wearily down and groaned.

"What the deuce ought one to do?" he demanded, with great earnestness.

"This being your affair," I answered, "you will have to think out that little problem for yourself. The circumstance of your living in a Christian country will not ... prove helpful."

"Don't tell Brink," said Baffin. "He'll want to poison her."

* * * * *

Seven days later Prudence came bursting in Baffin's studio on a mission of protest.

"'Ere, Mr. Baffin," she exclaimed, "what about this spyin'? I down't like it at all, I down't, and my mother down't like it; an' will you arst your friend, Mrs. Vesey, to mind 'er own business? Seems to take a lot of interest in me an' my business, she does, an' I down't like it, an' my mother down't like it, 'cos it is no business of 'ers to bother about my business, an' I believe she's got a lotter funny ideas in 'er 'ead, an' I down't know what she means, an' I down't like 'er.

"What's she wanter come to our 'ouse for at all? She comes round in 'er carriage, she does. Oo, you oughter see the funny cross-eyed coachman what she's got! Oo, and she don't 'arf wear no rings, neether. An' my mother says you sent 'er, cause she tole my mother so, and what does she wanter come fussin' round *our* place for—settin' the neighbours talkin'? An', 'ere, I say, Mr. Baffin, she's gointer take me to the London 'Ippodrome."

"You leave it to Mrs. Vesey," said Baffin subsequently. "*We* can't manage Prudence, but Mrs. Vesey can. *She'll* fix up Prudence. Consulted her lawyer yesterday.... Oh, they'll settle that nobleman all right."

Not long after this conversation Prudence's visits to the studio were temporarily suspended. Prudence was out of town. Mr. Baffin would explain to inquiring spirits that she had taken it in her head to go on tour as a chorus girl. "A cheap sort of holiday, don't you know!"

In due course Prudence returned to town.

Her first professional visit was paid to Baffin, and it pained me to notice that her very first observation caused that gentleman to blush. "I 'ave got some queer friends, I ave. What you think some saucy 'ound 'as done *now*? Sent along a *cradle* to my 'ouse! Do you know 'oo it was, Mr. Baffin? I bin away, you know—nursin' my sick uncle at Ramsgate, you know—an' it come while I was down there. I on'y got back from Yarmouth yesterday, an' the first thing I see was this joke. Silly joke, wasn't it, Mr. Baffin? 'Cos Mrs. Vesey was at *our* 'ouse.

"An', 'ere, I say, Mr. Baffin, my gran'pa died when I was nursin' him at Margate, an' there's some money comin' to me, on'y it's goin' to be took care of for me, so's I can dror a little every week. An' my mother's makin' me a noo 'at.

"'Ere, an' I can't sit for you be the day any more, Mr. Baffin, 'cos my mother's lonely, an'—an'—I don't like to leave my mother be 'erself all day. I got to go home to my—my mother now; an' I can come at eleven in the mornin', and go away to dinner, an' come back in the afternoon and stay till teatime—see? On'y I can't stop later than teatime, an' I can't stop all day, 'cos I don't like leavin' my mother, an' I got to go back an'—an' 'ave a look at 'er, like—see? Oo-*er*, I *am* late, Mr. Baffin: I ought to 'ave been back to my mother 'arf a hour ago. Oh, do let me go, Mr. Baffin! My—my mother might get very ill if I didn't get back to her punctual."

"Lying little fathead!" observed Mr. Baffin later.

Prudence's faith in our simplicity remained unshaken. "Time you went home to your mother now," Baffin would assert at fitting intervals. And Prudence would answer, "Oo-er, yes; my mother 'll be waitin' for me. I mustn't keep my mother waitin'!"

The value of her services grew less (if possible) at every sitting. Her capacity for wriggling returned to her with unabated force: the giggles came back, too, and the original fund of anecdote.

Mr. Baffin congratulated himself on these signs. "We'll keep up the pretence at 'sitting' a *little* longer," he said, "and then I'll deny myself the luxury of her assistance for a month or two. We'll call it a 'cure' on Monday."

But when Monday came, I noticed at once certain evidences of a "relapse" in Prudence. The tears had come back, and the sulks and the silence. Even Baffin's reminder that mother's hour for being visited had arrived did not seem to move her. "I'm an un'eppy gel, I am," said Prudence.

"I want to ask you something, Mr. Baffin."

"Yes, yes," said Baffin.

"I—I on'y wanted to arst you," Prudence was saying, "do—do you believe in bookmakers?"

"What?" said Baffin.

Prudence repeated her inquiry.

"I—I don't believe in—in auctioneers," said Baffin, blinking.

"I know you down't," responded Prudence. "But I want to know your opinion of bookmakers—*this time*."

XXXVI
A BIRTHDAY PARTY

I was sitting on the gas-stove in Dr. Brink's refectory when Mr. William Dawkins entered the consulting-room. And having applied my eye to the squint-hole so thoughtfully provided by Dr. Brink for the education of his guests, I was able to view and rejoice in the arrival of Mr. Dawkins.

That gentleman's "entrance," as they say in the Strand, was decidedly impressive. He came in under the escort of three cronies, and he was wearing a white waistcoat and a smile and a blood-stained head. He was singing.

"Did you collect all this by the side of the Zuyder Zee?" inquired the doctor, in his softest bedside voice.

The patient offered no reply to this question; but smiling, oh, so happily, he continued to pour forth the fresh, glad notes of his voluntary. The largest and dirtiest member of the escort, feeling, evidently, that the circumstances demanded explanation, was accordingly so kind as to offer it.

"This," he said, "is Bill Dawkins. Young Bill Dawkins, you know: 'im what works at the coal-wharf."

The doctor bowed. "Bill is a hearty fellow," he said, "and his head has been banged about damned awful, and you have not introduced me to him a moment too soon. I shall have to stitch that forehead."

Mr. Dawkins received this information with his sunniest smile. "Don't be shy, ole love," he said. "Bill don't fret, thank Gawd. My name is Bill Dawkins. Thank Gawd fur that!"

"I shan't be shy," replied the doctor, with a reassuring smirk, as he fumbled amongst a case of cutlery. "What have you been up to, by the way?"

Mr. Dawkins, however, had relapsed into melody: and the only answer which Dr. Brink received to his inquiry was the assurance that he was Mr. Dawkins's Bluebell.

"What *has* he been up to?" asked the doctor again, addressing himself to the largest escort.

"Eh?" said that gentleman.

"I say," repeated the doctor, preparing for action, "that I'd like to know what he's been up to?"

"'Oo been up to?" inquired the escort.

"William," said the doctor.

"'E ain't been up to nothing. This is young Bill Dawkins. '*E* ain't done no 'arm."

"But what is the cause of all this?"

"All what?" demanded the escort, with a touch of wonder.

"All this damage," explained the doctor patiently. "Has he been fighting?"

"Lord bless ye, no, sir!" whispered the escort, hoarse with horror. "'*E* ain't been fightin'. Bill Dawkins is a gentleman!"

"Then," cried the doctor, at last permitting himself to show heat, "who in the devil's name has been mutilating him?"

The escort looked blank. "Mutinate—mutinate," he repeated thoughtfully. "I ain't 'eard about that, sir."

The doctor sighed, and soaked some dressing. "Could you think carefully," he then suggested, "and tell me how he came to meet this trouble?"

"What trouble?" murmured the escort. He put his head on one side and opened his mouth, and his resemblance to an inquisitive owl was pathetic. "What trouble do you mean, sir?"

"*This*," cried the frenzied gentleman, pointing wildly to Mr. Dawkins's wounds.

"'Is *'ead*, do ye mean, sir?" demanded the escort.... "O-o-o-h! *That* don't matter, sir.... *It's 'is birthday.*"

"Oh," said the doctor, applying stitches, "I see. A celebration?"

"On'y his birthday, sir: just a plain birthday. 'E's thirty-two to-day, ole Bill is. It's 'is birthday, see?"

The doctor did see, and he stitched away emphatically. Mr. Dawkins left off singing. And when the repairs had been completed, it appeared that their influence had extended far beyond the damaged forehead. Mr. Dawkins sat up in his chair a sober man.

"Cheer up, Bill!" exhorted his bodyguard in chorus.

"I am cheered up," responded William, with a November edition of the smile. "My name is Dawkins. On'y—on'y me nose itches. Got 'ny biceps, Doc-

tor?"

"Eh? What?" snapped the doctor.

"Biceps, ole love. For pullin' teeth. My name is William Dawkins, and when I does a job I does it thorough. What's the good o' makin' two journeys if you can do yere business in one? Ain't that logic? Of course it is. My name is Dawkins. So fetch out the biceps, Doctor. You'll find 'im back there on the right 'and side, sittin' by 'isself in the pit, a ugly, lop-sided sot 'e is, with a 'ole in 'is middle. Fetch out the biceps."

"Do you really want your tooth out?" asked the doctor doubtfully. "You've lost a lot of blood, you know. Don't—don't you think perhaps that at some future——"

Mr. Dawkins rose up from his seat. "My name is Dawkins," he said simply, "and I've ordered one biceps. If you don't like the contrac', Doctor, there's many another bloke 'll be glad of my custom. Don't make no trouble, Doctor. I'm a friendly bloke. But me name is Dawkins. I likes to soot me fancy. I got a fancy for to shift this tooth. Me and this tooth we don't soot each other. I get a fancy sometimes, too, as I'll have me leg took off, because——"

"About this tooth, now," said the doctor, with haste; "I'm ready when you are."

Mr. Dawkins, to whom the clean white bandages about his head imparted an air of weakness and infirmity, replied with a stave or two from a patriotic ballad, and then seated himself in a chair. The tooth was removed.

Mr. Dawkins then examined the doctor's forceps and apostrophised the trophy which they still held. "Ache away, ye beggar!" he exclaimed. "Who's laughin' now? ... What I got to pay you, Doctor?"

"One shilling altogether," replied the doctor.

Mr. Dawkins flung down half-a-crown.

"Take it out of that," he cried. "I never paid a bob more 'earty. Nor I never met a genelman as was nicer spoken nor 'andier. And when I make me mind up in regards to this leg I'll bring it round to you. Me and my family is noted for our limbs. There's a uncle o' mine what 'ad a bone took out o' 'is ankle what they keeps in a bottle at Guy's 'Orspital to this day. Comin' out to 'ave one, Doctor? It's my birthday."

The doctor regretted that professional engagements previously entered into prevented him from accepting the very kind invitation of Mr. Dawkins. He also handed that gentleman his change and a small packet of tissue-paper which contained the tooth—the latter offertory being based upon an immemorial custom of the spot-cash trade.

And Mr. Dawkins expressed his gratitude in song, and Mr. Dawkins's bodyguard assisted in the swelling chorus thereof. And as Doctor Brink shook

hands with each in turn and received their oft-repeated praises, he returned to the question which was still unanswered.

"How *did* that head get cracked, Mr. Dawkins? A slight dispute, eh?"

"Dispute!" echoed Mr. Dawkins. "Me? On me birthday? Why I bin sittin' in the 'Four Soldiers' as gentle as a clurk from two o'clock this arternoon. Ain't that right, mates?"

"Certainly. What 'e's tellin' you is right, sir," confirmed the bodyguard.

"Not even a friendly spar?" queried the puzzled doctor.

"It's me birthday, I tell you," reiterated Mr. Dawkins. "And I bin sittin' like a corpse in the 'Four Soldiers.' First time I bin in there for four months, and——"

"How did your head get cracked, then?"

"That," said Mr. Dawkins, with dignity, "is what I was goin' to explain, old bird. There's a Scotchman got the 'Soldiers' now, you see, and 'e's a iggerant swine, and—— They've moved the blessed step!"

XXXVII
THE MORAL SENSE

"Good morning, Mrs. Budd," said Doctor Brink, meeting that lady in his waiting-room. "I suppose you've called round for the medicine."

"Well, sir," responded Mrs. Budd, turning up a red nose and two very swollen eyes, "I 'ave and I 'aven't. Could I see you privit?"

Doctor Brink led the way into the consulting-room and lit a pipe, at the same time inviting Mrs. Budd to "let us have it!"

"Now then, Mrs. Budd, let's have it!"

Mrs. Budd began to cry.

"That isn't what I asked for," explained the doctor.

"I—I 'ardly know 'ow to—to tell you," sobbed Mrs. Budd. "It's so disgraceful."

"I am always hearing disgraceful things," the doctor said. "You needn't consider my feelings: they are hardened."

"Well, Doctor," exclaimed Mrs. Budd, "the truth is that what I 'ad yisterday and the Dark Brown to-day makes eighteenpence and I can't pay you. And——"

"And?" repeated the doctor sternly.

"And—and—I 'ardly know 'ow to tell you, Doctor: it is sich a disgraceful thing—my man has stole a 'am and a policeman come for 'im and they have locked him up."

"I will book the eighteenpence," said Doctor Brink.

"Thank you, Doctor: you are a gentleman," said Mrs. Budd.

"Take a chair, ma'am," said Doctor Brink.

"Not at all, sir," said Mrs. Budd.... "I don't know what you'll think of us, I'm sure I don't. And 'im so respectable up to now."

"How did it happen?" inquired the Doctor.

"Well," said Mrs. Budd, "I don't exactly know the ins and outs of it; but 'e see the 'am in Mr. Biggs's shop and Mr. Biggs was spinning shillings with another gentleman, what was a Guardian same as 'isself, and Mr. Biggs's back was turned and Mine 'e see the 'am and took it."

"The devil!" exclaimed Doctor Brink.

"Yes," assented Mrs. Budd. "And 'im ben allus so respectable. And mind you, Doctor—I will say this for 'im: I don't believe it would 'ave 'appened only for the little gel bein' so porely. I told 'im what you said about givin' 'er nourishing food, and 'e seems, as you might say, to 'ave got it on the brain. The job what 'e went after yesterday morning, 'e never got it after all; and in the evening 'e took this 'am."

"Ha!" exclaimed the doctor.

"I'm sure we all agree with you," said Mrs. Budd. "'Im to 'ave bin a uniformed porter for all these years and now to turn thief."

"The Ingrate," observed my friend. "How is it that he has ceased to wear the uniform of a porter?"

"Well, sir, you see, sir," explained his patient, "the company's trade been so bad they was forced to reduce. Mine, 'e on'y went with the last 'underd, and if he'd been a younger man they would 'a kep' him on. They give 'im a splendid reference; and now—if it wasn't for the children, Doctor, I could do away with meself, to think 'e should so disgrace 'isself. It was a big 'am, sir; they say 'e will get three months. But if any gentleman, same as you, sir, was to say a word for 'im, perhaps they would make it lighter. It won't do away with the disgrace, sir; but perhaps it would come easier for Budd. Though I'm sure 'e don't deserve no pity."

"I should think not," assented Doctor Brink. "After being a uniformed porter for all those years. And a *big* ham, too."

"And the best quality, also," said Mrs. Budd.

"And from a Poor Law Guardian," added Doctor Brink.

"They tell me," continued Mrs. Budd, "that he never orfered no resistance. I 'ope you will think of that, Doctor, when you are considering it over.

"'Is father was an ironmonger, once, in a good way of business; but he took to drink and women, and the 'ome was broke up. Mine, 'e had to go out and shift for 'isself as a lad of twelve. It's no excuse for stealin' 'ams, of course; but—you never know. Perhaps this wouldn't never 'ave 'appened if 'is bringin' up was different. 'E's allus bin a sober man 'isself; but when a person is brought up rough it is bound to show itself some'ow.

"I am sorry to say we eat the 'am; for 'e brought it 'ome and never said nothing to nobody, and we was all of us glad of the food. The little girl, she *did* enjoy it, pore lamb. She don't know now but what it was honest meat.

"They come and fetched 'im away from 'ome this morning when I was out to sell some bottles. I 'ardly like to tell the children, for they won't 'ardly believe that their pore dad could be so wicked; only I s'pose the neighbours will tell 'em, if I don't. The neighbours is so friendly with my children.

"It's a shameful thing for a man to do: to turn thief at 'is age and bring disgrace on everybody."

"Damned shameful," said the doctor.

"I often wonder," Mrs. Budd ran on, "whether that dizziness what you treated 'im for is at the back of all this. 'E *'as* seemed a little strange since then; not much different, you know; only a little altered, same as anybody wouldn't notice except they was about with him a lot, like I am. *Something* must 'ave 'appened, don't you think, Doctor, to make a respectable man like 'e was turn thief?"

"The dizziness may have been indirectly connected with it," admitted the doctor. "He was suffering from a complaint which doctors call malnutrition."

"He has sent a message," stated Mrs. Budd, "to say he hopes I won't think none the worse of him. He says he knows he has done wrong——"

The doctor interrupted her with a profane exclamation.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said Mrs. Budd.

"I say," said the doctor, "that this surprises me."

"Oh," cried Mrs. Budd, "'e ain't what anybody would call a bad man at 'eart; really 'e ain't, sir. 'Tis something strange what's come over 'im as made 'im turn thief. I was tellin' you, Doctor, about this message. I sent one back to say I will think it over.

"'I can forgive,' I says, 'but I can't forget.' I mean to stand by 'im, really, if it's only for the children's sake.

"Besides, he ain't never treated me so bad—considering. He ain't always bin a thief. And he knows he had done wrong. He admits that, Doctor. Perhaps he'll try to do better in future. Don't you think so?"

"I can think anything of these thieves," said Doctor Brink.

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Budd.... "I admit 'e don't deserve no pity."

"And he 'knows he has done wrong'!" repeated the doctor.

"Oh, yes, sir," said Mrs. Budd.

"And he's utterly shocked at and sick with himself?"

"He's very low-sperited and shamefaced, Doctor. He knows he has done wrong-"

"Then," said Doctor Brink, "I'll give you a letter to the Vicar.... The Vicar, I'm sure, will help. Personally I think that your husband and all his social equals ought to be locked up for ever. But the Vicar, I'm sure, will be charmed to help."

"Thank you, Doctor," murmured Mrs. Budd. "I'm sure he don't deserve your kindness; but he knows he——"

"Here's your letter," stated Doctor Brink. "If you stop here any longer I shall choke you. Go away."

And, looking very puzzled, Mrs. Budd departed.

XXXVIII
LOVE AND HATE

The Hon. Mrs. Strudwicke-Moses came to tea with Doctor Brink the other day, your servant being in attendance. The Hon. Mrs. Strudwicke-Moses derives from beer; but she has a reputation for benevolence, wisdom, and the party virtues which is envied even by cocoa.

Doctor Brink, finding the minutes between "calls" hang heavy on his hands, has devoted them of late to organising a sort of small relief fund, from which he provides the most thriftless and improvident and least meritorious of his patients with milk and coal and flour.

"It is rank charity, of course," the doctor has had grace to admit—"charity of the filthiest description. But we do flatter ourselves that our little effort is free from the deadly sin of 'overlapping.' There isn't a really deserving case on our list."

The Hon. Mrs. Strudwicke-Moses had received an early invitation to assist this fund, and had lost no time in doing so, the doctor having intimated that cocoa had also competed. And now the honourable lady was come to take tea.

"I cannot tell you," she said, "how much I admire the quiet, unostentatious, truly Christian heroism of you East End doctors. It may truly be said of you that

you give your all."

"How so?" inquired the doctor.

"Well, look at you!" responded Mrs. Strudwicke-Moses. "Here you are, in voluntary exile, living amid filth and squalor, denying yourself every luxury, even that of fresh air, in order to devote yourself to alleviating the sufferings of our neglected poor."

"You flatter me," the doctor said.

"Not at all," responded his visitor. "Compare yourself with any even of our most eminent philanthropists. They only supply the poor with money—they merely give of their abundance. Now you, and men like you (pardon my mentioning it, but I cannot help pointing this out to you) you give *yourselves*. You actually see and touch the poor things, even the most unpleasant of them."

"That's true," admitted Doctor Brink, with the respectful air of one who has been introduced to a new and important truth. "But," he added, "they jolly well pay me for it."

The lady made a pretty sign of disagreement. "You cannot make me believe," she said, "that men like you are actuated by thoughts of gain. It is the cry of suffering which brings you here."

"That's true, madam," assented the doctor. "A cry of suffering which emanated from a bank. As for the pay question, I may assure you that I attach the very greatest importance to their sixpences. You see, there is a clear profit—medicine and bottle included—of fivepence farthing on every one of them, even the most unpleasant. I am saving up, you know, to buy a property—some pleasantly situated place in Scotland with a trout-stream. I have lived on animals all my life, and I want to try fish for a change."

"You are making fun of me, Doctor," demurred the lady.

"Really," protested Doctor Brink, "I was never more serious in my life. I am saving money here at the rate of six hundred a year, and living well into the bargain. Which reminds me to apologise for keeping my foot up in your presence. I've got gout rather badly—the result of Burgundy. I drink a good brand, but I drink it to excess. Suffering humanity pays for that, you know. The silly idiots crowd in here by the hundred, bringing bottles which I fill with a weak solution of picric-acid and water. For this service they pay me sixpence and go away, believing themselves cured. It is one of the simplest methods of acquiring trout-streams which has ever been invented."

"I don't believe you, Doctor," asserted the lady. "Men like you, if money is their only thought, can get it by easier means than coming out here to rob the poor poor."

"I could rob the poor in a pleasanter neighbourhood, of course," admitted Doctor Brink. "But then, you see, the living here is cheap—one economises even

on the Burgundy—and I'm saving up to buy a trout-stream."

"At any rate," protested Mrs. Strudwicke-Moses, "you like the dear creatures and feel sorry for their unfortunate poverty. Now don't you, Doctor?"

"Are you suggesting, madam, that I pity the poor?"

"Of course you do," cried Mrs. Strudwicke-Moses.

My friend, with an effort, sat up on his couch.

"My dear lady," he said, "I am a thoughtful and unusually intelligent man of forty, and the only thing which I have ever pitied in all my life was a parrot in a cage. But as for these hungry and verminous creatures who are saving up for my trout-stream, I have never ceased to hate and despise them."

"But why?" exclaimed the Hon. Mrs. Strudwicke-Moses, who, by this time, was seriously alarmed.

"For the same reason which causes you to despise them," explained the doctor.

"But," protested Mrs. Strudwicke-Moses, "I love the dear things! They are so unfortunate."

"I believe," declared the doctor, "that our feeling is identical; but, even to oblige a lady, I cannot call it love.

"When," he continued, "a large number of stout men are pleased to starve and shiver for no other reason than that I desire a trout-stream, I consider them to be worthy neither of love nor pity. I consider them to deserve what may be termed a helping foot, and when they have paid for my trout-stream I shall jolly well see that they get it."

Said the Hon. Mrs. Strudwicke-Moses, as she rose to her feet—

"I must confess, Doctor, that your bitterness surprises me. I can't think how anybody *could* feel angry with the poor dear things. For my part," she added, arranging her furs, "I love them. They are so unfortunate!"

XXXIX
ON A DEAD POLICEMAN

A small blue document reached the doctor recently. I don't remember exactly what words it contained; but there were references to God and the King and certain commands and threats thereto pertaining. And late that same night the

doctor, looking wistfully upon a large bottle of claret, uttered these words—

"That's a deuced good wine, that is, and I'm dog-tired, damme, and it's a dog's night, dammit. But I've got to hustle out into the thick of it, and do two 'midders' and a damnable post-mortem. You'd better come along."

I went along—not exactly because I wanted to, but because my better nature told me that I could drink the doctor's claret with more decency when claret-time came round if I had first earned my share. "But," said I to the doctor, "I will thank you to take notice that I have no intention whatever of watching you perform post-mortems."

"I don't perform post-mortems," replied my host. "This is one of the little matters which we 'arrange.'"

Knowing that this mysterious statement was one which time itself would explain, I did not ask any questions, but put on my boots instead, and we walked out into the murk and slosh, and the doctor went into two pig-styes and ushered in two lives, and I stood in two doorways and caught two colds.

And then we pursued the darkling ways until they ended in a red brick mansion with art-metal fittings, one of which we pulled with such effect that dogs began to bark at every hand, and a window was violently opened, and a heavy voice, high up, said, "All *right*!" very gruffly.

"That is George," remarked the doctor cheerfully. "George will have to slip his trousers on and come downstairs and be useful."

"George," I ventured to remark, "inhabits a very fine house."

"Yes," replied the doctor, "he occupies a pleasant flat. So well placed. He is within a stone's throw of his own mortuary, as I daresay you have observed."

"Then George——" I began.

"Is the official guardian of our English dead. His technical skill is profound. He was a porter at St. Giles's for ten years, you see. Ah! Ha! Here *is* George."

There was a grating of bolts behind the big oak gate at which we stood, and a little wicket which was set within the same came slowly open to disclose an ox-like bulk which growled out some inquiry. The doctor, ignoring this presence, stepped daintily through the wicket, and I followed. I then perceived that we were standing in a courtyard, neatly paved, and having large, neat buildings upon every side. The doctor, jerking his umbrella towards each of these natural objects in turn, spoke as with the mouth of a guide.

"Coroner's court is on your right," he said; "mortuary chamber straight in front; post-mortem chamber slightly to the left; coroner's private office still more to left; jury room just here; apartment for storing coffins just there; stairway opposite leads to George's private chambers; dark object there is kennel, containing George's private dog; dark object here is George. How are you, George?"

The dark object referred to came closer, accompanied by a very small candle

in a very large lamp, which it held up to the doctor's face, at the same time exhibiting its own, which was ox-like in character. "It's *you*," said the voice of the object at last. "I thought it might be somebody as was deceivin' theirself into playin' a lark on me. 'Ow are you, Doctor?"

At this the doctor and George shook hands with a great display of warmth, and George set down his lantern and produced a pipe, and slowly filled it, and slowly lighted it. "I thought it funny," he then remarked, between slow puffs, "as anybody should deceive theirselves into playing a lark on *me*. What is it to-night, Doctor?"

"Gregory the name is," replied my friend. "Inquest at ten o'clock to-morrow. I'm sorry to have you out at this time of night, but I couldn't possibly get round earlier."

"Not a word, Doctor," responded George, as he shook the raindrops from his cap. "This ain't the latest p.m. I done by many. Let me see now—Gregory? It'll be that middle-aged job from Wallflower Street, what? Come in this arternoon. What?"

"That's the case," responded Dr. Brink.

"Then," said George, "I'm ready when you are, Doctor. What do you suspect?"

He moved off up the yard, the doctor following.

"*I'll* wait here," said your servant.

"That's right," assented the doctor. "I'm not going farther than the doorway myself."

"Gentleman's welcome for my part," intimated George. For which the doctor thanked him.

"But," he said, "I don't think that my friend cares much for post-mortems."

"Oh!" reflected George. "There's lots like that in these days. I puts it down to them street preachers. If you'll wait there 'arf a minnit, Doctor, I'll just switch on the lights."

With these words the pleasant fellow entered into an adjacent building, which presently became illuminated. I could see the shadow of his form upon the ground-glass windows (which were spacious) as he busied himself with some congenial task upon the other side.

"You'll be all right out here, I suppose?" inquired the doctor kindly, while we waited for the reappearance of George. "I shan't be long, you know. George is very quick. He knows exactly what I want."

"Who is the poor chap?" I inquired.

"I suppose you'd call him the mortuary attendant," said the doctor. "He's really very skilful."

"I was alluding," I explained, "to the other poor chap: to him who is to be

the subject of this accomplished gentleman's skill."

"Oh," said the doctor. "Now let me see.... What did the widow tell me? Ah, I remember now. He was a retired policeman. And there's George beckoning to me. I shan't be long."

The doctor took his stand within the open doorway through which George had entered. And I took my stand in the rain, and watched the doctor's back and the shadow of George falling upon the ground-glass window-pane as he busied himself with congenial tasks.

Now and then the doctor would address some speech to George and stick his head a little farther round the door-post, and the shadow of George would draw, as it were, a little closer to the window-pane.

And after a certain time—a long time, it seemed to me—the light went out, and George and the doctor came forth, and George received five shillings and bowed us politely out. He also spat and uttered a parting *mot*. Said George—

"He liked his little drop, Doctor—what?"

XL
MRS. GLUCKSTEIN

It was one of those dull, dishonest days which open with a promise of rain and keep on promising all the time. The mothers and aunts in Doctor Brink's dispensary sat in couples, brooding silently.

Now and then, at long intervals, somebody would express herself in a rich, resentful snuffle or a limp oath; but, generally speaking, one just sat still and got damper. And those ladies who by virtue of seniority were from time to time admitted into the consulting-room carried their langour with them. Their fringes were straight and sticky, and they knew it, and hope had departed from them. They propped themselves up just anywhere, and slid their empty medicine-bottles out of one wet hand into another wet hand, and breathed hard, and pitied themselves, allowing the doctor to smile briskly and talk.

By the time that closing time drew near the doctor himself was beginning to feel the heat, and we began to wonder whether anything would happen to *his* fringe.

But Mrs. Isodore Gluckstein came in, and refreshed him.

Mrs. Gluckstein had four chins and a comprehensive bust, and no visible waist-line, and she moved with difficulty; but Mrs. Gluckstein had within her certain fires which were, as it might be, of the spirit, and burned, so to speak, with fierceness, and kept things moving. They re-curled the doctor's fringe for him. Said Mrs. Gluckstein—

"I vant you to eggshammun me, young men. I gut low-spirited."

"Will you show me your tongue, please?" said the doctor pleasantly. But said Mrs. Gluckstein: "Rubbutch!

"Rubbutch!" she repeated. "Vat you vanter see me tongue for? Do I keep me spirits on me tongue, then? I gut low spirits, I tell you, and the indigistions. Vat I vant is a Noirve Tunnuk. Ain't you gut none?"

"I can give you a nerve tonic, of course," assented the doctor. "But don't you think I'd better go through the form of making sure that you need it?"

"But," protested Mrs. Gluckstein, "I *told* you det I vant id. I gut low spirits. You're a proper, edugatud, respectable duckter, ain't you? Can't you see vat I gut?"

"If you could make it convenient," said the doctor, "to discuss your symptoms, I——"

"Symptums!" echoed Mrs. Gluckstein. "I ain'd gut no symptums. I gut low spirits. It's so simple. And I gut the indigistions—shocking! Vat I reely vant is dem Nelson's Noirve Beans. You know dem, Duckter—vat?"

"I have read about them—in the papers. You 'Try one in your teacup,' don't you?"

"Det's right, Duckter," assented Mrs. Gluckstein. "Dem Nelson's Noirve Beans is vat I reely vant. I gut der same exact sickness vat dey make 'em for: low spirits and indigistions. It's a fine ding dis Nelson's Noirve Beans: vat, Duckter?"

"I don't think I should place *great* faith in them if I were you. They're made to cure so many things at once, you see."

"De babers dalks vell about 'em."

"They write those talks themselves, you know. The papers get paid for printing them."

Mrs. Gluckstein raised a chubby hand and pushed this argument away from her. "I gant 'elp vedder der babers is baid or nut," she said, "dem Nelson's Noirve Beans is a good medsun. Everybody knows id.

"I arst der boy in der chimmis shup 'smornin', and 'e tole me, 'e seth: 'Ve sells a lut of 'em', 'e seth. 'E vould 'a' said more, Duckter, but I don't believe dey likes to thell 'em you. It ain'd der *good* dings vat brings yer in der brufit. You notice dat in *your* business—vat, Duckter?"

The doctor looked at his watch. "Then you'd like me to give you a nerve tonic, Mrs. Gluckstein. Very well. We'll see if we can't manage to rival Mr.

Nelson's Nerve Beans."

Mrs. Gluckstein pushed *this* statement away with both hands.

"You'll do your best, no doubt, Duckter," she said; "but I dink dem Nelson's Beans is vat I reely vant. And Mr. Gluckstein (God bless 'im; long life to 'im) 'e dinks 'id too. But dey cust a lut o' money, Duckter, dem Nelson's Noirve Beans. A shillin' a bux I dink it is dey cust. And Mr. Gluckstein (may he walk in blessedness) he is a vise man.

"'Shall ve slay the ox' 'e seth, 'ven der sheep custs not so dear?' He dinks the same as me det it is good medsun, dis Nelson's Noirve Beans; 'is own mudder (may she live to be ninety) vas cured from going blind by dem.

"But ve seth to vun annudder, ve seth, 'a shillin' is dear for a medsun.' So Mr. Gluckstein (may the Lord be friends vid 'im) 'e consulted vid me, saying—-

"'Never mind about dem Noirve Beans for de dime bein',' 'e seth. 'You ain'd so bad enough, in der meandime,' he seth. 'Ve'll try der duckter *foirst*,' he seth."

XLI
OF HUMAN KINDNESS

"Whether my name is Donovan or whether it's Smith, I do not wish to be be'olding to them, Doctor; I do not want their blasted milk. That is the long and short of it."

Applying my eye with feverish haste to the squint-hole, I perceived that she who uttered these proud sentiments was young and not ill-favoured, having red hair and freckles and a "Hands off" expression. "That," she repeated, "is the long and the short of it—if you can call it milk at all! They buy it from ole Tompkins."

"Well," said the doctor, feeling, evidently, that he was called upon to say *something*, "well, Mrs. Donovan——"

"One minit, Doctor," interpolated his visitor, "it is Wilson now, if you please, Doctor. Donovan was our name when we lived in Beddoes Street."

The doctor uttered an apology and began again. "Well, Mrs. Wilson, I——"

But the visitor again checked him. "Of course, Doctor," said the lady, "you will understand that *she* don't know me by the name of Wilson. I am still Mrs. Bannister to 'er, same as I was in the ole days, when she got me to sign the pledge. Pledge, indeed! Fudge, *I* call it. Did ever you 'ear of a thing so silly, Doctor?

Me not turned eighteen at the time, and to make me sign a paper about never touching nothing for the rest of me life. And she calls 'erself a lady. With 'er airs an' graces, an' 'er two pennorth o' milk an' what not! I've broke the blessed thing a 'undred times, that is one comfort.

"The joke of it is, Doctor, that they almost force you to take their blessed milk. Is it right, I arst you, Doctor, that a person is forced to be beholding to another person for such a trivial thing as milk because they 'appen to be sister to the vicar? You understand my meaning, don't you?"

"Perfectly," assented Doctor Brink.

"You know yesself 'ow ill I been, Doctor. Well, then, she come round to my place every day, she did, with 'er little notebook and 'er gold-rimmed eye glasses, and what not, and she says to me, she says:—

"'I didn't ought to be visiting you at all, not be rights,' she says; 'but you was a good girl once,' she says, 'one of my very favourite girls once,' she says, 'though you *'ave* made mock of your solemn pledge,' she says, 'and I thought I must come round,' she says, 'for old times' sake, and ask you what you mean be wastin' money on doctors,' she says.

"'It's me own money,' I says.

"'Never mind 'oose money it is," says she, 'you ain't got enough of it to go an' waste on doctors when the Church 'as got a beautiful sick club and a free dispensary all kindly arranged for you. Sich extravagance!' says she. 'And now, I suppose, you'll expect us to give you some milk tickets.'

"Did ever you 'ear the like of it, Doctor?

"'I ain't never arst you for no milk tickets,' I says; 'I ain't never arst you for nothing. Me 'usband is in work, and I kin buy me own milk, and I kin buy me own doctorin'.'

"'It's a disgrace,' she says. 'If the vicar was to 'ear of it 'e would be furious,' she says.

"'Then I shouldn't tell 'im, miss,' says I.

"'Why?' she says.

"'Because,' I says, 'it isn't a sister's place to put 'er brother into tempers.'

"She raised 'er forrid at me. 'You seem to forgit,' says she, 'as you are talkin' to a lady.'

"'Quite right,' I answers, 'so I did.'

"She looks at me solemn for a little while, and then she says, in a sort o' 'lift-'im-gently' voice, she says, 'I suppose we shall 'ave to let you 'ave some milk tickets. I will talk to Miss Perkins,' she says.

"'But, if you please, miss,' I tells 'er, 'I don't *want* any milk tickets. I got as much milk to drink as ever I want.'

"'Nonsense!' she says. 'I will talk to Miss Perkins. A pore woman like you

are didn't oughter be 'ere at all. You oughter be in the infirmary gettin' proper attention, instead o' wasting money on doctors.'

"'But my man is in work,' I tells 'er once more. I rubbed in that point 'cause I thought per'aps she was ignorant about it—'im goin' to work under the name of Rogers. But it didn't satisfy 'er, bless you.

"'Your 'usband 'avin' work 'as got nothink to do wiv it,' she says. 'All the more reason,' she says, 'for you to save the money while it is comin' in,' she says. 'Your Doctor Brinks, indeed! What's the good of us Church people gettin' up all these kind things for you if you go an' get ill in this 'igh-stepping fashion,' says she, 'with your private medicine and your private doctors? Wasting your husband's money.'

"'E don't complain,' I says. "E likes me to be independent.'

"'Nonsense!' she says. 'The idea! People in your position can't afford to be independent. What you working people are coming to is really remarkable,' she says. 'Ere's me an' the vicar, an' Miss Perkins, and the 'ole Church workin' 'ard for you all day long, and all the reward we get is a lot of impertinent talk about independence! 'Owever,' she says, 'I'll see as you get the milk.'

"'But,' I tells 'er fur the twentieth time, 'I don't want no milk.'

"'Fiddlesticks!' says she; 'I'll talk to Miss Perkins. You kin 'ave a pint a day for a fortnight.'

"'On'y,' I says, 'I don't *want* no milk.'

"'My good woman,' says she, 'you don't know what you want. Nor it ain't your place to know. Your place is to take what's given you an' be respectful. Next time you see your Doctor Brink, you kin tell 'im I told you so.'"

* * * * *

"So that," pursued the visitor, "is what I mean, Doctor, when I say be damned to 'er blarsted milk. Do you follow my meaning?"

"Perfectly," said the doctor again, as he grasped the rebel's hand. "Perfectly, Mrs. Donovan."

"Mrs. Wilson, if you please, Doctor," corrected the lady.

The doctor offered many apologies. "I believe," he said reflectively, "that you are Mrs. Bannister to *her*?"

"That's right," assented his patient.

"Ah!" murmured Doctor Brink, "I will write to her and acknowledge her kind message. Be gad I will. Yes. Ah! I—I—begad, yes. Ha! H'm! ... And now, Mrs. Ban——Mrs. Wilson, what is this about the certificate for the insurance company?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Wilson. "Will you oblige me, Doctor, be makin' it out

in the name of Banks?"

XLII
THE LAST

"It's true then?" I inquired.

"Oh, yes," responded James—"quite true. Fatty's got a person coming to see him this afternoon about buying the practice."

"I suppose it's no use asking, 'Why all this?'"

"Well," admitted James, "you know it's against our principles in this household to give reasons. But seeing that it's you—the truth is that Fatty isn't going to stick it any longer, because he says he'll be damned if he does stick it any longer. He says he's going to start a pottery and kill them quicker."

"*You* don't seem so tremendously jubilant as I was led to expect."

"No-o," replied James. "The idea was rather exciting at first. But I've been walking about to-day telling everybody the news; and, really, people have been so awfully kind. Mrs. Bernstein—where they make the old furniture, you know—actually cried and gave me a salted cucumber; and her brother, who is our fish man, says he's sending round a hat—why, I don't know—besides a small plaice which came this morning. And dear old Mr. Grimsdick, the grocer, got very excited indeed, and he says it isn't to be heard of, and he's coming round to stop it. And Mrs. Bolt, where we buy our coal, she said, 'Lord-love-a-duck,' she said, 'what next? You tell your father to stop where he is. You tell him he suits us very well. We don't want none of your educated gentlemen in Bovingdon Street.'

"Besides," continued James, "there's Baffin. What are we to do about Baffin? We can't sell Baffin with the practice. And what's to become of him? *We* all know that he's a genius, but nobody else has found it out yet, and so he hasn't got much money. Think of all his pictures stuck to the washhouse wall! Fatty says they'll be worth thousands one day; but they won't come off the walls, and if we leave them there somebody else will steal the money. And there are all his clothes. Baffin has been collecting clothes for years, and these are all in the washhouse—*somewhere*. I really don't——"

James's reflections were interrupted by the sudden opening of the door, which admitted a strange young gentleman into our presence. He was followed by Doctor Brink himself.

"This," said the latter gentleman, "is Mr. Reginald Cavendish, who has come to inquire about the practice. He is charmed with the situation of the house, my dear."

"What I mean to say," explained Reginald, having made his bows, "is that you've got so many windows, and such decent rooms. One doesn't expect that sort of thing in the East End. My pater will be quite pleased. It's my pater who's going to buy this practice for me, you know. I'm studying law, you know—goin' in for this medico-legal game—and my pater thinks this'd be a good thing to amuse myself with until I'm through. It's all cash, you say, Doctor.... Ah! Well, it saves a lot of fag, book-keepin', an' that—what? Not exactly what you might term 'classy,' but—you needn't tell people, eh? Who's to know—what?

"Of course," continued Mr. Cavendish, as if in answer to an imaginary objector, "the patients do smell, I suppose. But a chap could have a change here. A sort of professional uniform—what? Ha! Ha! This place all right for gettin' about, Doctor? Easy reach of the West End and all that sort of thing?"

"We are served by two railways," responded Doctor Brink, "besides a tramline. And there are cabs at the London Hospital."

"No motor-buses, then—what? *No motor-buses*?"

Doctor Brink was able to assure his visitor that the boon of the motor-bus would not be absent from that gentleman's future joys.

The cloud which had sombred Mr. Cavendish's features immediately gave place to a smile.

"Good business," he cried. "Whenever a chap gets too awfully fed up with it, then, he can nip on to something or other and have a night at the Pav.—what? Besides," added Mr. Cavendish, "a chap can put up with a lot for twelve hundred a year. That's what it's doing, you say?"

"That's what *I'm* doing," replied Doctor Brink. "But then," he explained, with a mild expression, "I haven't tried the effect of running the practice from the Pav."

"Oh, quite," assented Mr. Cavendish. "What I mean to say is, of course not. But when I take over the practice, I shall run an assistant: one of those middle-aged Scotch chaps, you know, with a turn-down collar. A chap can afford to have one of those beggars if he's doing twelve hundred—especially when he's a bachelor—what? Ha! Ha! ... I shall let my assistant do most of the night-work and the confinements, and all that sort of thing. I'm a consulting-room man, really."

The other practitioner merely smiled. "I suppose," continued Mr. Cavendish, "that you don't give these beggars anything very special in the way of drugs. No elaborate gout cures—what? Ha! Ha!"

"It's a faith-cure practice almost entirely," replied the doctor, winking at

your servant.

"Oh," said Mr. Cavendish, a little coldly. "Of course, I should run the show on dignified lines. They'll have everything in reason. I shall do my own dispensing. You can be sure that they get the right stuff then—what?"

Again the doctor merely smiled.

"And now," said Mr. Cavendish, rising from his chair, "I shall have to clear out. Got to dine with a couple of chaps at some beastly club. I think this will suit me very well, Doctor; just the thing I've been looking for—a quiet, steady practice to keep a chap goin' while he's reading for these rotten law exams. You'll hear from my pater, I expect. Of course, your price is pretty stiff, but I'll tell my father what I think about the show, and no doubt he'll consider it. So long, Doctor."

"So long," said Doctor Brink, and James, and I.

"And now," said Doctor Brink, as he reached for a long glass, "supposing *we* consider it?"

"I *have* considered it," said James. "We are going to stop."

"Why?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Because," replied James, "it is too awful to think of a person like that being let loose on everybody."

"A person!" echoed the doctor. "My dear girl, that was an awfully educated young man. He's an M.B.! and he's going to run the practice on dignified lines. What more can the beggars ask for their sixpences than real drugs and dignity?"

"Fatty," said his daughter, in a voice of cold resolve, "if you take me away from here, do you know what I shall do? I shall live with Aunt Isobel and go to school, and grow up to be a little lady."

"Ha!" cried the doctor, starting up.... "I'd forgotten you. Bring out the Burgundy.... We'll consider it."

THE END

* * * * * * * *

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