BRIGHT IDEAS

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BRIGHT IDEAS ***

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"'TIS YOUR DOING," SPLUTTERED NOAKES, SHAKING THE SOOT FROM HIS CLOTHES. (See page 28)

BRIGHT IDEAS

A RECORD OF INVENTION AND MISINVENTION

BY

HERBERT STRANG

ILLUSTRATED BY C. E. BROCK

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THE SMOKE MACHINE

I

Bob Templeton tucked a leg under him on the parapet of the bridge on which he was sitting, and with a look of gloomy disgust spread a number of coins, the contents of his trouser pocket, on the weather-beaten stone.

"Eleven and ninepence," he said, dolefully. "That's all."

Tom Eves, who had been leaning his elbows on the bridge, and watching the roach darting among the weeds in the clear running stream below, straightened himself, smiled, and, diving a hand into his pocket, gave a comical glance at the coins it returned with, and said:

"Well, you beat me. I've got seven and fivepence halfpenny, and no chance of more for nearly a couple of months. We're sturdy beggars: under a pound between us."

"You can't do much with a pound."

"True, old sport, and still less with nineteen and twopence halfpenny. Might as well not count the halfpenny."

"And there was so much I wanted to do. There's the levitator, and the smoke machine, and the perpetual pump——"

"And the microphone, and the lachrymator, and the super-stink——"

"And the electric cropper, and the tar entanglement, and—but what's the good of talking? They all mean cash."

"Well, haven't I read, in the days of my youth, in the excellent Samuel Smiles, that most inventors have been poor men?"

"That's all very well; but they started with more than nineteen and twopence half-penny—and war prices, too! It's maddening to think what chances we are missing. This is just the sort of place where you can think out things quietly. No masters to pounce on your inventions before they are half finished. That automatic hair-cutter, now; there was a ripping idea simply squashed flat. A few touches would have made it perfect. If that blatant ass, young Barker, hadn't shouted before he was hurt——"

"Barked before he was bitten."

"Eh? Oh, that's a pun. I wish you'd be serious. If he hadn't shouted and brought old Sandy on the scene the thing might have been finished by now, and on the market."

"And what would the Hun say when he came back after the war and found your patent cutter in every one's pocket? His job would be gone. Really, I've a sneaking sympathy with the gentle Hun."

"I haven't—not a ha'porth. Anyway, now we've got to begin all over again,

simply because young Barker hadn't the pluck of a—of a——"

He paused for want of a word.

"Of a cucumber?" suggested Eves, promptly filling the gap.

"Yes—of a cucumber," snapped Templeton, who, for all his lack of humour, was quick to suspect levity in his chum.

"By gum, he did look a sight!" added Eves, grinning in gleeful reminiscence. "Half his crumpet bald as a billiard ball; t'other half moth-eaten."

"Serve him right. If he'd waited until we'd readjusted the clippers, and shut his face instead of raising Cain and bringing old Sandy rushing in at a mile a minute, I'd have made a thorough good job of him. He was a beautiful subject, too; hadn't seen a barber for six weeks."

"And enough grease on his mane to make the thing self-lubricating. There's an idea for you, old man."

"Yes; I hadn't thought of that. But what's the good? Here we're in a quiet village, with the run of old Trenchard's disused barn; all the conditions favourable, but no funds! Upon my word——"

"Hullo, Postie," cried Eves at this point. "Anything for us?"

The village postman, a veteran of sixty years, had appeared round the corner of the lane that abutted on the bridge, his boots white with the dust gathered since he had started his morning tramp of ten miles a couple of hours before.

"Marnen, young genelmen," said the postman. "Fine marnen, to be sure. Ay, I've got one little small thing in the way of a registered letter."

"Then I've no further interest in you, my friend," said Eves. "Registered letters are not in my scheme of life."

"Good now; that saves me the trouble of asking ye which is Mr. Robert Templeton. No, no," he added, as Templeton held out his hand. "Ye'll sign the bit o' paper first. Just there, with my pencil, an 'ee please; 'twon't rub out, and I've got to think of my fame in the land; forty year in the service and no complaints, I don't care who the man is."

Templeton signed the green-tinted receipt slip; the postman handed over the letter, bade them good morning, and shambled away.

"From my aunt," remarked Templeton as he cut open the envelope.

"My prophetic soul!" exclaimed Eves. "How much, Bob?"

Templeton flourished a ten-pound note, but made no reply until he had read through the accompanying letter, which he then handed to Eves with the remark, "She's a good old sort."

"Wasn't it Solomon said, 'Go to the aunts'?" said Eves. A broad smile spread over his face as he read the letter, which ran as follows:

"MY DEAR NEPHEW,

"I am really *sorry* that we shall not be able to spend the holidays together this year, as we have often done so *delightfully* in the past, but I feel that I am only doing *what is right*. It is *so important* in these terrible times that everybody should practise the *strictest economy* in food; and every one must do what he (*or she*) can for our dear country; and I have every hope that by going about the villages in my caravan, as I told you in my last, and delivering simple lectures on the greens and other public places, I may persuade the dear people, *especially the mothers*, that it is not *really necessary* to health to have *both* bacon *and* eggs for breakfast *every* morning. If you were a little older and more experienced I am sure that you would be able *and willing* to give me *very great* assistance; but after your *arduous labours* at school I feel you need complete rest from brain work, and you will get that nowhere so well as with *dear* Mr. and Mrs. Trenchard. To make up for your disappointment in being deprived of our usual simple pleasures I send you a little pocket-money, which I am sure you will spend *wisely*. I *hope and believe* that you will not indulge in luxuries; we all of us owe it to our *King and country* to eat as little as we can. You will find that *barley water and onions fried in margarine* make an excellent light breakfast; will you tell Mrs. Trenchard that, *with my love*? In the course of my tour I hope to reach Polstead before your holidays come to an end. I will give you good notice, and rely on you to ensure me a *large audience*.

"**Your affectionate aunt**, "CAROLINE TEMPLETON."

"Excellent Aunt Caroline!" exclaimed Eves. "But your 'arduous work,' Bobby. My hat!"

"I work jolly hard."

"The labour we delight in don't show on our reports, old man. Anyway, you've got a tenner. Better an aunt in England than a pater in India. The old boy's all right, of course; I don't blame him, but that old mummy of a solicitor who manages things here. He'll pay Mother Trenchard's weekly bills on the nail, but he won't send me another penny till next quarter day; theory is, teach me economy, as if any man could come through the summer term with a pocketful of money! The wonder is I've got fivepence halfpenny plus seven bob."

"Well, Aunt Caroline's tenner will go a long——"

"Will go along too fast," Eves interrupted. "What will you try first?"

"You see, I've got such loads of ideas. Better start with something useful and patriotic. The hair-cutter can wait."

"That's rather a pity. Young Noakes's flaxen locks are as long and twice as oily as Barker's. Still, his father might cut up rough; he'd certainly charge you for the hair-oil you'd wasted. Noakes gets my bristles up, and Trenchard looks very blue when he calls. Wonder what he comes for; we've only been here three days, and he's called twice at tea-time, and eaten enormously. Any one could see the Trenchards didn't want him; asked him to stay out of politeness, I suppose."

"I say, we're not getting on. There's the tar entanglement."

"Jolly good idea! Thousands of Huns stuck fast like flies on a fly-paper; you know, one of those you unroll and can't get off your fingers. But don't tar come from gasworks?"

"Really, I don't know. Why?"

"I believe it does. That idea's off, then, for the present. Let's try something with material we can get close at hand."

"Well, what about the smoke machine? With the submarines sinking our vessels——"

"Jolly good idea! Lick the submarine, and the Hun's done—*un*done, you might say. I vote for the smoke machine, then. By the way, where will you change your note? A tenner's a rarity here, I fancy, and Trenchard won't have any change."

"He'll be going into Wimborne or Weymouth or somewhere to draw his hands' wages at the week-end. We can jog on till then. That's him calling us, isn't it?"

A prolonged shout reminded them that it was time to start work.

"Another idea, Bob," said Eves as they crossed the bridge and walked up the road. "An automatic turnip-puller. Of all the dreary, deadly, backaching jobs, pulling turnips is the rottenest."

"Still, it's work on the land; got to be done by some one. An automatic puller: I'll think it over."

II

Fellow-members of the Sixth Form, and close friends, Eves and Templeton were spending the holidays together by force of circumstances. The latter was an orphan, and lived with his aunt. She, having embraced the temporary career of lecturer on food economy, had arranged that her nephew should undertake voluntary farm work with Giles Trenchard, whose wife was an old family servant of

the Templetons', and at whose farm, in the Dorset village we will call Polstead, Miss Templeton had visited more than once. Eves's parents were in India, and the London lawyer in whose guardianship he was placed raised no objection when he proposed to spend the holidays with his friend.

Five Oaks Farm was of no great size, and had been the property of the Trenchard family for generations. The present owner, a hale old yeoman whose features were framed for perennial cheerfulness, had latterly looked rather careworn. A year before the war an epidemic among his cattle had caused him heavy losses. Both his sons had joined the Army and were now fighting in France, a constant source of anxiety. Being short-handed, he was glad enough to avail himself of the voluntary help of the two strapping schoolboys of seventeen, and they had already, though only three days at the farm, firmly established themselves in the good graces of both host and hostess by their readiness to turn their hands to any kind of work.

Templeton, however, had not come to this remote rural spot merely to work on the land. He had a serious belief that he was cut out for an inventor, the only ground for which was an astonishing fertility of ideas. At school he was always in hot water with the masters; he would rather construct an automatic hair-cutter than a Latin prose. The prospect of a six or seven weeks' stay in the quiet village, with the sea within a mile, held promise for Templeton of many opportunities for working out his ideas. There were hours of leisure even on the farm, and Mr. Trenchard, whom he had at once taken into his confidence, was impressed by his earnestness and put an old barn at his disposal, pleasing himself with the hope that some great invention would spring to birth on Five Oaks Farm.

Templeton took himself very seriously, and, as often happens, attracted to himself a very unlike character in Tom Eves, to whom life was one delightful comedy; even the flint-hearted lawyer was matter for jokes—except at end of term. While having a genuine admiration for Templeton, Eves's humorous eye was quick to see the lighter side of his friend's experiments, and he shared in them for the sake of the fun which he did not often trouble to disguise.

That evening, when work was over, Eves and Templeton strolled down to the seashore together to discuss plans for the smoke machine.

"You see," said Templeton in his most earnest manner, "in things like this you can't do better than follow the example of most other inventors, and see if anything in the natural world will give us a start."

"'Follow Nature,'" chuckled Eves. "You remember old Dicky Bird setting that as an essay theme?"

"Yes; he sent mine up for good."

"He jawed me: sarcastic owl! He was always asking for homely illustrations, as he called them, and when I gave him one he snapped my head off. I

wrote, 'An excellent example of the application of this philosophical maxim in practical life is afforded by the navvy, who, as the most casual observer will often have noticed, dispenses with a handkerchief when he has a cold in the head.' A jolly good sentence, what?"

"But I don't see——"

"Oh, it's not worth explaining; it was the explanation that rattled the Dicky Bird. What were you saying?"

"I was saying we ought to get a hint from Nature. What's the object of the smoke machine?"

"To make a deuce of a smother, of course."

"Yes, to enable a vessel to hide itself from a submarine. Well, what's the nearest thing in Nature?"

"Give it up; I'm no good at conundrums."

"This isn't a conundrum; it's a scientific fact. You alarm a cuttle-fish, and it squirts out an inky fluid that conceals it from its enemy."

"You don't say so! Jolly clever of it. Ought to be called the scuttle-fish. But how does that help you? You want your cloud in the air, not in the water."

"Of course. The idea is to produce a large volume in a short time, of great opacity, yet spreading rapidly over a large area. What's the nearest parallel in Nature?"

"Human nature?"

"I said Nature."

"Well, human nature's a part of Nature; and, if you ask me, I should say a careless cook and a foul kitchen chimney—the fire engine up, and a month's notice."

"I do wish you'd be serious. But you've hit it all the same. Half-consumed carbon——"

"You mean soot?"

"Soot is half-consumed carbon. That's the stuff we want. It's the very thing, because a steamship produces loads of it every day. All you want is a suitable apparatus and what you may call a firing charge. I'll just make a note."

He took out his note-book, and wrote in his very neat handwriting the following tabular statement:

SMOKE MACHINE.

REQUIRED.

1. Soot.
2. Combustibles.
3. Receptacle.

4. Vehicle.

"Four-wheelers are cheap, but bang goes your tenner, Bobby," said Eves, looking over his shoulder. "Can't you do without the vehicle?"

"You don't understand. We must have something to carry the receptacle along at a good speed, like a ship at sea. A motor-boat would be the very thing, but that's out of the question. We must find something cheap to experiment with on land, and if it works I'll send the scheme to the Admiralty, and they'll provide funds for marine tests."

"Jolly good idea! I suggest we take the things in order. Soot first. What about that? There won't be much in the chimneys. Mother Trenchard's sure to have had a spring cleaning."

"We'll see. Combustibles are easily got."

"Fire-lighters! You can get 'em at old Noakes's; they make a fine smoke themselves and a jolly good stink. Splendid!"

"They might do. I don't see my way to numbers three and four at present, but I'll ask Trenchard if he has anything he could let us have cheap; he takes a great interest in my inventions."

"Good, old bird. I say, it's about supper-time; we'd better get back. You didn't say anything to Mrs. Trenchard about barley water and fried onions and margarine?"

"Not yet."

"Good man! She'll be quite satisfied with Aunt Caroline's love. Come on."

At supper, in the farmer's raftered living-room, while Templeton was considering how to open up the matter of soot with Mrs. Trenchard, Eves suddenly began to sniff.

"Is that a smell of soot?" he said. "Does the chimney need sweeping, Mrs. Trenchard?"

"There now!" exclaimed the farmer's wife, a comfortable-looking matron some years younger than her husband. "If I didn't say to Trenchard I was sure the noses of you London gentlemen would find it out! Us country bodies don't notice it, bless you."

Eves grinned.

"'Tis true," the good woman went on; "it do need the brush. But there, what can you do when the milingtary takes the only sweep in the village and makes a soldier of him? I declare I didn't know him, he was so clean. 'Tis a strange thought: the war makes men clean and chimneys dirty."

"And takes away my appetite," said Eves, with his mouth half full of bacon. "Look here, Mrs. Trenchard, you're going to market to-morrow morning; why

shouldn't we sweep the chimney for you while you're away? I'm sure Templeton and I could do it, and we'd like to, awfully."

"'Tis very kind of you, that I will say; but I couldn't abear to think of you dirtying yourselves."

"Oh, that's nothing. We get dirty enough on the farm."

"But that be clean dirt, not like the bothersome sut. Besides, there's no chimney brush and no rods."

"Quite unnecessary," declared Eves. "Templeton has invented a new way of sweeping chimneys, haven't you, Bob?" He gave him a kick under the table. "You've no idea what a lot of useful notions he's got in his head."

"Well now, did you ever?" said Mrs. Trenchard. "Do 'ee tell me all about it, Mr. Templeton."

"To-morrow, Mrs. Trenchard," said Eves, hastily. "You see, it's quite new, and hasn't been properly tried yet. An inventor never likes to talk about his inventions until he's proved they're a success."

"Ay sure; he's in the right there," said Mr. Trenchard.

"I knew you'd agree," said Eves. "Well, then, we've settled that we sweep the chimney while you're out, Mrs. Trenchard, and we'll tell you all about it when you get back. You'll be delighted, I assure you."

When they went up to the room they shared, Templeton turned upon his chum a face of trouble, and began:

"Look here, old man, it isn't right, you know. You know very well I have not invented a way of——"

"Hold hard! You don't mean to tell me you haven't got it all cut and dried?"

"Well, when you began gassing, of course I had to think of something to save my face."

"I knew it! The idea was there; it only wanted switching on, like electricity. What's the scheme?"

"Still, I don't think you ought——"

"The scheme! Out with it."

"Well, I thought we might get on the roof with a long cord, with weights and a bundle of straw tied to one end, and jerk it up and down inside the chimney."

"And the soot falls, and great is the fall of it! Splendid! Couldn't be better. We'll have a ripping day to-morrow."

Next morning, soon after breakfast, Mrs. Trenchard set off for the market town, driving one of the light carts herself. The farmer went off to his mangold fields; the maids were busy in the dairy across the yard; and the inventors had the house to themselves. The simple materials they needed were easily obtained, and within an hour the novel sweeping apparatus was ready. It had been decided that Templeton should climb to the roof, while Eves remained in the room to see

how the invention succeeded.

Only when he was left to himself did it occur to Eves that something should be hung in front of the fireplace to prevent the soot from flying into the room, as he had seen done by professional sweeps, and he ran to the potato shed to find an old sack or two that would answer the purpose. While he was still in the shed, a man entered the yard and looked cautiously around. He was a strange figure. A straw slouch hat, yellow with age, covered long, greasy black hair. His long, straight upper lip was clean shaven, but his cheeks and chin were clothed with thick, wiry whiskers and beard. He wore a rusty-black frock-coat, grey trousers very baggy at the knees, and white rubber-soled shoes. It was none other than Philemon Noakes, the owner of the village store, grocer, oilman, draper, seedsman—a rustic William Whiteley.

Seeing no one about, he approached the farmhouse, walking without once straightening his legs, glanced in at the open door, then round the yard, and, after hesitating a moment, entered the room. Mr. Trenchard's desk, open and strewn with papers, stood against the wall to the left. Noakes walked to it, and had just bent down, apparently with the object of looking over the farmer's correspondence, when a muffled sound from the neighbourhood of the fireplace caused him to start guiltily and turn half round.

At that moment Eves, carrying a couple of sacks, arrived at the door. Seeing the man start away from the desk, he stepped back out of sight to watch what was going on.

Noakes, as if to resolve a doubt or satisfy his curiosity, crept across the room, doubled himself, and looked up the chimney. There was a rattling sound, and Noakes was half obliterated in a mass of soot, clouds of which floated past him into the room. Hatless, choking, rubbing his eyes, he staggered back.

[image]

"THERE WAS A RATTLING SOUND, AND NOAKES WAS HALF OBLITERATED."

"I say, Mr. Noakes, what *are* you up to?" said Eves, entering with the sacks. "What a frightful mess you're in!"

"'Tis your doing," spluttered Noakes, shaking the soot from his clothes. "'Tis you, I know 'tis, and I'll—I'll——"

"Gently, Mr. Noakes, don't be rash. Why you should accuse me when I'm perfectly innocent—you've hurt my feelings, Mr. Noakes."

"What about my feelings?" shouted the angry man. "'Tis a plot betwixt you

and t'other young villain, and——"

"Really, Mr. Noakes, with every consideration for your wounded feelings, I must say I think you most insulting. Who on earth was to know that you'd be paying one of your visits just at the moment when the chimney was being swept, and would choose that very moment to look up the chimney? You surely didn't expect to find Mr. Trenchard there?"

Noakes glared; at the same time his eyes expressed a certain uneasiness. How much had this smooth-spoken young ruffian seen? Picking up his hat he shook the soot from it, rammed it on his head, and strode to the door. There he turned, shouted, "You've not heard the last of this," and hurried away.

When Templeton came in a minute later he found Eves sitting back in a chair, shaking with laughter.

"My word, what a frightful mess!" exclaimed Templeton. "I forgot all about a covering. It's nothing to laugh at."

"Oh, isn't it! If you'd only seen him, soot all over his greasy head, and the more he rubbed his face the worse it got."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Old Noakes. It's a priceless invention, Bob. Great minds don't think of little things, but *I* remembered the covering and fetched these two sacks. When I got back Noakes was here, prying into Trenchard's papers. But I fancy he heard a sound, for he went over to the chimney, and then—by George! you've missed the funniest sight ever seen. He's only just gone, in a most frightful paddy."

"I don't wonder. Don't see anything funny in it myself. I called down 'Are you ready?' and if you'd been here as we arranged it wouldn't have happened."

"Of course it wouldn't, and old Noakes wouldn't have been jolly well paid out for sneaking. What's he want nosing about at a time when he thought every one was out? Trenchard must be told."

"I don't know about that, but I do know we'd better clear up this mess before Mrs. Trenchard gets back."

"Or she'll think precious little of your invention. It's a great success, anyway; you've got more soot than you expected. And old Noakes carried away a lot."

III

In Mrs. Trenchard's absence there was to be no midday dinner. After clearing

up the mess with the assistance of one of the dairy-maids (who called it "a rare messopotamia as anybody ever did see"), the two lads went to join the farmer at lunch in the fields.

"That there invention, now," said Mr. Trenchard. "Hev it worked?"

"Splendid!" said Eves, emphatically. "We've got two good sacks of soot and scared a slug."

"It don't take a mighty deal to do that, sir," said the farmer with a smile. "I'll find that soot useful, and I'm much obleeged to 'ee, to be sure."

"Oh, but, Mr. Trenchard, could you spare me some?" said Templeton.

"For another invention," Eves added. "He's got a jolly good idea for protecting our ships from the U-boats, and soot's in it."

"As much as you do want, surely. I'd gie more'n a little to scrimp them there engines of iniquity."

"And perhaps you could help me with something else," said Templeton. "I want a sort of metal box; any old thing would do, something that's no good for anything else."

"I can find 'ee summat, I b'lieve. There be an old tank in the shed behind the dairy, where I keep th' old tricycle."

"A tricycle!" exclaimed Eves. "What about that for number four, Bob?"

"The very thing! Will you lend it or sell it, Mr. Trenchard?"

"I'll take no money from a young gent as is inventing for his country, danged if I will. 'Tis a old ancient thing that I bought five-and-twenty year ago for me and the missus."

"A sociable!" cried Eves. "We are in luck's way."

"'Tis called such, I b'lieve," said the farmer. "Ay, 'tis many a year since the missus and me went gallivanting about the country. She were a nesh young maid then, so to speak it; you wouldn't think it to see the size she've growed to. I've kep' th' old thing for the sake o' them gay young days."

"If you can spare us this afternoon, I'd like to experiment with it," said Templeton.

"Surely, and welcome, and I hope 'twill serve 'ee."

Hurrying back to the farmhouse they drew the tricycle from the shed and tried its paces over the yard. It was rusty and stiff, but a little oil eased the parts, and Templeton was delighted with his number four. The tank of which Mr. Trenchard had spoken was made of galvanised iron, and had several holes pierced in each side.

"The very thing!" cried Templeton. "We'll make some more holes at different heights, Tom."

"What for?"

"My idea is to rig up some trays inside the tank, one above another; there

are several old sheets of iron lying about. They'll hold the soot and combustibles."

"By George! we forgot to ask Mother Trenchard to bring some firelighters."

"Never mind about them for the moment. We'll bore holes just above the trays, and put in some straw soaked in paraffin, and light it. Then when we start there'll be a fine draught through the holes."

"Splendid! But shan't we be fairly choked?"

"Of course we'll rig up the tank behind us; the smoke will all blow back."

Eves eyed the tricycle dubiously.

"It'll be the dickens of a job to fix this heavy tank," he said.

"Oh, we'll manage it. There's plenty of wire about, and we can hunt up something that will do for stays."

They worked energetically all the afternoon. Templeton's patience and ingenuity triumphed over all difficulties. The tank slipped off several times, but at last it was firmly fixed with an elaborate arrangement of stays and wire, and when Mrs. Trenchard returned, between five and six o'clock, she beheld her guests careering round the farmyard, making a trial trip.

"Well, I never did see!" she exclaimed, pulling up the horse at the gate. "Whatever hev happened to the old tricycle?"

Eves waved his hand gleefully.

"Splendid!" he cried, as Templeton halted the machine beside the cart. "A new invention, Mrs. Trenchard."

"'Tis like the butcher's contraption I saw in the town, only the box is behind instead of afore. What be the hidden meaning of that, I'd like to know?"

"It won't be hidden long, Mrs. Trenchard. But the sun will be hidden; there'll be an eclipse to-night."

"Go along with your rubbish, Mr. Eves. The sun will go down at his proper time, whatever the clocks do say; they Parlyment men up along at Lunnon can't make no eclipses, don't think it."

"Templeton means to; don't you, Bob?"

"He *does* talk rubbish, Mrs. Trenchard," said Templeton, earnestly. "All that he means is that we're going to try making a thick smoke, to see if we can hide our ships from the German submarines."

"Well, never did I hear the like o' that! You'll need a powerful deal o' smoke, Mr. Templeton."

"Of course, this is only experimental, on a very small scale. If it succeeds——"

"He'll be rolling in wealth, and you shall have a new bonnet, Mrs. Trenchard," said Eves.

"Ah, me! That do remind me of my boy Joe, to be sure; allers a-going to be rich and gie me a new bonnet. And now, poor boy, he's in them there horrible

trenches, and the rats——"

"Cheer up, Mrs. Trenchard," said Eves, hastily, spying a tear. "I'm sorry for the rats, from what you've told us of Joe. I'm sure you want your tea after your long day. We want ours, I can tell you; and after tea, Templeton will give you a demonstration of this splendid invention. I say, Bob," he added, when Mrs. Trenchard had gone into the house, "while they're making tea there'll be just time for you to cut down to the village and buy some firelighters at old Noakes's. I don't suppose he'd serve me. Hurry up."

Mr. Trenchard returning from the fields a few minutes later, Eves unburdened himself.

"I say, Mr. Trenchard," he said, "when I told you we scared a slug, I didn't mean one of those small slimy things, you know. I meant Mr. Noakes. I caught him poking his nose into your papers this morning. I think you ought to know."

"Do 'ee tell me that, now?" said the farmer, looking distressed.

"Honest Injun. He was over at your desk when we were sweeping the chimney, and the fact is, he got a mouthful of soot and went away fuming."

"I'd never have believed it, and him a chapel member," said Mr. Trenchard. "Don't 'ee go for to anger Mr. Noakes, sir, med I beseech 'ee."

"All right. I dare say he'll keep out of our way. Of course, if he's a friend of yours——"

"I wouldn't say that, sir, but as the Book do say, 'as much as lieth in you, be at peace wi' all men.'"

"Jolly good idea! If the other chap won't be at peace with you, then you must go for him. Splendid!"

After tea they made their first trial at smoke production. Placing a layer of soot on each of the trays, with a couple of fire-lighters in the midst, they lit some straw soaked in paraffin, poked it through the holes, and began to treadle the machine round the yard, the farmer and his wife looking on at the door. A considerable volume of smoke poured out of the tank, but when they pulled up, Mr. Trenchard said:

"'Tis a noble beginning, to be sure; but I own, so to speak, I could allers see that there tank through the smother, and if I understand your true meaning, that hadn't oughter be."

"Quite right," said Templeton. "We want more of a draught, Tom. Larger holes and greater speed."

"Righto!" said Eves. "Will you chisel the holes larger? Then we might start on a real cruise—down the hill to the village, say. You can't work up much speed in the yard. What do you think of it, Mrs. Trenchard?"

"I know why my chimney wanted sweeping so bad, Mr. Eves. Ay sure, ye're just as full of mischief as my Joe."

Half an hour's work with a chisel and hammer sufficed to enlarge the holes. They then filled up the trays with more soot and firelighters, kindled a fire, and when the smoke began to surge, ran the machine out at the gate on to the high-road. A winding hill, nearly half a mile long, led down to the village. The slope was not very steep; the tricycle with its tank was heavy, and the bearings rusty; but by dint of hard pedalling they soon worked up a good speed, and the increased draught caused the smoke to pour forth in a dense cloud, ever increasing in volume and pungency.

Meanwhile in the village young Noakes had noticed the first issues of smoke, and ran into his father's shop shouting:

"Feyther, feyther, Farmer Trenchard's ricks be afire!"

Noakes, in a state of great agitation, rushed to the door in his apron, glanced up the hill, and cried, excitedly:

"Fire, fire! Run and rouse up the neighbours, Josiah. 'Tis a matter o' hundreds o' pounds. Fire!"

The boy set off through the village at a frantic run, shrieking "Fire!" at the top of his voice. Out rushed the baker in his singlet straight from the oven; the butcher in blue with his chopper; the smith from his forge, rolling up his leather apron; the agricultural labourers, smoking their after-tea pipes; the village constable in his shirt-sleeves. The little street filled with women and children, the latter flocking to the shed where the village fire manual was kept, and towards which the tradesmen, members of the volunteer fire brigade, were hastening. Waiting only to don their helmets, the men dragged the clumsy machine forth, Noakes being the most energetic, and began to drag it up the hill, the children following in a swarm.

"It do seem out a'ready, sonnies," said the smith, before they had gone many yards.

"That's true as gospel," said the baker. "Do 'ee think I med go back to my dough, neighbours?"

They came to a halt. It was the interval during which Eves and Templeton were overhauling and restocking the machine.

"'Tis a mercy for Trenchard," added the smith.

"A merciful Providence," murmured Noakes, the lines of anxiety disappearing from his face. "Run up along and tell neighbour Trenchard how we all do heartily rejoice, Josiah."

The boy started, but the moment after he had turned the first corner he came rushing back with his eyes like saucers.

"Feyther," he yelled, "fire bain't out. 'Tis blazing worse, and ricks be ramping down along like giant Goliath!"

"'Tis a true word, save us all!" cried the baker. "What in the name——"

"Now, sonnies, haul away," cried the smith. "Ricks hev staddles but no legs, as fur as I do know. 'Tis the wind blowing the smoke down along. Now, all together."

The windings of the road, and the hedges on each side, prevented them from getting a clear view of this singular phenomenon. All that they were aware of was a dense cloud of black smoke approaching them very rapidly. They had just restarted the manual engine when, round the bend just ahead, the tricycle shot into view with a huge trail of smoke behind it.

"Sakes alive!" gasped the smith.

The children yelled, and fled down the road. The men, after an instant's dismayed irresolution, scattered up the banks into the hedges, leaving the engine standing half across the road. Noakes, on whose face a dark flush had gathered as he recognised Eves, backed into a hazel and flourished his fists.

Templeton, who was steering, tried to turn the machine into the hedge before it reached the manual. But he was a shade too late; the off wheel fouled the engine; the tricycle spun round; its riders were flung into the hedge, and the trays, parting company with the tank as it overturned, were distributed in several directions, bestowing a good portion of their noisome contents impartially among the members of the fire brigade.

[image]

"ITS RIDERS WERE FLUNG INTO THE HEDGE."

The inventors picked themselves up, rubbed their elbows, and approached the discomfited villagers, who, coughing and spluttering, were now descending into the road. Templeton looked serious; Eves wore a broad grin.

"Really, I'm extremely sorry," began the former.

"Sorry be jowned!" shouted the baker. "Sorry won't clean my hands, and my dough a-spoiling."

"'Tis rank pison!" cried the butcher.

"Assault and battery and attempted murder," shrieked Noakes, furiously. "Wi' my own firelighters!"

"Let us discuss it calmly," said Templeton. "No one can regret more than I the—the inconvenience to which you have been put, quite without intention, I assure you——"

"But the fact is," Eves interposed, pointing to the manual, "you were on the wrong side of the road. Constable, I appeal to you."

The constable, who had left his fire helmet in the hedge, scratched his head,

the villagers looking at him expectantly.

"Well, neighbours all," he said, slowly, "the law's what it is, and I'm not the man, being sworn in my office of constable—'t ud be high treason or worse to gainsay it. And I don't care who the man is, that there manual be on the right when the law says it oughter be on the left, and no true man can deny it."

"That's for horses and carts, for horses and carts," fumed Noakes.

"As a man I respect you, neighbour Noakes," said the constable, solemnly, "but as a officer of the law I say you don't know nothing about it. The manual's a vehicle; well, then, the law's no respecter of persons, and what be law for a horse and cart be law for a manual; ay sure, for a baby's pram, if so be a pram was in custody."

"That's all very well," said the baker, "but what's the law say about foul smoke? Tell us that, constable."

"Foul smoke be from factory chimneys; t'other smoke bain't foul."

"Of course not," said Eves. "You've got the law at your finger-ends, constable. The penalty for being on the wrong side is a heavy fine, isn't it?"

"That depends on whether 'tis Squire Banks or Sir Timothy on the bench, sir."

"Well, my friend won't prosecute, I'm sure. And when I tell you he was trying a new invention for beating the Germans, you'll be sorry you've ruined it through being on the wrong side of the road."

"Wish we'd knowed that afore, sir," said the smith. "The truth on't is, we thought 'twas Farmer Trenchard's ricks afire."

"And like true Britons you rushed to help your neighbour. Splendid! I'll tell Mr. Trenchard how promptly the brigade turned out; he's very lucky in having such good friends."

"Speaking for us all, sir——" began the smith.

"Not for me," Noakes interrupted, savagely.

"Hear what the man hev got to say, neighbour Noakes," said the baker. "Mebbe I won't agree with him myself, but I'm not the man to say so afore he's hawked it out."

"Speaking for us all," the smith went on, "I'm certain sure there's not a man of us but hopes the gen'lman's invention bain't ruined out and out. Anything as will beat the Germans hev our hearty good wishes, eh, souls?"

"Hear, hear!" cried the butcher.

"There, neighbour Noakes, you was too primitive," said the baker, reprovingly. "'Tis a good cause we suffer in, and I'm not the man to complain. And speaking for us all, I say three cheers for the young gen'lman."

The cheers were given, Noakes dissenting. Eves shook hands with them all round, Noakes excepted. Then he helped them to right the manual, and gave

them a genial good-bye as they trundled it off.

"We've had a ripping day, Bob," he said, mopping his brow. "The smoke was splendid—a first-rate stink. Old Noakes's face was a picture."

He laughed heartily.

"I'm afraid the tricycle is crocked for ever," said Templeton with a gloomy look, "and I don't approve——"

"Oh, pax! You can pay Trenchard for the old thing out of your tenner; and you're jolly ungrateful. If I hadn't chipped in they wouldn't have cheered you. Let's pick up the ruins and get 'em back somehow. Buck up!"

Mr. Trenchard received Templeton's apologies for the break-up of the tricycle very good-naturedly. He refused his offer to buy it or have it repaired.

"'Tis come to a good end, if so be your invention is a success," he said.

Templeton drew out a specification of his smoke machine and sent it to the Ministry of Munitions. In about a fortnight he received a formal letter of acknowledgment. But by that time he had almost forgotten the smoke machine, other ideas having absorbed his attention and activities.

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED

I

Mrs. Trenchard that evening, after a brief absence from the living-room, reappeared in her best flowered bonnet and a muslin shawl and announced her intention of going "just there and back." Her husband, who was reading the newspaper, looked up and nodded. Templeton was sketching out a specification, and did not hear what she said. Eves gave her a cheerful *au revoir* from the depths of the chair where he lay at ease, and smiled at her retreating form.

"'Tis like that, sir," said the farmer, catching his look. "'There and back' in our family do mean a gossip with Martha Runt."

"The wife of Runt the smith?"

"Ay, that be the woman. I've not a word to say against Martha—not a word; but she be a rare workman with her tongue. We shan't see no more of Mother

till supper-time."

He relapsed into his paper, and Eves stretched his legs and watched Templeton steadily pursuing his task.

Mrs. Trenchard returned a good hour before she was expected. Her rosy cheeks were flushed a deeper shade than usual; her bonnet was awry.

"I never did!" she exclaimed, pulling the strings into a knot. "No, never in all my born days, without a word of a lie in it—never hev I seed or heard no such goings on."

"What hev ruffled yer spirits, Mother?" asked the farmer, mildly.

"You may talk till yer throat be dry as a kex, Trenchard," cried the angry woman, "but you'll never make me believe as black's white—never!"

"What silly ass has been trying to, Mrs. Trenchard?" said Eves, sitting up. He had passed a dull evening.

"There's my boy Joe," she went on. "What did he do, though only a Territorial and not supposed to move a leg out of his parish? 'Mum,' says he—you heard un wi' yer own ears, Trenchard—"tis said here and there they want men in France. Seems to me I must go.' 'That heathen land!' says I. 'Ay, that's the place,' says he; 'we're all going.' And go he did, and what wi' the rats and the mud——"

"Now, now, don't 'ee carry on, Mother," said the farmer, seeing that his wife's eyes were filling. "Who've been vexing yer soul? And I don't care who the man is——"

"Man! He baint no man. He's a conscientious objection. You'd never believe it, Trenchard. When I traipsed down along to village, there was a crowd of a dozen or more by church gate, and, thinks I, 'They be talking o' young gentleman's invention'; but, coming up to them, no such thing; 'twas that lad of Noakes's holding forth, preaching peace as bold as brass."

"You don't say so, Mrs. Trenchard," cried Eves. "That little chap with the long hair?"

"No, no, Mr. Eves; little Josiah baint so gifted. 'Twas Noakes's elder lad, Nahum by name, as went away to work in Weymouth a year or two back, and now home he comes boasting of how he 'scaped the Army, and telling folks the war is wrong, and we be as much to blame as they Germans, and no one didn't oughter fight for their country, and a pack of rubbish. All fighting be against his conscience, says he—a pretty conscience, indeed, as growed sudden when the Lords and Parlyment said every man was a born soldier. Conscience! Why, Trenchard, you mind how he used to leather his feyther's horse; and many's the time I've seed un cuff and pinch his little brother till the poor soul hollered wi' pain. The likes of him! What them there tribunals be about in letting him off when good boys like my Joe, as wouldn't hurt a fly and haven't got no conscience—there, 'tis a scandal, and makes my blood boil, it do."

"Well, well, Mother," said Mr. Trenchard, "I'll go as fur's to say I agree with 'ee; but I wouldn't say a word against Mr. Noakes. He's a man of renown in the parish."

"The dickens he is!" ejaculated Eves, who had followed Mrs. Trenchard's story with the liveliest interest. Templeton, also, having finished his draft, had listened with his usual air of thoughtfulness.

"Judging by the price he charged for those firelighters," he said, "Mr. Noakes is a profiteer."

"Prophet neither here nor there, for all his Bible name, and his sons' likewise," said Mrs. Trenchard. "That there Nahum, coming here and stuffing his unnat'ral thoughts into the heads of our young fellers whose time be nigh come! There was Billy Runt, and young Pantany, and Tim Coggins, and such—oh! it did rile me, and I hadn't the heart to go there, so I comed home along. And bless 'ee, he be going to wag his tongue again to-morrow, and axed the boys to bring all their friends to hear un."

"Splendid!" cried Eves. "I say, Bob, we'll go. You can nobble the audience for Aunt Caroline."

This suggestion was not immediately accepted by Templeton, but in the privacy of their bedroom it bore fruit.

"This is rather serious, you know, Tom," he said.

"Broken a collar-stud, old man?" Eves rejoined.

"No; I mean this speechifying. It's not right for the fellow to turn the village boys against military service."

"Gas like that won't do much harm."

"But it may. It ought to be stopped. It's our duty to stop it."

"Jolly good idea! Start an opposition meeting and talk him down. Ripping rag!"

"I'm afraid I'm not up to that. You see——"

"Leave it to me, then. I bet I can rattle my tongue faster than Nahum Noakes. By George! Bobby, what an awful name!"

"You don't understand, Tom. It isn't talk that's wanted. The question is, is he sincere? If he is—well, what about free speech?"

"A free kick is more to the purpose. But what are you driving at?"

"Well, oughtn't we to find out if he really has a conscientious objection?—test him, you know? Mrs. Trenchard seemed to doubt it, and if he's a humbug he ought to be exposed."

"Just so, Socrates. I'll kick him, and see how he takes it. You can't take him to pieces like a clock, and examine his innards."

"That's the difficulty. Your idea won't do at all. You can't justify an unprovoked assault."

"I jolly well can. But I'm dead beat; pedalling that heavy old machine nearly biffed me. Sleep on it, Bob; perhaps you'll dream one of your bright ideas."

But in the morning Templeton confessed that he had slept as sound as a top, and hadn't given the matter another thought. Meditation during the day was not more fruitful, and in the evening, when they went down to the meeting-place opposite the church porch, Templeton had come to the conclusion that they had better hear what Noakes had to say, and act as circumstances seemed to require.

On the way they met Haylock, the constable, nodded to him, and passed on. After a few seconds, however, Eves ran back, saying:

"I'll catch you in half a tick, Bob."

Templeton strolled on, too busy with his thoughts even to wonder what his friend had to say to the policeman, or to notice the broad smile on Eves's face when he overtook him.

They found that the meeting had already started. A group of the male villagers, old and young, was gathered in a half-circle in front of a sturdy-looking fellow of some twenty years, who was perched on the churchyard wall. Nahum Noakes's appearance was that of an unusually robust clerk. His black hair was cut short; his straw hat was tilted back, showing a neat middle parting and well-oiled side-shows. He wore a pointed collar and a lilac tie; his grey flannel trousers were hitched up, revealing lilac socks neatly stretched above brown shoes.

"You want to know what I said to the tribunal?" he was saying as the two new-comers sauntered up. His accent was that of a countryman overlaid with a thin veneer of town polish. "I'll tell 'ee. 'Your name?' says the chairman. 'Noakes,' says I. 'Christian name?' says he. 'Nahum,' says I. 'Yes, your name,' says he. 'Nahum,' says I. 'Don't waste our time,' says he; 'what is your *other* name besides Noakes?' 'Nahum,' says I. You see, neighbours, I was taking a rise out of him. 'Is the man an idiot?' says he. 'No, he's not, and he knows his Bible,' says I. That was a good one, wasn't it? Well, there was a young officer there, only a lieutenant, but as stuck up as if he was commander-in-chief. Military representative, he's called, I believe. He had a paper in his hand, and he cocked his eye at it, and said: 'The man's Christian name is Nahum, I find.' 'Oh! ah!' says the chairman, fixing his eyeglass. 'One of the minor prophets. Well, Nahum Noakes, what are the grounds of your appeal?' 'I don't hold with fighting,' says I; "tis against my principles.' One of the tribunal, a little worm of a feller, pipes up: 'What would you do, my man, if the Germans landed?' 'I'd meet 'em as men and brothers,' says I."

"Was they yer principles when you cracked young Beddoe's skull for saying as you sanded yer feyther's sugar?" cried a voice from the outskirts of the crowd.

There was a titter; Mr. Noakes, who had been listening to his son's eloquence with a fond smile of paternal pride, scowled at the interrupter, Runt the

smith.

"Abuse is no argument, Mr. Runt," said Nahum, obviously nettled. "What happened years ago when I lived in the village is not to the point. Since I've been a resident in the town I've done a deal of deep thinking, I can tell you, and studied a lot of subjects you've never heard of——"

"Ever study phrenology?" asked Templeton, moving forward with Eves into the circle.

"Got it?" whispered Eves, eagerly.

"Perhaps," returned Templeton.

Nahum stared at his questioner. The villagers drew together, Runt winked at Coggins the butcher. Mr. Noakes looked annoyed, and stiffened his long, straight upper lip.

"You said?" began Nahum.

"I asked you if you had ever studied phrenology, the science of reading the mind through the skull."

"Well, I won't exactly say that I've been very deep into it, but——"

"Allow me," interrupted Eves, who had taken his cue. "Having only just returned to the village, you don't know my friend, Mr. Templeton, who has gone very deeply into loads of things, I assure you. Mr.—I think you said Nahum Noakes—you are really a splendid specimen for the phrenologist, and a little examination of your bumps——"

Nahum started back as Eves approached.

"It is quite painless, I assure you," said Eves, soothingly. "Mr. Templeton will only pass his hand gently over your head, and from the configuration of the cranium he will read your character like an open book."

"I don't think I need even touch your head," said Templeton. "If you will kindly just raise your hat—

"Give it a trial, Nahum," said Runt. At first puzzled, like the rest of the villagers, he had now risen to the situation, and was ready to lend his aid in its development.

"See if the young gen'l'man be right," added Coggins. "We all know 'ee, from a baby up'ard."

Half suspicious, angry at the interruption of his discourse, and still more at the sniggers of some of the younger members of the group, Nahum seemed to think that to acquiesce was the shortest cut out of his quandary. He took off his hat. Templeton stood in front of him, inspecting his head with the gravity of a judge at a cattle show. Nahum looked simply foolish.

Templeton moved slowly round, and leant on the wall to get a back view of Nahum's head.

"Yes, it seems genuine," he said at last. "I don't find the bump of pugnacity."

"Which means that he doesn't mind what you do to him?" said Eves.

"Just so. He's not a fighter."

Nahum's face cleared; his father shed a gratified smile around the group.

"Supposing some one pulled his nose?" Eves went on.

"He couldn't possibly resent it," replied Templeton. "It would be quite safe."

A loud guffaw from Runt brought a flush to Nahum's cheeks, and a scowl to his brow.

"I'd like to see any one try it," he muttered.

Instantly Eves shot out his hand, seized the somewhat prominent member in question, and pulled. Nahum sprang from the wall and hit out. Eves nimbly evaded the blow, and for half a minute dodged up and down like the matador at a bull-fight, pursued by the infuriate youth, who became only the more enraged as his clenched fists beat upon empty air. Shouts of laughter broke from the crowd. "Mind yer principles," cried the smith. "Gie un a larruping!" bellowed Mr. Noakes. Templeton looked worried.

At this moment the constable elbowed his way into the arena.

"Good now, gen'l'men," he said; "this be what the law do call a breach of the peace, and I'm not so sure but 'tis time to take 'ee both into custody for obstructing the police in the execution of his duty." He took Nahum's arm. "Come, come, sonny. I be surprised, and you such a man of peace as never was."

"Ay, and he axed the gen'l'man to pull his nose, he did so," said the smith.

"True, he said he'd like to see any one try it," said Coggins. "The gen'l'man only took him at his word—hee, hee!"

Aware now of the pitfall into which he had fallen, Nahum broke away from the constable, plunged through the crowd, and hurried away, followed closely by his father.

"A rare good randy, sir," said the smith to Eves, "but I hope Philemon won't make 'ee pay for it. Howsomever, Nahum's tongue won't wag no more, maybe, and that'll be for the good o' the nation."

"Another ripping day, Bob," said Eves, as he walked home with Templeton. "That idea of yours was splendid."

"I was quite serious," said Templeton.

"You always are, old man. But you don't mean to say you really meant to feel the fellow's bumps?"

"I did, till I funked the bear's grease."

"And there really is a bump of pugnacity?"

"Of course there is—combativeness, they call it. It's at the back, low down. The fellow hadn't got a trace of it. I really think——"

"You'll be the death of me, Bob. A fellow who lashed out like that not combative? Why, you can see it in his face—bully's written there as plain as a

pikestaff. It's jolly lucky you've got me to work out your ideas! Anyway, it was a good rag, well worth half-a-crown."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I tipped old Haylock half-a-crown to barge in if he heard a row. That leaves me four and elevenpence halfpenny."

A few days later Lieutenant Cradock, military representative at the county tribunal, rode over on his motor-bicycle and had a short interview with Constable Haylock. With the constable perched on the carrier he went on to Trenchard's farm, and found Eves and Templeton digging energetically along the border of a field. A conversation ensued, freely punctuated with laughter, and the officer rode away.

Next day a summons reached Nahum Noakes to attend an adjourned meeting of the tribunal. The chairman announced that an incident reported by the military representative hardly squared with the appellant's professions, and Nahum Noakes, passed A1, was handed over to the military authorities.

II

Spring and summer had been very dry, and Farmer Trenchard's fields, lying on a rocky upland, gave promise of but an indifferent harvest. The growth was thin, the stalks were short and yellow, the husks lean. The farmer had almost given up hope of his cereals, and his root crops could only be saved if the drought was soon broken.

On the morning following the affair of Nahum Noakes's bumps Mr. Trenchard was walking along the edge of one of his fields, looking disconsolately at the drooping upper-growth of the carrots. Eves and Templeton were hoeing some little distance away.

"Here's old Noakes," said Eves, suddenly. "Wonder if he's come to grouse about yesterday?"

Mr. Noakes, dressed as usual in his rusty frock-coat, but wearing a new straw slouch hat—his old one had not survived its bath of soot—was shambling up the field to meet the farmer.

"Marnen, neighbour Trenchard," he said.

"Marnen, Mr. Noakes," returned the farmer, with the air of timidity that

marked all his intercourse with his neighbour. The two men stood together, Noakes smug and self-satisfied, Trenchard downcast and almost humble.

"It do seem you'd be the better for a drop of rain," Noakes went on. "The ground be dust dry. Them there carrots baint no good."

"True; I'm afeared 'twill be a bad year wi' me."

"Well, we're in the hands of Them above," said Noakes, smiling and rubbing his hands slowly together. "The old ancient men of Egypt had their lean years and their years of plenty; we can't look for no different in these here end o' the world times."

"Ah, Mr. Noakes, I don't gainsay 'ee, but 'tud hev made all the difference to me, a good moist season. I be afeard I shall have to axe 'ee——"

"Not a word, neighbour. Sufficient unto the day, you know. Not but what 'tis a misfortune to 'ee, but things may take a turn."

He thrust his hands into his pockets and stood for a few moments scanning the fields; then after a word or two of a general nature moved away, without having appeared to notice the two boys.

"Cut dead!" said Eves with a grin. "A good thing too; I loathe the fellow. Poor old Trenchard will be wretched all the rest of the day. I wonder why he always looks so hang-dog when Noakes is about? He couldn't look worse if Noakes was his landlord and he couldn't pay the rent. And upon my word, Noakes has cheek enough for two. I saw him prodding the cattle the other day as if he owned 'em, or would like to. What do you think about it?"

"Eh? about Noakes? I wasn't thinking of him," said Templeton. "I was wondering whether we couldn't do something to help save the old man's crops."

"Well, old chap, if you can invent rain——"

"Don't be an ass. Of course I can't. But I don't see why we shouldn't irrigate, as they do in India."

"We haven't got an Indus, and the river down there is too far away, and below this level. You can't make water run up-hill."

"But there's the brook just at the edge of the field, behind that ridge. All we've to do is to divert it."

"My good man, it's miles below the top of the ridge. Besides, there's not much water at the best."

"There's enough. We should have to build a dam, of course. Then the water would collect till it rose to the height of the ridge and flowed over, and we could carry it over the fields through small drains. You see, the stream runs straight to the sea; there are no fishing rights to consider, and it's not used for mills or anything of that sort."

"A jolly back-aching job, digging drains and what not. No chance of a rag. Still, the idea's good enough, and I'd like to see old Trenchard more cheerful. You

had better see what he says about it."

The farmer was so much preoccupied with his gloomy thoughts that he scarcely appreciated at first the nature of the service which Templeton offered to render. This, as Eves pointed out afterwards, was partly due to Templeton's manner of broaching the subject.

"Your jaw about irrigation and the Punjab was enough to put him off it," said Eves, who was nothing if not frank. "Of course, the old countryman didn't understand; he understood right enough when I chipped in. There's nothing like what old Dicky Bird, when you do a rotten construe, calls *sancta simplicitas*."

Between them they managed to explain the idea to Mr. Trenchard, and to win his assent. Indeed, the chance of saving his crops had a magical effect on his spirits.

"It do mean a mighty deal to me," he said; "more'n you've any right notion of. I wish 'ee success, that I do."

They started work on the following morning. From the rocky banks of the stream they rolled down a number of stones and boulders and piled them in the channel to the height of the ridge, forming two adjacent sides of a square. Then up stream they cut a quantity of brushwood, which, being set afloat, was carried by the water against the piled-up stones. This occupied them the whole day, and they left for the next the final operation—the digging of earth to stop up the interstices through which the water still flowed away, and the carrying of it in wheelbarrows to its dumping places.

It was while they were digging that Lieutenant Cradock arrived to interrogate them about the conscientious objections of Nahum Noakes. About half an hour after his departure Nahum's father appeared on the scene, breathless from hurrying up the hill from the village. He had pumped Constable Haylock, who was a simple soul, and had learnt enough about the recent interview to feel a gnawing anxiety as to the fate of his beloved Nahum. He was hatless, and wore his apron, with which he wiped the shining dew from his face as he stood watching the diggers.

"Marnen, gen'l'men," he said, presently, in the tone of one who would be a friend. "'Tis warm work 'ee be at, surely."

"A warm day, Mr. Noakes," said Templeton, resting on his spade. Eves went on digging.

"Ay, sure, 'tis warm for the time o' year, so 'tis. Vallyble work; if there be one thing I do admire, 'tis to see young gen'l'men go forth unto their labour until the evening, as the Book says—earning their bread with the sweat of their brow. Ah, 'tis a true word."

Templeton was too modest to acknowledge this compliment. Eves went on digging. Mr. Noakes hemmed a little, and stroked his beard.

"Purticler such young gen'l'men as you be," he went on, "as hev gone deep into book learning and gives yer nights and days to high matters. That there finology, now; that be a very deep subjeck—very deep indeed; wonderful, I call it, to read into the heart through the head. Nobody 'ud never hev thought 'twere possible. And so correck, too; my boy Nahum, as peaceful as a lamb—you was right about that there bump, sir."

"He certainly hasn't got the bump of combativeness," said Templeton; "but——"

"Ah, yes, to be sure; he was a trifle overtaken with yer friend's joke, as any young feller might be; but I told un 'twas just a bit o' juvenile high spirits, and so he oughter hev took it. 'Let not the sun go down upon yer wrath,' says I, and bless 'ee, he smiled like a cherub next day, he did. That there bump be a good size on soldiers' heads, now? I warrant that young officer man as I seed down in village has a big un."

"I really didn't think to look, Mr. Noakes," said Templeton, patiently.

"Only think o' that, now, and I felt in my innards he'd come up along a-purpose. You didn't say nought o' finology, then?"

"Well, it was mentioned—just mentioned."

"And Mr. Templeton assured Lieutenant Cradock that your son hadn't the slightest prominence in that part of the skull," Eves broke in. "In fact, it's the other way about."

"Wonderful ways o' Providence!" said Mr. Noakes, rubbing his hands together and smiling happily.

"But I'm bound to say——" Templeton began.

"Come on, Bob; shovel in, or we'll never get done," Eves interrupted. "There's enough stuff dug; let's cart it down. We're trying an experiment in irrigation, Mr. Noakes."

"Ah! irrigation. It needs a dry soil, to be sure; it'll grow well here—very well indeed."

Eves smothered a laugh, and let Templeton explain. The explanation, strangely enough, brought a shadow upon Mr. Noakes's face. It darkened as he watched the dumping of the earth upon the dam. He was silent; his mouth hardened; and after a few more minutes he shambled away.

"I'm afraid we've given him a wrong impression," said Templeton, anxiously.

"Well, he shouldn't be sly. Besides, if he's ass enough to think 'finology' will go down with the tribunal, that's his look-out."

They worked hard through the rest of the day, and by tea-time the water had begun to trickle over the ridge in many little rills. It seemed, indeed, that there would be no necessity to dig the channels of which Templeton had spoken,

the slope of the ground and the natural fan-like spreading of the streams promising that in due time the whole field would be thoroughly watered. Tired, but well pleased with the success of their experiment, they returned to the farmhouse.

Mr. Trenchard had been absent all the afternoon. At tea they told him what they had done, and he cheerfully assented to their suggestion that he should go with them to the ridge and see for himself their irrigation works.

It was dusk when they started. The ridge was at an outlying part of the farm, and as they strolled across the intervening fields Eves suddenly exclaimed:

"What's that?"

Some hundreds of yards ahead, a whitish object, not distinguishable in the dusk, was moving apparently along the top of the ridge. In a few seconds it disappeared.

"That was one of they rabbits after my turmuts, I reckon," said the farmer. "Terrible mischeevious little mortals they be."

"I say, Bob," cried Eves, "we might have a rabbit hunt one of these days."

"We've a lot of other things on hand," said Templeton, dubiously. "You see, there's the tar entanglement, and——"

"There it is again," said Eves, pointing towards a hedge some distance to the left beyond the ridge. "Rabbits don't live in hedges, do they, Mr. Trenchard?"

"Not as a general rule," replied the farmer, cautiously; "but there's no saying what they'll be doing. He's gone again; we've frighted him away."

"Well, here you see what we've done," said Templeton. "The dam there holds back the stream, the water is forced to rise, and it's now finding its way over the ridge in many little rivulets which I daresay by to-morrow morning will have flowed right over the field."

"Well to be sure!" said Mr. Trenchard. "Now that's what I call a downright clever bit of inventing. And to think that there stream hev been a-running along there all the days of my life, and I never seed no use for un! 'Twill be the saving of my roots, young gen'l'men, and I'm much beholden to 'ee."

It was as though a load had been lifted from the old man's mind. He was more cheerful that night than his guests had yet seen him, and was easily persuaded to join them and his wife in a rubber of whist.

Early hours were the rule at the farm. By nine everybody was in bed but the two strangers. They were always the last to retire. About ten they had just undressed. It was a hot, sultry night; the bedroom, low-pitched and heavily raftered, was stuffy; and Eves, after blowing out the candle, pulled up the blind and leant out of the window to get a breath of what air there was. The sky was slightly misty, and the moon, in its last quarter, threw a subdued radiance upon the country-side.

"By George!" exclaimed Eves, suddenly; "there's that white thing again."

"What does it matter?" said Templeton, who was getting into bed. "We've got to be up early; come on."

"Come and look here, you owl. That's no rabbit. It's bobbing up and down, just where the dam is. I'll be shot if I don't believe some one's interfering with it."

This suggestion brought Templeton to the window at once. Side by side they gazed out towards the ridge.

"This is serious," said Templeton. "If it really is any one interfering with our work——"

"We'll nip him in the bud. Come on; don't wait to dress; it's quite warm. Get into your slippers. We'll go out of the back door without waking the Trenchards and investigate."

Two minutes later they were stealing along under cover of the hedge that skirted the field to be irrigated. Arriving at the ridge some distance above the dam they turned to the left, and bending double crept towards the scene of their toil. There, rising erect, they saw Mr. Noakes up to his thighs in the stream, hard at work pulling away stones and earth from the dam.

The water was already gurgling through.

"Hi there! What the dickens are you up to?" Templeton cried.

The man turned with a start, and faced them. He appeared to be undecided what to do.

"What are you about?" repeated Templeton, indignantly. "What right have you to destroy our dam?"

"What right!" said the man, indignant in his turn. He was still in the water, and, leaning back against the dam, he faced the lads in the misty moonlight. "What right hev you two young fellers, strangers in the parish, to play yer mischeevious pranks here? 'Tis against the law to interfere wi' the waterways o' the nation, and the Polstead folk hev their rights, and they'll stick to 'em. Ay, and I hev my rights, too, and I'm a known man in the parish. This here stream purvides me wi' washing water, and to-morrow's washing day. You dam up my water; I can't wash; that's where the right do come in."

"My dear sir," said Eves, gravely, "however much you want washing, and however much it is to the interest of your neighbours that you should wash, the interests of our food supply, you must admit as a patriotic man, are more important. Wash by all means—to-morrow, when the dam, having done its work, will no doubt be removed. For my part, I have a distinct bias in favour of cleanliness. If a man can't be decent in other things, let him at least be clean. There was young Barker, now, a wretched little scug who wore his hair long, and always had a high-water mark round his neck. My friend Templeton, of whose ingenuity you have seen proofs, had an excellent invention for an automatic hair-cutter. But I

am wandering from the point, which was, in a word, how to be happy though clean——"

Eves was becoming breathless. He wondered whether he could hold out. Templeton gazed at him with astonishment; as for Mr. Noakes, he looked angry, puzzled, utterly at sea. Once or twice during Eves's oratorical performance he opened his mouth to speak, but Eves fixed him with his eyes, and held up a warning hand, and overwhelmed him with his volubility.

"Yes, how to be happy though clean," Eves went on; "there's a text for you. Cleanliness is an acquired taste, like smoking. The mewling infant, with soapsuds in his eyes, rages like the heathen. The schoolboy, panting from his first immersion—my hat!"

The expected had happened. During Eves's harangue, the water had been eating away the pile of soil and rubbish which had been loosened by Mr. Noakes's exertions. Without warning, the dam against which the man was leaning gave way. He fell backward; there was a swirl and a flurry, and Mr. Noakes, carried off his feet by the rush of water, was rolled down stream. His new soft straw hat, which had betrayed him, floated on ahead.

Templeton sprang over the ridge and hastened to Mr. Noakes's assistance. For the moment Eves was incapacitated by laughter. Fortunately the stream was not deep, and after the first spate it flowed on with less turbulence. Templeton gripped the unhappy man by the collar, and hauled him up after he had been tumbled a few yards. Breathless, he stood a pitiable object in his frock-coat and baggy trousers, his lank hair shedding cascades.

[image]

"TEMPLETON GRIPPED THE UNHAPPY MAN BY THE COLLAR, AND HAULED HIM UP."

"A most unfortunate accident," said Templeton. "You see, by removing some of the stones——"

"Mr. Noakes, your hat, I believe," interposed Eves, handing him the sodden, shapeless object which he had retrieved from the stream. Mr. Noakes snatched it from him, turned away, and started downhill. Never a word had he said; but there was a world of malevolence in his eye.

"We had better get back and dress," said Templeton.

"What on earth for?"

"Well, we can hardly repair the dam in our pyjamas."

Eves laughed.

"You're a priceless old fathead," he said. "Repairs must wait till the morning. I can never do any work after a rag."

"A rag! But it was a pure accident, due to the idiot's own meddlesomeness."

"Most true; but it wouldn't have happened if I hadn't kept his attention fixed by the longest spell of spouting I ever did in my life. It was a ripping rag, old man, and now we'll toddle back to bed. The one thing that beats me is, what's his motive? He'd hardly take the trouble to smash our dam just to get even with us, would he? That's a kid's trick. There's something very fishy about old Noakes."

III

Templeton had not settled which among his many ideas to work at, when accident launched his imagination upon a new flight.

One day the village was stirred to unusual excitement. Two items of local news, following quickly one upon the other, gave the folk so much matter for gossip that the amount of work they did was reduced fifty per cent. The first was that Nahum Noakes's final appeal had failed; the second, that young Wilfred Banks, the son of Squire Banks, one of the local magnates, had been seriously injured by the fall of an aeroplane.

Mrs. Trenchard, having been "there and back," was full of the story.

"Ay me, to think of a nice pleasant young gentleman like Mr. Wilfred lying at death's door through one o' they dratted airyplanes! That venturesome he always was, as a little small chiel. 'Tis against Nature to try to fly like the birds, that's what I say, and what can you expect? The world do be turning topsy-turvy, and all through they Germans."

That night, just as Eves had turned over to sleep, he was roused by a call from Templeton in his companion bed.

"What is it?" he murmured, drowsily.

"I've got an idea," was the reply.

"Well, sleep on it, old man."

"You know very well that I can't get a wink till I see daylight."

"Then you've got about five hours. Good night!"

"Of course I meant a light on the problem; you're so literal. You see, the evolution of a perfectly stable machine——"

Eves interrupted with a groan.

"I suppose I must be a martyr," he said, "but I wish you'd arrange for your

ideas to come in the morning. Fire away! I'll keep awake if I can, but cut it short."

"You're a good sort, Tom. Really I'd like to know what you think of it. You see, an aeroplane ought to balance itself automatically, and I've got an idea for automatically adjusting the surfaces of the planes so that the machine will instantly adapt itself to gusts of wind, side-slips, and so on."

"Jolly good idea! Good night."

"Hold hard. You haven't heard the idea yet. My arrangement would be electric. Beyond the extremities of the frames I'd have a light framework on which an extension of the plane could be pushed out by a steel rod actuated by a small electric motor."

"I can go to sleep at once, then, because that won't work. It means more weight."

"No, no; we'll argue it out. Weight's becoming less and less important every day. Look at the weight of bombs an aeroplane can now lift. Anyhow, the point is that the motor would be controlled by the movement of the plane. A sphere moving in a horizontal channel would be affected by the slightest inclination of the plane. I'd arrange by a series of electrical contacts——"

"How?"

"I haven't worked out all the details yet; how could I? But the effect would be that the farther the sphere moved the farther the rod would push out the extension of the plane on the side required. And when the aeroplane had righted itself, the sphere would return to neutral."

"My sleepy brain is fairly dazed with your rods and spheres and the rest. Hang all that! The question is, would the extension idea work? Would the lengthening of the planes meet the case?"

"Of course it would. It's easily proved. All you want is a glider."

"Well, old man, the idea's ripping, and being a reasonable chap, you'll agree that you've got to go one step at a time. I don't say you're wrong, but treat me as a bit of a sceptic, who wants everything proved."

"Very well; I'm not unreasonable. We'll set to work and make a glider; then you'll see."

"Righto! Feel more easy now? Hope you won't wake in the night."

Templeton was just dozing off when from Eves there came:

"I say, Bob."

"What?"

"You'll have to cut into your tenner at last. Bye-bye!"

During the next week they did very little "work on the land." Farmer Trenchard, impressed as usual by Templeton's earnestness, allowed them as much leave as

they wanted, and they devoted themselves during the hours of daylight to the manufacture of a glider. A journey to the nearest town and the cashing of the £10 note furnished them with the wood and the textile fabric they needed, and Templeton had sufficient skill in carpentry to fashion two wings, light enough for his purpose, yet strong enough to sustain him. His funds would not run to an electric motor, but he thought that, for his first experiments, the lengthening rod might be actuated by stout cords running over pulleys.

The contrivance was finished after a week's hard work. Tested in the farmyard, the lengthening apparatus worked smoothly; it only remained to try it in the air. Templeton had already marked a suitable spot for the trial—a sloping field some little distance from the farm, too steep for cultivation, and occupied usually by cattle fattening for Coggins, the butcher. It was enclosed by a thick hedge except at the gate, and that was kept locked, and blocked with brushwood.

"I think perhaps we had better ask Coggins's leave to use his field," suggested Templeton.

"Don't do anything of the sort," replied Eves. "We don't want a crowd of yokels looking on. If the thing goes all right, you can invite the village to an exhibition."

The morning chosen for the trial was warm and still. No danger from gusts of wind was to be anticipated. Mounting the glider on two wheels from the old tricycle, patched up for the occasion, they wheeled it up to the field and managed with some difficulty to hoist it over the gate, after having cleared a way through the obstructing brushwood. At the far end a few cattle were peacefully grazing. The well-cropped hill was a smooth inclined plane of springy turf.

They carried the machine to the top.

"I bag first go," said Eves.

"No, I can't agree to that," said Templeton. "You see, though I'm pretty sure it will work all right, there's bound to be a certain risk, and as it's my idea I ought to test it."

"That's no reason at all. Cooks never eat their own cake. Besides, if there is an accident, much better it should happen to me than you. *I'm* not an inventor."

"I still maintain——"

"Oh, don't let's waste time. Let's toss for it. Heads me, tails you. A use for my half-penny at last. Here goes."

He spun the coin.

"Heads! There you are. Now fasten the straps on my shoulders, and give me a gentle shove off."

The glider was not fastened to the wheels, Templeton's theory being that, having been started on them at the top of the hill, it would almost at once gain "lift" from the air. So it proved. After a few yards it rose slightly; a little farther

on it was quite clear of the ground, and Eves, with legs bent and arms stretched out on the wings, enjoyed for a few brief seconds the exhilaration of aerial flight. Then, however, it began to tilt. Mindful of Templeton's careful instructions and the preliminary test in the farmyard, Eves tugged at the appointed rope, which should have thrown out an extension of the wing, and, according to Templeton's theory, have restored the balance. Unhappily the mechanism that had worked so smoothly before now proved treacherous. The machine swerved to the left, and crashed into a bramble-bush in the hedge at the foot of the hill.

Templeton rushed down in great agitation, sprang into the hedge regardless of scratches, unloosed the straps, and hauled Eves out.

"I say, you're not hurt, old man?" he asked, anxiously.

"I'm pretty well pricked, confound the thing!" said Eves. "The wretched cord jammed."

"But the theory's all right."

"Hang the theory! Look here, old man— Hullo, here's old Noakes."

Noakes, accompanied by a thick-set countryman in corduroys and leggings, had come over the crest of the hill just as the accident occurred, and run down almost on Templeton's heels.

"I've cotched 'ee," he cried, panting. "You're my witness, Ted Smail. Cotched in the act, the mischeevious young vipers. I'll have the law of un."

[image]

"'I'VE COTCHED 'EE,' HE CRIED."

"My dear sir, I don't think it has anything to do with you," said Templeton. "My friend, as you see——"

"Your friend, and you too, be a-trespassing on my field and a-ruining my property, and the law'll have something to say about that."

"Ruined a bramble-bush!" said Templeton.

"And the bush has ruined my clothes," Eves added.

"That there's my hedge, and you've been and knocked a hole in it, and——"

At this moment his tirade was suddenly interrupted by a bellow behind him. A bull, excited by the vagaries of the glider, had trotted up from the far end of the field to investigate, and further roused, probably, by Noakes's loud tones and waving arms, threw down its head and charged. The men scattered. Eves and Templeton made for the gate and vaulted over. Noakes ran one way, his friend another. The bull plunged straight at the glider, sticking in the hedge, and smashed it to splinters. Then it dashed after Noakes, who, seeing no other

outlet, flung himself into the ditch below the hedge and scrambled through the tangled lower branches only just in time to escape the animal's horns.

"We must offer to pay Noakes for the damage," said Templeton.

"Rot! We haven't done tuppence-ha'-penny worth; and how do we know it's his field?"

"I'm sure he wouldn't say so if it wasn't, and there's certainly a hole in the hedge. I'll just see what he says."

Noakes, hatless, dishevelled, and scratched, was coming towards them.

"I'm willing to pay any reasonable sum for damages, Mr. Noakes," said Templeton.

"Are ye?" replied the man with a grin. "I be main glad to hear it. You shall have the bill, don't 'ee make no mistake about that. But I won't take no money 'cept by judge and jury."

He passed on, and stood at the gate until his friend should find it convenient to join him.

Two days later Constable Haylock came to the farm, and, with an apologetic air, handed to Eves and Templeton each a blue document, summoning them to appear at the justice court to answer a plaint of trespass and damage on the part of Philemon Noakes.

"This is serious," said Templeton. "You see, we've no defence. We did break his hedge and disturb his tenant's cattle, as he says. I wonder what the penalty is?"

"A fine of £5, old man, I expect," said Eves, cheerfully. "Don't you worry; I did the damage, and I can't pay."

"I'm sure *I* can't. That glider cost £7 16*s.* 4*d*. I haven't half £5."

"Well, they'll give us seven days C.B., or whatever they call it, and you'll have to write to Aunt Caroline to bail us out. Jolly good idea! We'll be able to give her tips in food economy after a week of prison fare."

"It's no joking matter. She'll be upset; no Templeton of our family has ever been in prison."

"You don't say so! You'll make a record, then. Splendid!"

On the appointed day they appeared before the justice.

"'Tis Squire Banks's day," whispered Haylock as they passed him at the door. "He baint such a hanging judge, so to speak it, as Sir Timothy."

Noakes gave his evidence, Smail corroborated it, and Squire Banks asked the culprits what they had to say in their defence.

"It was like this, sir," began Eves, before Templeton could start; "my friend Templeton devotes a lot of time to trying experiments—working out ideas for

useful inventions. When he heard of that accident to a flying man the other day"—the old gentleman looked interested—"he kept me awake at night talking over an idea for making an aeroplane automatically safe. I confess I was sceptical, and it's my fault all this happened, because it was to prove his theory to me that he made a glider; it cost him over £7, sir; and we couldn't find a better place to try it on than that hilly field. I'm afraid I was clumsy; at any rate, the thing came to grief——"

"But the principle of it is quite sound," Templeton put in.

"But, of course, you're not concerned with principles here, sir, but only with law," Eves went on. "We didn't know the field belonged to Mr. Noakes, or I assure you we wouldn't have touched it with a pole, and as to damage, my friend offered to pay any reasonable sum."

"But didn't I understand that you caused the damage?" the squire interposed, his eyes twinkling. "That being the case, ought not the offer to pay have come from you?"

"I'm afraid it ought, sir; but—well, I've only got four and elevenpence halfpenny."

There were smiles in the court at this ingenuous confession.

"Well, Mr. Templeton offered to pay," the squire went on. "What then?"

"Mr. Noakes wouldn't hear of it, sir," Eves answered.

"Is that so, Noakes?"

Noakes had to confess that it was.

"Come, now, Noakes, brambles grow very fast, and any hedger will close the gap for eightpence. It's a trumpery matter. You young fellows can pay half-a-crown between you for the damage, and Noakes must pay his own costs; it's an unreasonable action. Call the next case."

"Jolly old trump!" said Eves as they went out. "And I'm jolly glad the old boy's son is getting better."

On reaching the farm, Templeton found awaiting him a letter from his aunt, written in reply to one he had sent her more than a week before. She explained the long delay by the fact that the letter had pursued her through three counties. "I am delighted to hear," she wrote, "that you have not yet spent *any* of the money I sent you. It shows great *strength of character*. You will be pleased to hear that my lectures are a *great success*. I expect to reach Polstead in about ten days, and I shall be so glad if you will do a little thing to prepare my way. My lectures are *thoroughly practical*; it is useless to talk about economical foods if the dear people cannot procure them. I want you to see Mr. Philemon Noakes for me; he is the *principal tradesman* in the village; and ask him if he will *very kindly* lay in a stock of certain *cheap* articles of which I will send you a list. A personal interview is so much more satisfactory than a formal letter, and you will find Mr. Noakes a

very civil and obliging person."

"My hat!" cried Eves, laughing. "What a rag! I'll come with you, old man."

Templeton looked worried.

A GAS ATTACK

I

Mr. Noakes made no further attempt to interfere with the irrigation of Farmer Trenchard's fields. The two lads repaired the dam, gave the parched ground a thorough soaking for two days and nights, then demolished the simple structure and allowed the stream to pursue its usual course.

Templeton, meanwhile, had been anxiously weighing the claims of the other ideas that jostled in his brain. He wanted to perfect his automatic hair-cutter; to experiment with what he called, in advance, a "levitator"—a contrivance for enabling an aeroplane to rise more rapidly; to test his notion of a tar entanglement, and various other sound schemes. Unfortunately the incomplete hair-cutter had been confiscated by his head master, and it would take weeks to construct a new one. The levitator was out of the question at present, for it would cost a good deal more than the two pounds odd which remained out of his aunt's gift. Several ideas were unworkable for the same reason, and he had almost resolved on the tar entanglement when, with that suddenness to which inventors are accustomed, a quite new idea shot into his mind.

He had been reading, in a war correspondent's dispatch, about the star shells and Verey lights which were used at night to throw a fitful illumination upon the hostile lines. Eves noticed that as he cleaned his teeth before going to bed he made frequent pauses, holding the tooth-brush motionless for some moments at a time.

"What's up, old man?" asked Eves, who was already in bed. "Got toothache?"

"No; I was thinking," replied Templeton, rubbing again. "You see——"

"But I can't hear through the bristles. Hurry up, or I shall be asleep."

Templeton finished his toilet, blew out the light, and got into bed, sitting up and clasping his knees.

"Those flash-lights, you know—they don't last long enough. What our fellows want is some continuous illumination."

"What about the moon?"

"You know perfectly well the moon doesn't shine for half the month."

"I thought perhaps you'd invented an artificial moon. But expound, old bird."

"Well, you know the prevailing wind in winter is from the west. Why shouldn't our men start relays of light balloons——"

"Balloons always are light."

"I mean light-giving balloons. They'd float over the German lines and illuminate their whole positions with a steady continuous light."

"The Huns would shoot 'em down."

"Not easily, for they'd be dark."

"Light and dark at the same time! Go on, Bobby; I'm sure you can prove black's white."

"If you wouldn't interrupt, you'd see. The illuminant would be attached to the balloon by a long cord, and there'd be a shade like a lampshade over it, so that the balloon itself would be in darkness. It's easy enough to try."

"How?"

"All you want is a dozen toy balloons, a few cubic feet of hydrogen, a slow match, and a little magnesium wire. There you have it on a small scale. Fill the balloons with hydrogen, tie 'em together, fasten a slow match and a bit of wire to each, light the match, and send the whole caboodle up."

"But magnesium wire only burns for a second or two."

"You really are an ass, Tom. We'd only use magnesium wire for our experiment; there are heaps of things that could be used with big balloons at the front."

"You mean to try it, then?"

"Of course. Old Noakes has some toy balloons."

"But what about the hydrogen? It doesn't smell, does it?"

"No. Why?"

"Only that I forget all my chemistry except the stinks. How do you make it?"

"By the action of an acid on a metal. Don't you remember Zn + H2SO4 = ZnSO4 + H2? Iron will do as well."

"That's easy enough, then. But you'll want retorts, wash bottles, pneumatic troughs, and goodness knows what else. Bang goes the rest of your cash, Bob."

"Nonsense! Mother Trenchard has some old pickle bottles, and we're not

out to make a specially pure gas. All we'll have to buy will be a little acid, a few feet of glass tubing, and a rubber cork or two. Four or five shillings will buy the lot. We shall have to go to Weymouth for them."

"Righto! That's a day off to-morrow."

The morning post brought a letter from Aunt Caroline enclosing a list of foods which she wished Mr. Noakes to stock. Templeton read it solemnly, and handed it to Eves.

"I say, Mrs. Trenchard, what do you think of this?" cried Eves. "Things Bob's aunt is going to lecture about, you know. Haricot beans——"

"They want a deal of cooking, Mr. Eves," said Mrs. Trenchard. "You must soak 'em overnight, and boil 'em hours and hours. I have my doubts whether the village folk can spare the time."

"Well, here's dried peas."

"Do 'ee think the women 'll use 'em dried when the shucks are full of green? What can Miss Caroline be thinking of?"

"Tinned eggs, then."

"Lawk-a-mussy, I was silly enough to buy one o' they tins once, and when I opened it—there now, never in my life did I come so near fainting afore, and me not a fainting sort, the smell was so terrible. If that be the kind of thing Miss Caroline's cook do give her, 'tis time I was back in my old place, that it be."

Eves laughed as he handed the list back to Templeton.

"There are a dozen more things," he said; "if they're all as good, old man, Aunt Caroline will get a shock when she's heckled."

"Bless 'ee, sir, and who'll be so bold?" said Mrs. Trenchard. "Folks 'll listen, ay sure, as meek as lambs; but buy them things—never in the world."

"Well, Bob, you must take the list to Noakes. You must do something for your tenner. Tell you what: I'll go to Weymouth for the chemicals and things. By the time I'm back you'll have seen Noakes and got the bottles and other things ready. Noakes wouldn't serve me, I'm sure."

So it was arranged. Eves hurried through his breakfast and just caught the carrier's cart that conveyed passengers to the junction. Templeton finished leisurely, and then, not much liking his job, walked down to the village to interview Noakes. As he came to the shop door he heard Noakes addressing a customer.

"No, I tell 'ee, you can't have no sugar without you buy tea and bacon."

"But 'twas only the day afore yesterday I bought my quarter of tea, sir," said a woman's voice, plaintively; "and I must have sugar to stew my plums for the children's dinner."

"Bain't no good you standing there whining about yer children. No sugar without t'other things; that's my last word to 'ee."

"Excuse me," said Templeton, entering the shop. "Is there a new order from the Food Controller? If I'm not mistaken, there have been several prosecutions lately of——"

"Now look 'ee here," cried Noakes, angrily, "I bain't a-going to stand no more nonsense from you. Who be you, I'd like to know, coming and ordering me about in my own shop?"

"Far from it, Mr. Noakes. I only wished to give you a hint that your customer is entitled to buy sugar without any conditions, and it's silly to put yourself in the wrong."

Noakes glowered and blustered, but previous experience of Templeton's determination had taught him a lesson, and ultimately he served the woman with a half-pound of sugar.

"I want half a dozen of those toy balloons," said Templeton.

"They bain't for sale," growled Noakes.

"Indeed! You hang them up as ornaments, I suppose. Perhaps you'll sell me some if I buy some sugar, say."

"Get out of my shop," cried Noakes, furiously. "I tell 'ee I won't serve 'ee, and I won't have you imperent young fellers in my shop at all, so now you know it."

Templeton shrugged his shoulders. Taking his aunt's letter from his pocket, he opened it, and said:

"There must be a mistake. My aunt says that the principal tradesman is a very civil and obliging person. You know her—Miss Caroline Templeton. She is coming down in a few days to lecture on food economy, and wants you to lay in a stock of various things of which I have a list. But perhaps she is referring to somebody else, and it's no good bothering you."

At the mention of Miss Templeton's name an uneasy look settled upon Noakes's face. He watched Templeton replace the letter in his pocket, then said hesitatingly, in a milder tone:

"When be the lady coming, sir?"

"In ten days or so, and as the letter was written some days ago, it may be under a week from now."

The look of uneasiness gave way to a smile. Noakes turned his back, and Templeton, resolving to have nothing more to do with the man, left the shop.

II

Thinking it probable that he might get some balloons at the nearest village about five miles away, Templeton set off to walk there. Eves would not be back till the afternoon; there was plenty of time. As he left the shop he met the man Smail, who had been in Noakes's company on the day of the experiment with the glider. The man leered at him and passed on.

When Templeton, unsuccessful in his quest, returned to the farm at midday, he found Mrs. Trenchard in a state of great agitation.

"Oh, Mr. Templeton," she cried, bursting into tears, "to think I've lived to see this day!"

"Why, what's the matter, Mrs. Trenchard?" he asked.

"He's there, sir," she nodded towards her husband's little den, "and 'tis ruin to us, and we'll have to go to work'us, and my poor Joe——"

"Come, Mrs. Trenchard, don't be upset. Just tell me all about it. Nothing has happened to Mr. Trenchard, I hope?"

"Only a broken heart, sir. Ah! if he'd only telled me afore! We've had bad times, as you know, sir; 'twas worse than I knew, and my poor man kep' it all to himself, so's not to worrit me. He went and borrowed money of Mr. Noakes, sir, to tide him over harvest. I don't know the rights of it; 'tis too much for my poor head; but by what I can make of it Trenchard signed a paper to say as if he didn't pay back the money by a certain time the farm 'ud belong to Mr. Noakes, and a week afore the time Mr. Noakes could put a man in to see as we didn't rob him. And he's in now, sir, in there—'tis Ted Smail, a rascal of a man as knocks his poor wife about. And what I'll do, Them above only knows."

"Can't Mr. Trenchard turn him out?" asked Templeton.

"'Tis the law, sir; Trenchard owned it all, poor man, and axed my pardon, he did, for bringing it on me. Ah! if he'd only telled me afore! A week's such a little time to get all that money. When he telled me, wi' tears in his eyes, I said, 'Now just you run up along to Lunnon and see your brother, as keeps a public-house and is rolling in money. He'll help 'ee, and I'll work myself to skin and bone to pay him back.' And he'd just time to catch the train at the junction, and if his brother be hard, as some be, there's nothing but the work'us for us."

"Cheer up, Mrs. Trenchard. Let's hope for the best. I'll talk it over with Eves when he gets back, and we'll see what can be done."

"Thank 'ee kindly, sir, but don't 'ee go against the law. The law be a terrible creature."

In the afternoon Eves returned with his purchases.

"There you are, old man," he cried, "acid, stoppers, and tubing. You've got the balloons?"

"No. I say, Tom, this experiment's off for the time; things here are in a deuce of a mess."

He gave an outline of the domestic troubles.

"Whew!" Eves whistled. "So that's old Noakes's game. That throws a flood of light on the old villain's doings. But we'll dish him yet. The first thing is to get this fellow Smail out of the place. That will make the old woman feel a little easier."

"I don't see how we can do that. Trenchard signed the deed or whatever it's called, and you may be sure that Noakes kept on the right side of the law."

"Well, let's go and see."

They opened the door of the farmer's little room, and beheld Smail lying on his back on the sofa placidly smoking a very rank tobacco. On a chair was a basket of provisions and several bottles of beer.

"I say, my man," said Eves, "your boots are rather dirty, you know."

Smail closed one eye and said nothing.

"Mrs. Trenchard doesn't like it, you know," Eves went on. "Don't you think you'd better go?"

The man was still silent. Eves mutely consulted Templeton. Smail was a big, thick-set fellow; a physical struggle with him might end in disaster.

"Look here, how much do you want to go?" asked Eves. ("I've got some change," he whispered to Templeton.)

Then the man spoke. Winking and waving his pipe, he declared, hoarsely:

"Here I be, and here I bide."

"We'll give you ten shillings," said Eves.

"Here I be, and here I bide."

"Oh, all right, bide away," said Eves, taking Templeton by the arm. "Rotten tobacco, ain't it, Bob?"

They returned to the other room and sat down.

"We can't starve him out," said Eves. "The beggar's got grub enough for a week."

"If we could only entice him out it would be all right," said Templeton, "because I believe I've read somewhere that a bailiff or whatever you call him can't legally force his way into a house."

"Well, only beer would entice that sort of bounder, and he's got plenty of that. He's a big hulk, but we *might* manage to chuck him out."

"Dangerous that. Even if we succeeded, we might find ourselves in court again."

Eves stuck out his legs and pondered. Suddenly he sat up straight.

"By Jove, I've got it!" he cried. "We'll stink him out."

"How do you mean? It would have to be a powerful stink to upset a fellow who can smoke that tobacco."

"Of course; and I haven't wasted my time in the lab, old man. I never took

any interest in chemistry till I learnt how to make stinks. What about H2S? The very thing. Splendid! We've got the acid; all we want is—by Jove! where can we get some iron pyrites? That means another trip to Weymouth."

"And you probably won't get it there."

"Hang it all; can't we make it some other way?"

"Wait a bit. Don't you remember old Peters making it once by boiling sulphur with tallow? And he told us you get a more steady flow of gas that way. We've probably got all we want on the premises. But how are you going to get it into the room?"

"We'll have to find a way. Let's go and investigate."

Inquiry of Mrs. Trenchard elicited the information that her store cupboard ran along the whole length of the room in which Smail had made himself at home. The wall between them was rather thick, but it would certainly not be impossible to pierce a hole in it.

"Splendid!" said Eves. "We can make the gas in the store cupboard, and pass it into the room through one of our tubes. Of course, we'll have to lock the man in."

"The gas won't drive him out of the window," said Templeton. "In fact, if he keeps that open the smell will never be strong enough."

"You may be sure the window won't be open. A fellow of that sort revels in fug. No doubt he'll take an afternoon nap to-morrow. That'll be our time. He'll wake up choking, and if I know my man he'll make a dash for the window and tumble out into the open—by the way, I suppose the gas won't actually poison him?"

"No; the worst effect, I believe, is sickness and dizziness. We had better start boring our hole to-night, when he's asleep. If we're careful he won't hear us."

"We must get Mother Trenchard to take out her stores. Shall we tell her why?"

"Better not. I'll just say we want to try an experiment."

Mrs. Trenchard somewhat reluctantly agreed to remove her stores for a short time. From her they obtained a quantity of tallow and a few sticks of brimstone, and in the privacy of their bedroom they broke up and pulverised one of the sticks, and boiled a little of the sulphur powder with tallow in a tin.

"Ripping stink," said Eves, putting his head out of the window. "It's going to work A1. We'll pound up the rest of the brimstone, and then wait for night. This is the stuff to give friend Smail. It will bring him to his senses right enough."

"More likely it'll take his senses away from him to begin with," answered his fellow-conspirator. "But it won't do him any real harm. Phew, what an aroma!"

After dark, when loud snores from the room proclaimed that its occupant

was asleep, they bored a couple of holes in the partition wall with a brace and bit obtained from Constable Haylock, who was something of a carpenter.

"I'll lend 'em to 'ee with pleasure, sir," he said when Eves requested the loan, "purvided 'tis for a legal objeck. As a servant of the nation, 'tud be my ruin if so be you was committing a felony."

"That's all right, constable," replied Eves. "We're only going to bore a couple of holes for Mrs. Trenchard."

After an hour's careful work there were two small holes in the wall, about six niches apart and a few inches above the floor, just under the sofa. Satisfied that all was now ready for the morrow's experiment, the lads went to bed.

Next afternoon Templeton assured himself, by a peep from the outside through the closed window, that Smail had settled himself on the sofa to sleep over his heavy midday meal. Eves then quietly opened the door, abstracted the key, and locked the door from the outside. Their simple apparatus was already fitted up in the store cupboard—an old saucepan over a spirit lamp, with two holes in the lid through which they had passed two lengths of glass tubing, the other ends of which projected slightly into the room. Their next move was to lock all the house doors, except one leading to the garden at the back. By this time they had found it necessary to tell Mrs. Trenchard what they were about, and she was rather timorously awaiting results.

"Whatever you do, Mrs. Trenchard, don't open the door to the fellow after we get him out," said Eves, impressively. "Templeton says he can't legally force his way in, so keep the doors shut and leave the rest to us."

Templeton lit the spirit lamp and closed the store-room door. In a few minutes the nauseating fumes of sulphuretted hydrogen stole through the cracks into the passage.

"Gracious goodness, we'll all be poisoned!" cried Mrs. Trenchard.

"No, it's quite harmless, I assure you, though rather horrid," said Eves. "Look here, Bob, you paste some strips of paper over the cracks while I go outside and see how things are getting on."

He went out of the back door, hastened round to the front, and peeped in at the window. Smail was sleeping on his back with his mouth open, one hand dangling over the side of the sofa. The gas being colourless, Eves had no evidence that the experiment was working until he put his nose to the lower sill and got a faint whiff of the fetid odour. Minute after minute passed, and there was no sign that the gas was having any effect on the sleeper. At last, however, he stirred, sniffed, and looked round the room. Then he got up, looked under the table, under the sofa, examined his basket of provisions, turned up on end two empty beer bottles. Seized with a fit of coughing, he made for the door, tugged at the handle, shouted, then dashed to the window, pulled back the catch, tumbled out,

and ran towards the front entrance.

Eves had slipped out of sight, but the moment the man's back was turned he ran to the window, sprang on to the sill, and braving the fumes, prepared to dispute any attempt to re-enter by the same way.

Meanwhile Smail was thundering at the front door, mingling curses with cries to be let in. At this signal that the experiment had succeeded, Templeton threw open the door of the store cupboard, extinguished the lamp, and asked Mrs. Trenchard to open all the inner doors and the upper windows, so as to clear the air.

Finding the front door closed to him, Smail returned to the window. Eves had now entered the room and stood at the window, holding a poker. Smail approached him, scowling and squaring his fists.

"Just you come out o' that, you young viper," he cried. "You've a-tried to pison me, and I'll have the law of 'ee. That there room's my room for now; 'tis the law; so get out."

"Here I be, and here I bide," said Eves, brandishing the poker. "Don't come too near, Mr. Smail. You know so much about the law that you'll be aware you're committing a felony if you try to force your way in. You don't want to go to quod again, Mr. Smail, I'm sure. Besides, I don't think your head's hard enough to stand a whack from this poker."

[image]

"'HERE I BE, AND HERE I BIDE,' SAID EVES, BRANDISHING THE POKER."

"I say, Tom, don't be violent," said Templeton, coming up behind him.

"I'm just explaining," replied Eves. "Cut down to the village, Bob, and fetch old Haylock. He'll expound the law to Mr. Smail."

Smail spluttered and cursed, but he was evidently doubtful on the point of law, and after standing irresolutely in front of the window for a minute or so he turned on his heel and shambled out through the gate.

"Splendid, old man!" cried Eves. "There's no law that I know against making a stink, and he went out of his own accord."

"That's all very well, but the important thing is, will old Trenchard be able to raise enough money to pay off Noakes? I wish Aunt Caroline were here. She'd be able to advise; she's had a good deal to do with lawyers, one way and another. If I knew where she was I'd wire her."

"Well, all we've to do at present is to keep Smail and Noakes out till the

farmer gets back. From what I make of it, Trenchard still has a few days' grace before his debt to Noakes becomes due, and anything may happen in that time."

III

They kept a close watch on the house all the rest of the day. At night all the doors and windows were bolted, and Eves took turns with Templeton to mount guard. The latter was by no means sure of the legal position; it might be that he was mistaken, and that a forcible entry would not be a breach of the law. The night was undisturbed, and next morning Eves, leaving Templeton to keep watch, went down to the village to consult Constable Haylock.

"Can a bailiff, or whatever you call him, force his way into a house?" he asked, meeting the constable near the bridge.

"Well now, that's queer, danged if it bain't," said the constable. "I've been axed that very same question a'ready this morning. It do seem there's debts and executions in the wind, and folks come to me, as stands for law and justice, to know their true rights."

"They couldn't come to a better man, I'm sure," said Eves. "Was it old Noakes who asked you?"

"Now, sir, if you axe me to tell state secrets, I couldn't do it—no, not for a judge or royal highness. I name no names; but I'll tell 'ee what I said to them as axed me, that being law for rich and poor. 'Force yer way in,' says I, 'and you would be imprisoned without the auction o' fine, 'cos the judge med bring it in housebreaking, or burglary if by night. But there be other roads to market,' says I. 'If so be you comes up quiet and finds some out-o'-the-way door as bain't the high road, so to speak it, into the house, and gets yer foot inside—well, there 'tis; if those inside tries to get yer foot out 'tis assault and battery, and the fine forty shilling.' That's what I said, and I make no boast, but I defy any man to give 'ee better law nor that, I don't care who the man is."

"By Jove! you're Solomon and Daniel rolled up together," said Eves. "You're a treasure, constable. By the way, don't say I asked about it. I'm rather hard up myself, but Mr. Templeton——"

"Not a word, sir, not a word. Maybe I'll meet yer friend up along one o' these days; he's a gentleman and will behave as such."

Eves's face wore a grin when he returned to the farm.

"Haylock's a priceless old ass, Bob," he said. "Noakes has been at him, and

he's given him a tip."

"Who's given who? Your pronouns are mixed up," said Templeton.

"Well, you don't suppose Noakes would tip Haylock; that's for you to do. What I meant was that Haylock has given Noakes a tip how to get into the house without breaking the law, and you may bet your boots we shall have Smail up again to-night. You know that narrow lane leading up to Trenchard's coal-shed? It's hardly ever used. Any one might come up there at night, and get in by the window of the shed. There's a door between the shed and the scullery, never locked, and Smail can easily get into the house that way."

"You don't mean to say that Haylock put 'em up to that?"

"Of course not; but he told Noakes that if he can manage to get into the house secretly when the inmates are off their guard they can't legally turn him out. Whether he's right or wrong I don't know, but you may be sure it was enough for Noakes."

"Haylock ought to have warned Mrs. Trenchard."

"But Noakes wasn't such a fool as to say what house he wanted to get into. He asked a general question, just as I did. Well, on the way up I had a ripping idea. Your tar entanglement—just the very thing."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, if it's good enough to stump the Huns in Flanders it's good enough to spoil old Noakes's game. Noakes is sure to think of the lane. We'll cover the ground with a layer of good runny tar some inches deep and a few feet square, and stretch a few wires across, and Messrs. Noakes and Smail will find themselves properly held up. I know the very place—just where the lane runs under the wall of the barn on one side and a prickly hedge on the other. They couldn't go round. Imagine old Noakes stuck fast in the tar, like a fly in treacle."

"Where's the tar to come from?"

"There's a barrel in the outhouse; Trenchard uses it, no doubt, for tarring his fences. We could melt that down, and it would keep sticky a long time this hot weather."

"But I don't see why we need take all that trouble. All we've got to do is to lock the door between the scullery and the coal-shed."

"Hang it all, where's your enterprise? Don't you see, you owl, we'd kill two birds with one stone? We'd teach old Noakes a lesson and test your idea at the same time. Imagine Noakes is a prowling Hun, coming at dead of night to surprise our unsuspecting Tommies, stealing along, all quiet—and slap he goes into the tar. Come, man, it's splendid."

Templeton came round to his friend's view, and they lost no time in making their preparations. The lane was apparently used only as a short cut from the high-road when coal was brought to the farm. It was just wide enough to allow

the passage of a cart, and even on a bright night was dark, owing to the tall hedge on one side and the high blank wall on the other. At its darkest spot, ten or a dozen yards from the house, Eves set to work to prepare the ground. He measured off a space about four yards long, and at the end farthest from the house dug the soft earth to the depth of four inches. Working back from this point, in the course of a couple of hours' diligent spade work he had made a shallow excavation in the lane, varying in depth from four inches to eight. Meanwhile Templeton had broken up the tar and melted it down in the small portable copper which the farmer used for conveying tar from place to place. They ladled the molten stuff into the excavation, filling up to the level of the lane.

"Hope they won't smell a rat—which is tar backwards," said Eves. "Perhaps the smell will have gone off a bit by the time it's dark. Tell you what, we'll cover it lightly with farm litter, and strew some more between here and the road; perhaps one smell will kill the other."

Last of all they carried two strands of stout wire across the lane, about half-way along the tarry patch, and three inches above its surface.

"Good!" cried Eves, surveying the completed work. "In the darkness they won't see a thing."

"Suppose they don't come this way at all?" said Templeton.

"You're a horrible pessimist. Is there a better way? Aren't all my deductions good? Well, then, cheer up, and see if you can manage to laugh when the flies are trapped."

About half-past nine (summer time) Eves and Templeton left the farmhouse by the front door. Mrs. Trenchard locked the door behind them, and they had previously assured themselves that all the other doors and windows were securely fastened. Each carried a shot-gun. Two guns were always suspended on the wall of Mr. Trenchard's den, and it had occurred to Eves that they might prove useful.

It was a dark summer night. There was no moon, and the starlight was too feeble to throw any illumination upon the tree-bordered high-road. The lads' intention was to walk down the road until they came to the lane, to hang about the entrance there until they discovered the approach of Smail, and then to take cover in the angle between the hedge and the road, behind the visitor.

They had hardly left the farm gate when Eves's quick eyes detected a small figure lurking in the shadow on the farther side of the road.

"Noakes has posted a scout," he whispered. "They're going to make the attempt. But this is awkward, Bob. We shall have to dispose of the scout; I fancy it's long-haired Josiah."

"I bar that," said Templeton, decisively. "I'm not going to hold up the young-

ster, or anything of that sort."

"All right; there's no need. Leave it to me."

They walked on, giving no sign of having seen the boy, who slipped behind a tree-trunk as they neared him.

"Yes, it's just the night," said Eves in a loud voice, as though continuing a discussion. "Just the night rabbits like. Slip round quietly to the wood; there'll be hundreds skipping about in the darkness. It's nearly a mile away; allow half an hour to get there and back, and an hour's sport; it'll only be eleven then—not so very late."

By this time they had passed the lurking scout, who must have heard all Eves said. A few yards farther along there was a turning on the right, leading to a small wood. Eves struck into this.

"Come on," he said to Templeton. "See if my strategy doesn't answer."

They concealed themselves in the hedge, and a few seconds later saw Josiah Noakes run down the road towards the village.

"There you are," said Eves. "Josiah's run to tell his father we're off shooting rabbits, and the coast is clear. To bring the guns was a bright idea, Bobby."

They waited until the boy was well out of earshot, then returned to the road, crossed it, and entered the lane on the opposite side.

Some twenty minutes later three figures were faintly discernible on the white road, coming up the hill.

"Here they are," whispered Eves. "They're bringing Josy to protect their rear. Now into cover!"

They crept through the hedge and waited. No footsteps sounded on the road.

"Wearing rubber-soled shoes," whispered Eves. "So much the better; the tar will stick."

Presently the voice of Noakes in subdued tones came to them.

"Now, Josiah, do 'ee stop here at the end of the lane, and if so be you see or hear any one coming up or down along, do 'ee run and tell us—quiet as a cat, mind 'ee."

"All right, feyther. I'll tell 'ee sure enough."

The men passed on. Smail sniffed.

"A powerful smell o' tar, Mr. Noakes," he said in a hoarse murmur.

"Mm'm," grunted Noakes. "Trenchard don't tar his fences till autumn. 'Tis some mischief o' they young varmints, belike. I'll tar 'em!"

"You be sure o' the law, Mr. Noakes? Young feller said summat about my being in quod *again*. How did he know I been in quod?"

"Quiet, Smail. I'll answer for 'ee, man. Now, you go for'ard, straight along. When you get into coal-shed, gi'e me a whistle."

"Not if I knows it. I can't get in that there winder wi'out being hoisted, and 'tis you must hoist me."

"Stuff and rubbish! Winder's low, and don't 'ee see 'tis best I shouldn't be seen, if so be the door inside's locked and you can't get in?"

The men had halted some yards from the patch of tar. Smail was insistent. Noakes declined to accompany him to the shed, and it seemed to the two watchers that matters had come to a deadlock.

"Now, Bob," whispered Eves, "we must give them a start."

He pulled back the trigger of his gun, causing a slight click.

"What's that?" murmured Smail.

"I didn't see nothing," returned Noakes.

"But I heard something."

"'Twas a bird in the hedge, then. My Josiah would have give us warning if he seed any one, and they young fellers be a mile away. Get on, Smail; ten shillings extry, man."

He took Smail's arm and led him, still reluctant, up the lane. They had just reached the edge of the tar when there were two loud reports from the direction of the hedge a few yards behind them.

Startled, they plunged forward, floundered through the first few feet of the tar, tripped over the wire, and sprawled at full length, more or less mixed up with each other, in the deeper end.

[image]

"THEY TRIPPED OVER THE WIRE AND SPRAWLED AT FULL LENGTH."

"Splendid!" whispered Eves. "Your tar entanglement is a great success, Bob. Let's get back; we can very well leave them there."

As they returned to the road they heard the rumble of cart wheels coming up the hill, and voices. The cart stopped.

"That's young Josiah speaking," said Templeton. "We had better wait and explain, Tom."

"All right, the cart's coming on again."

They reached the farmyard gate and stood waiting. The lamps of the vehicle fell upon their faces, and both started when a lady's voice exclaimed:

"Robert!"

"Aunt Caroline!" said Templeton in an undertone to Eves.

"And Trenchard!" cried Eves. "What luck!"

A ramshackle fly pulled up at the gate, and Mr. Trenchard assisted Miss Templeton to alight.

"What has happened?" asked the lady. "We heard shots, and a little boy came running down the hill crying that his father was killed. It is Mr. Noakes, Mr. Trenchard says."

"Quite a mistake, Aunt," said Templeton. "I *am* glad to see you. Come in; I'll explain. This is my friend Eves."

"Yes, yes; but the boy was greatly agitated. Run after him, Robert, and tell him that his father is *not* killed."

"My hat!" muttered Eves, with a grimace, as Templeton sprinted down the hill.

"What was it, Mr. Eves? I am greatly concerned that the little fellow should have had such a terrible shock."

"Well, Miss Templeton, I really—you see—oh, yes, it was Bob's tar entanglement, you know. But Mr. Trenchard has told you about old Noakes, I expect."

"Mr. Trenchard has told me things about Mr. Noakes that I cannot credit. But I do not understand—a tar entanglement, you said?"

"Yes, an invention of Bob's, you know; a splendid thing. But there's such a lot to tell: won't you go into the house? Then Bob and I can tell you between us."

"Very well. Give the driver ten shillings for his fare."

"I've only four and elevenpence half-penny," said Eves, with a smile.

"Dear me! Then I must ask the driver to come to the house. My notes are in my dressing-case. One cannot be too careful."

By the time Miss Templeton had found her money and paid the driver Templeton was back.

"It's all right, Aunt. The boy is going home with his father."

Eves grinned.

"Oh!" said Miss Templeton. "Now, as Robert is out of breath, perhaps you will be good enough, Mr. Eves, to run down and tell Mr. Noakes that I desire to see him here, without fail, at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

Eves threw a melancholy look at Templeton as he departed.

Mrs. Trenchard had received her visitor with transports of delight. It came out that Mr. Trenchard, having failed in his errand in London, had encountered Miss Templeton on his way back at the junction a few miles away, and, completing the journey with her, had explained the circumstances that had led to his absence from home. The lady heard his story with mingled incredulity and indignation. On its repetition by Mrs. Trenchard she exclaimed:

"I am amazed and horrified, Martha. Do you know that when I was last here, ten years ago, that man Noakes came to me and borrowed a considerable

sum of money for the extension of his business. He seemed a civil and obliging person, and I was glad to lend to a respectable tradesman—of course, at a reasonable rate of interest. He has paid me the interest regularly, but always regretted that circumstances did not permit of his repaying the loan. It is shocking to find that he has actually used that money—my money—to involve your dear husband in difficulties. Such depravity! I shall deal very sternly with Mr. Noakes to-morrow, I assure you."

"Ah! To think of it, now," said Mrs. Trenchard. "And that dreadful man as he put in here—well, I do owe your nephew something, ma'am, for he and his friend Mr. Eves blowed him out with the most terrible smell that ever was, and no harm to a soul. Mr. Bob's inventions are that wonderful!"

"Really, Robert," said Miss Templeton, "I hope you have not been troubling Mrs. Trenchard with your inventions. It was clearly understood that you came here to work on the land."

"And so he hev, ma'am," put in Trenchard. "Him and his friend hev worked on the land, and done inventions as well, and one of 'em saved my root crops, it did. I'm not the man to say anything against inventions."

"I am glad to hear you have invented something useful, Robert. Was that tar entanglement that your friend spoke of also an invention of yours?"

"Well, yes, Aunt, it was," said Templeton, somewhat embarrassed. "It was an idea for worrying the Germans, you know. But, of course—here's Tom, he'll explain better than I can."

"Oh, I say!" protested Eves, who had just come in. Then he began to laugh. "My word! He did look funny—tar from head to foot. You see, Miss Templeton, we got rid of that ruffian Smail once by means of stinks—I mean, sulphuretted hydrogen, a gas very useful in chemistry. Then, suspecting he'd come back, it occurred to me that we might teach him a lesson by putting into practice Bob's idea of a tar entanglement. It really worked out splendidly. Noakes—he's a bad egg——"

"A what?" asked the lady.

"A bad man, ma'am. He and Smail came up, and we let off the guns just to encourage 'em, and they fell slap on their faces in the lane over there, and I'm sure they won't get the tar off for a month."

"You gave Mr. Noakes my message?"

"Yes."

"And he said he would come, no doubt."

"I'm sorry to say, ma'am, he swore like a trooper. But in the circumstances I dare say you would have done the same—not you, of course. I didn't mean that; I mean any one—that is, any man."

"But no gentleman, Mr. Eves."

"Certainly—that is, of course not; but then no gentleman would ever be Noakes."

Noakes did not appear next morning. Miss Templeton sent one of the maids to fetch him. She came back and reported that Mr. Noakes had been suddenly called away. He never reappeared in Polstead. The story of the tarring was told by Smail, who felt aggrieved, at the village inn that night, and Noakes saw next morning that his position in the village was ruined. He gave instructions for the sale of his business, and Miss Templeton generously cancelled his debt to her in return for his release of Mr. Trenchard.

Miss Templeton gave her lecture on food economy, the last of her tour, and the holidays being over, returned with her nephew and Tom Eves to London.

"A ripping holiday, old man," said Eves as the friends parted. "Lay in a stock of bright ideas for next year."

THE CLIPPER OF THE ROAD

I

"How long will you be, Bob?"

"Can't say: perhaps twenty minutes. You needn't shout."

"Jolly sensitive, ain't you? What about my tender spots? After I've taken the trouble to write to your Aunt Caroline for your address, and got it, with yards and yards of advice to a young man, and then sacrificed a day of my leave to hunt you up, you won't spare a jiff to talk to a fellow, and when I ask you a civil question, tell me not to shout, with the wind roaring like a barrage, and that wretched machine squeaking like——"

"Oh, come now, Tom, that's not fair!" said Templeton. "I told you I must finish grinding these valves, then I'm free. And as for talking, I can hear you quite well; that's all that matters, isn't it?"

"Been cultivating repartee with your C.O., I suppose," remarked Eves. "Or else your naturally amiable disposition has broken down under the tender mercies of the Boche. Aunt Caroline warned me, I admit: said you had under-

gone great mental strain, underlined, and were feverishly anxious to repair your wasted life, underlined twice. What did the Boche do to you, Bobby, old man?"

"Tell you by and by: must finish this job."

Eves sighed with resignation, and looked round for a seat. There was nothing available except a bench along the wall, littered with tools and odds and ends of machinery. Being also plentifully besmeared with black grease, it looked far from inviting, especially as Eves was wearing a new pair of slacks; but he cleared a space large enough to afford sitting room, and taking the outer sheets of a newspaper that lay handy, spread them on the board, seated himself thereon, and opened the inner sheet to kill time until Templeton should have finished his job.

Tom Eves, whose cap bore the badge of a certain regiment of Light Infantry, was in the final stage of convalescence from wounds received in action before Amiens. While in hospital he had learnt that Templeton, taken a prisoner in the early days of the Germans' spring offensive, was among the first batch of officers repatriated under the terms of the armistice, and on applying to Miss Templeton for her nephew's address, was astonished and amused to hear that he was hard at work in a little Dorset town within easy reach.

"Just like old Bob!" he said to himself. "Two months' leave! And instead of playing the giddy goat, as any sensible fellow would do in his place, he feels he must make up for lost time and swot away at his old inventions. With a good balance at Cox's, too. Aunt Caroline says she quite approves of his spending his money in preparation for his career—just the sort of thing she would say! Well, I'll look him up, the old juggins, first leave I have!"

Templeton, in fact, taking his usual serious view of things in general and his inventions in particular, had been unable to reconcile himself to the prospect of two months' idleness, after having kicked his heels for seven months in a prisoners' camp, months during which his brain had teemed with "notions." There was the two-way motor; the turbine motor; an automatic fire extinguisher; a sound increaser; a combined tin-opener and fountain pen, with corkscrew attachment; a road yacht; a push and pull door-handle. Aunt Caroline was so much impressed with the potential public utility of the bright ideas he expounded to her, that she placed £25 to his credit with Cox's, and warmly commended him when he told her that he had found a field for his experiments in the little town of Pudlington. "A *delightful* spot!" she said, in her emphatic way. "A quaint old town, quite *charming*! And *such* invigorating air!" The manager of the British Motor Garage, just outside the town aforesaid, had agreed to give Templeton facilities for experimenting in exchange for his services—an arrangement that suited with his own and his aunt's ideas of economy. Wilkins, the manager, was short-handed: indeed Templeton found himself more often than not in sole charge of the garage,

for Wilkins was frequently absent, driving his only serviceable car for the officers of the camp a few miles away. Thus, when Eves made his appearance on this bright, windy December morning, he found his old friend, encased in the blue overalls of a mechanic, alone in the repairing shop, and engrossed in the job he had in hand.

For a few minutes Eves read the newspaper, without addressing any further remark to Templeton.

"I say, Bob!" he exclaimed at last, "here's a chance for you.... All right—I won't shout, but listen! 'G.R.—Notice. Tenders for the purchase of waste from the Upper Edgecombe Camp should reach the Officer Commanding not later than noon on Thursday, December 12.' Fortunes have been made out of waste. Perhaps you have tendered already: I see the paper's nearly a week old."

"I haven't," replied Templeton, curtly.

"Well, you're not a rag and bone merchant, it's true, but——"

"Considering that to-day's the 12th, and it's just on eleven now, it's too late to tender, even if I wanted to."

"Which you don't! *My* bright ideas are always nipped in the bud. I say, Bob, was there anything in that story we heard in our mess at Corbie—that idea of yours, you know?"

"Which one?" asked Templeton, pausing for a moment in his task. He was always interested in ideas.

"Well, they said you were showing off one of your inventions to a brass hat—some sort of a door-handle, I think it was—and he got fixed up in a dug-out, and you couldn't release him for three hours or so, and he got no lunch. Everybody said it was a splendid rag."

"Idiots!"

"But wasn't it true? The story ran through the front line trenches for thirty miles or so, and bucked the men up no end."

"It wasn't a rag at all. The fact is, the staff-major was too impatient. He wouldn't wait till I'd finished explaining the idea, and the result was what you might have expected. It was his own fault—the idea's all right."

"What about your gas machine, then?"

"Well, what about it?" The inventor was roused: he stood facing Eves, with the air of a cat whose fur has been rubbed the wrong way.

"The story that came to us was that you nearly caused a vacancy in the command of your battalion. Everybody said you were taking a short cut to getting your second pip."

"Asses!" growled Templeton. "The explanation simply is that a screw was a trifle loose——"

"Now nobody said that, Bob, I assure you. Everybody said you were an

awfully clever chap, only——"

"I tell you a screw was a bit loose, owing to the lack of suitable appliances, and the gas came out a second or two before it ought. And the C.O. needn't have put his nose quite so close to the machine: I didn't ask him to!"

"I suppose the adjutant was too inquisitive, then. Not that time; I mean when you were trying that self-adjusting bomb of yours. The Brigade Bombing Officer was full of it, and the mess were quite jealous, because we never had such rags on our sector."

"Rags!" snorted Templeton in disgust. "I hate the word! You know perfectly well that I never rag. That self-adjusting bomb was a very serious matter."

"Quite so. It's only lucky it wasn't more serious, isn't it? We were told it cost your adjutant his left eyebrow and half a promising moustache."

"Grossly exaggerated!" Templeton exclaimed.

"As Mark Twain said when he read the report of his own death! But what's this, Bob?"

A long green motor-car was drawing up slowly and noisily in front of the garage, emitting a cloud of smoke. From the seat beside the chauffeur sprang a large man, wearing a heavily furred coat. He came round the car and called out, before he reached the open door of the repairing shop:

"Here, I say there! Can you do anythink for this car? My fool of a shover can't find out what's wrong, and we'll crock up altogether if we go on like this. The engine's knocking like anythink."

By this time he had reached the doorway, and he stood there facing Templeton, after shooting one brief glance at Eves on the bench. Templeton, looking a little more solemn even than usual—or perhaps his expression was partly due to the black smears on his face—had not time to reply before Eves put in a word.

"Can yer do anythink for the gentleman?" he said.

"P'raps you've got another car handy?" said the stranger.

"No, there's none in just now," replied Templeton.

"Can't you find one? Look here, young feller, I'll make it worth yer while. I've got to call on the mayor and be at the camp inside of an hour. What yer say?"

"There's not another car in the place. They're all at the camp."

"Well, then, you got to do somethink, and look alive!"

"Don't keep the gentleman waiting!" said Eves, already enjoying himself. The turn things had taken seemed to carry prospects of what he called a "splendid rag."

Templeton asked the chauffeur to step out, and taking his place, started the car, listening intently.

"There! Didn't I tell yer?" said the owner, trotting alongside. "What's wrong, eh?"

Templeton pulled up within a few yards, and backed.

"Oil," he said, laconically. "Your big ends are going."

"Big ends! What the jooce! Here, you Thomson, why didn't you give the engine no oil?"

"'Cos there warn't none," said the chauffeur, sulkily. "I told yer——"

"None of yer lip, now! Well, if it's only oil—Here, mister, oil up, and look sharp about it! None of yer country dawdling: get a move on!"

Templeton looked over the side of the car, and said quietly, in his mild considered way:

"I should just like to remark that unless you can moderate your impatience, or curb your somewhat insolent expression of it, you may take yourself and your car elsewhere."

"Yes," cut in Eves, who had come out into the road. "If I were you, young feller, I'd jolly well chuck him into the horse-pond."

[image]

"'YES,' CUT IN EVES, WHO HAD COME OUT INTO THE ROAD. 'IF I WERE YOU, YOUNG FELLER, I'D JOLLY WELL CHUCK HIM INTO THE HORSE-POND.'"

The stranger looked from one to the other, his astonishment at Templeton's address yielding to wrath.

"Who are you a-talking to?" he cried, making an aggressive move towards Eves.

"Not to you, my dear sir, not to you. I was merely telling this young feller what I should do if I were he, and you may thank your lucky stars I'm not."

The man eyed the speaker truculently, as if meditating chastisement; but Eves, in spite of the blue band on his arm, looked so well knit, so vigorous, that valour subsided into discretion. Muttering something about "young pups in khaki," the stranger turned towards the car, saw that Templeton had begun lubricating, and strolled across the yard towards a strange vehicle standing outside the garage.

"Here, Thomson, come and look at this," he called.

For a few minutes the two men walked round the vehicle, discussing its appearance, laughing as one pointed out this or that feature to the other.

"It ain't a car," said the chauffeur.

"More like a boat," said his employer. "This here's a mast, ain't it? P'raps it's one of them hydroplanes."

"They're the same as airyplanes without the wheels. My idea it's an agricultural implement: now-a-days they've all sorts of rum contraptions in country parts."

They examined the vehicle, perfunctorily and without knowledge, until Templeton called out that the oiling was finished.

"Quite time too," said the stranger, looking at his watch. "She'll go all right?" he asked, as he rejoined Templeton in the road.

"Naturally I can't give any guarantee," replied Templeton, "but in all probability the engine will last out a few hours—until you have time to give it a thorough overhauling. If I may make a suggestion, let it cool down and run slowly, or the big ends will go altogether."

"H'm! S'pose you know! How much?"

"Oh! say half-a-crown."

"Here y'are. Get in, Thomson." He shoved the chauffeur into the car. "Straight up!" he cried.

The car rattled away, still smoking, but less vigorously than before.

"Charming man!" said Eves, as the two returned to the shop. "Come across many like him, Bobby?"

"Oh! one meets all sorts. But I really think, Tom, I should be in danger of losing my temper if everybody who stopped here for repairs were quite so—so—"

"Exactly. Well, old sport, do hurry up with those valves. I had an early breakfast, and no squish—simply rotten, breakfast without squish. So hurry up, and we'll go and swop some coupons."

II

Templeton placidly resumed his job; Eves remounted the bench and again took up the newspaper. After a minute or two he exclaimed:

"I say, what do you think of this? 'Our worthy mayor, Alderman Noakes'—"

"Who?"

"Alderman Noakes. Recalls sweet memories, eh, old sport? That summer idyll in our early youth—law! what ages ago it seems! 'But ah! how it was sweet!' That's Browning, old man; not my own, I assure you. I seem to see, down the dim vista of departed years, the figure of our Noakes, smothered in

half-consumed carbon, otherwise soot; and again the same Noakes, sprawling in a purling stream; and yet again the same Noakes, affectionately embracing his mother earth—various phases of Noakes concurrent with the flow of ideas in the cerebellum of——"

"Oh, dry up, Tom! You really are an awful ass sometimes."

"Who are you a-talking to, young feller? I was just pointing out that the name Noakes, on the principle of the association of ideas—but let's see what it says. 'Our worthy mayor, Alderman Noakes, accompanied by the bailiff and reeves, will on December 21, for the four hundred and fifty-second time in the history of this ancient borough, perform the quaint ceremony of anointing the British Stone.' The worthy mayor must be a hoary old Methuselah if he's performed the ceremony four hundred and fifty-one times: he might be the great-grandfather ten times removed of that old rascal we knew. And if he's even so distantly related as that, he's probably a rascal too, and deserves to be kept waiting."

"Waiting? What for?"

"Why, for that model of urbanity and fur collar who wanted you to do somethink to this 'ere car and look alive, young feller. He said he was going to call on the mayor, you remember."

"He's part of the show, perhaps. I wonder what that ceremony is. What a ramshackle old car that was! But all existing cars will be scrapped when I get my two-way motor going."

"That's the latest, is it?"

"Yes: I've great hopes of it. I've partly drawn up the specification—I'm going to take out a patent—but I can't finish it until I get a nozzle that's being specially manufactured to my order."

"Rum thing, Bob, that most of your thingummy-bobs seldom do get finished: what? But we've had some splendid rags out of them all the same."

"Now that's not fair," cried Templeton, swinging round, and speaking with a heat pardonable in an earnest inventor. "My road yacht is complete; it's out there in the yard at this very moment."

"That thing old Rabbit-skin was poking his nose into! What's the idea?"

"Well, it's not exactly new; it's an adaptation of the sand yacht. With petrol scarce, I asked myself, why waste petrol when the wind can be harnessed for nothing an hour?"

"Jolly patriotic, and sporting too, old son. How's it work?"

"Well, you see, it's a light chassis and a skeleton body with a mainsail, rigged sloop fashion, which gives me several miles an hour in a light wind; it's good for twelve or fourteen in a fair breeze on a good road on the flat. What it can do in the kind of wind we have to-day I don't know."

"But hang it all, what if you're becalmed? And what about hills, and bridges, and all that?"

"You've spotted my main difficulty—to obtain the maximum sail area consistent with the stability of the craft and the limitations of road navigation. Of course I've got an auxiliary motor for use in calms and uphill; but bridges aren't such a nuisance as the hedges; they constrict the roads confoundedly. I have to stick to the highway ... I say, old chap, just answer that telephone call for me, will you? Another five minutes will see me through."

Eves walked across to the telephone box in the corner. The following conversation ensued.

"Hullo!"

"Are you Mr. Wilkins?"

"Am I Wilkins, Bob?" (in a whisper).

"Say you're the British Motor Garage," said Templeton. "Wilkins is out."

"Are you there? Righto! We're the British Motor Garage."

"Well, I say, sorry to trouble you, but Noakes's 'phone is out of order. Tell him he can cut his tender thirty per cent.: no other offers."

"Hold on a jiff." Eves moved from the mouthpiece and turned towards Templeton. "Noakes again, Bob. Our worthy mayor. You're to give him a message, something about cutting a tender."

"Tell him I know nothing about Noakes."

"Righto! Leave it to me.... Hullo! A tender cut, you said?"

"Can't you hear? I said, tell Noakes he can cut his tender by thirty per cent."

"All right; I've got it now. But who's Noakes, and what have we to do with him?"

"Aren't you Mr. Wilkins?"

"Wilkins is out. I'm speaking from his shop."

"Oh, hang!"

"He's cut off, Bob," said Eves, ruefully, hanging up the receiver. "I wanted to ask him about Methuselah. You've done at last?"

"Yes, thank goodness!"

"Well, clean yourself, and come along. Hullo! Here's another visitor."

A tall, lean, loosely-built man was hurriedly crossing the yard towards the shop door.

"Good morning to you," he said, somewhat breathlessly. "I'm just off the train from London, and there's never a bit of a car, and what'll I do at all, when I've to be at the Upper Edgecombe camp before twelve? I'll be glad now if so be you can tend me the loan of a car."

"You're the second man within ten minutes or so who has wanted to get to the camp in a hurry," said Templeton.

"Do you say that, now? And what like might the first be, if you please to tell me?"

Templeton was considering how to begin a serious description; but Eves forestalled him.

"A fur-lined coat, a bristly moustache, and a voice like a corncrake. That's near enough for anythink."

"It is that," said the stranger, his blue eyes twinkling for an instant. His expression became grave as he added: "Sure it's mighty unlucky, without you have a car. They told me in the town I'd get one here, or nowhere at all."

"I'm sorry I haven't one handy," said Templeton. "Ours are out."

"I say, Bob, what about the road yacht?" said Eves, who had been attracted by the civility of the Irishman, and with quick wit had jumped to the conclusion that he was on the same errand as the boor. "There's a spanking wind."

"Well, if he doesn't mind risking it," said Templeton, dubiously.

"'Deed now, I'll be after risking anything."

"Anythink?" said Eves.

"You'll have his measure taken," said the Irishman, smiling again. "And if it's a five-pound note——"

"Don't mention it," said Templeton. "Tom, just lock up, will you? while I get ready."

He hastened across the yard, opened the bonnet of the car, and spent a few minutes with the inner mysteries. By the time he had satisfied himself that the engine was in working order the other two had joined him.

"I've only a quart of petrol," he said. "Wilkins has taken the rest, and our monthly allowance isn't due till to-morrow. The camp's about eleven miles, and we've nearly half an hour; but there's a stiff hill that will use most of the petrol; it's an old Ford and can barely do fifteen miles to the gallon."

"I'll run up the hill on my two feet to lighten the car," said the stranger, eagerly; "and sure I'd have run the whole way from the station if I were twenty years younger."

"You must have been a stayer in your time, sir," said Eves.

"Maybe I was that, the time I did a Marathon, and was not the last either. Only for being five and forty I wouldn't be troubling you, for a matter of eleven miles. But it's a sail I see you have. There's a nice breeze from the west, surely, and if the car doesn't upset on us I'm thinking we'd do without petrol only for the hill."

"Faith removes mountains," said Eves. "You've a pretty good share of it."

"Faith, and I have then. And if so be the car upsets on us, sure we'll have a bit of fun, and maybe that'll make up for the disappointment."

Eves chatted with the genial Irishman during the few minutes in which

Templeton was making his final preparations. These completed, Templeton ran the machine out into the roadway. It was a strange-looking object. The body was little more than a skeleton framework, affording seating accommodation for three, and the necessary protection for the working parts. The drive was on the front wheels; the steering gear connected with the back wheels. A strong single mast was stayed just behind the driver's seat. A bowsprit projected some five feet beyond the radiator. There were two sails, mainsail and jib. As Templeton unfurled these, Eves noticed that the former had been recently patched.

"Torn in a gale, Bob?" he asked.

"No. The other day a wretched farm wagon claimed more than its fair share of the road, and as of course I wouldn't give way there was what some people call a contretemps. Look here, Tom, you must manage the mainsail; I can deal with the jib. Get in: we've no time to spare."

Templeton got into the driver's seat, the other two men into the seats behind. The car was started on petrol, and ran at a moderate pace over the half-mile of narrow road that led to the main street of the little town. Dodging the market traffic, Templeton steered the car out at the further end, and as soon as he was clear of the town slowed down and gave the word to hoist the sails. These bellied out in the brisk following wind; the strange vehicle gathered way; and, looking over his shoulder with a smile of gratification, Templeton said:

"Now we're off. Look out for gybing at the corners, Tom."

III

Templeton's road yacht had been for a week or two a fairly familiar object in the neighbourhood, and the few country folk on foot whom it met or passed in the first few minutes of its voyage graced it with no more attention than was evinced by a stolid stare, a shake of the head, and a sort of prolonged sigh. A spectator of quicker mind—and he would need to have been quick, for the pace was already great—might have taken a fugitive interest in noting the facial expressions of the vehicle's three occupants. Templeton looked earnest and responsible: Eves wore only the shadow of his usual smile, for he was oppressed by an anxious doubt whether his former experiences of yachting would serve him in handling the sail of this novel craft. The wind was not only strong but gusty, and at slight turns in the road the boom showed a tendency to swing out of his control and commit assault and battery on the person of his passenger. That gentleman, however, was

evidently on the top of enjoyment. Whatever his errand was, it was driven from his mind by sheer exhilaration. He lived wholly in the present. Peering over Templeton's shoulder at the speedometer, he reported with boyish excitement the movements of the indicator—twenty, twenty-five, thirty: "Believe you me, it's thirty miles; the like of that, now!"

Approaching a sharp bend in the road, Templeton gradually throttled down until the speed was reduced to fifteen; and when, as the yacht rounded the bend, the change of course caused the boom to swing over and knock the Irishman's hat off, the genial stranger shouted with glee and declared that he was having the time of his life, begor.

Eves hauled in the mainsheet; the pace again rose to twenty-five; and a marked down-grade enabled Templeton to maintain that speed for a time with the engine switched off. At the end of the dip, where the road bent again, Templeton was faced by the first up-grade—a long straight stretch almost in the teeth of the wind. Some little distance from the foot of the incline he switched on his engine, and took the ascent for the most part on top, dropping to first about two hundred yards from the summit. At this point the passenger, looking back along the road, exclaimed:

"There's a car in the wake of us."

"Overhauling us?" asked Eves.

"She's not, then. How would the likes of her?"

"She will, though. We shall have to slow down. Look ahead."

A heavy farm wagon drawn by three horses had appeared over the crest of the hill, and was lumbering down with skidpans adjusted, and occupying three-fourths of the roadway.

"It's the way we'd see a collision," said the Irishman, chortling. The prospect had evidently no terrors for him. Eves, on the other hand, for all his delight in a rag, felt by no means easy in mind.

"Slow down, Bob," he cried, anxiously, at the same time hauling in the sheet until the sail stood almost parallel with the side of the vehicle.

Templeton made no reply; but knowing from experience that the road yacht was a likely source of anxiety to horses he slowed down, at the imminent risk of stopping entirely, and steered well into the hedge. The carter hurried to the leader's head and pulled in to his side of the road, giving only a gaping stare as the yacht grazed the off wheels of his wagon and the hedge on the other side.

"As good a bit of steering as ever I saw," cried the Irishman. "Did you get a whiff of the mangolds?"

"I was expecting to be mangled," said Eves, grimly. "I say, Bob, the wind's dead ahead, and the sail's no bally good."

"Lower it, man, lower it," said Templeton. "We'll be all right at the next

turn."

The yacht was crawling painfully to the top of the hill when there came from behind the sound of a hooter. Eves and the Irishman looked back. A large car had just rounded the bend below, and was mounting the hill with a great roaring and rattling, distinctly audible above the noise of their own straining engine.

"By George, Bob," cried Eves, "that green car that called at the garage is upon our heels."

"I hear it," said Templeton. "Couldn't mistake it: I'll give it room to pass."

Before the yacht had gamed the top of the hill the following car, hooting continuously, closed with it and dashed past.

"I say, Bob," shouted Eves, "did you see who was in it?"

"No. Didn't look. Who is it?"

"Rabbit-skin and Noakes."

"Our Noakes?"

"Philemon, as sure as a gun."

"Our worthy mayor, evidently. Rummy!"

"What was that you said?" asked Eves, turning to the Irishman, who had uttered a sharp exclamation as the car ran by.

"It was what I don't care to repeat. The fellow you do be calling Rabbit-skin has the rise got on me, and indeed I'm sorry I put you to the trouble and all."

"Noakes, you mean?"

"I do not. Noakes is unbeknown to me. But by the look of it that car will get to the camp by twelve o'clock, and we will not, and then Saunders, him with the fur collar, will be the way of slipping in his tender and I'll be left on the doorstep."

A light flashed on Eves.

"You're tendering for the camp waste?" he asked, quickly.

"I was. It was told me Saunders——"

"All right," Eves interrupted. Leaning over Templeton's shoulder he said: "I say, Bob, it's up to you, old man. You remember that telephone call. Noakes and Rabbit-skin are in co. Tendering for the camp waste, you know. He mustn't get in first with a higher tender. Can you hustle a bit?"

"I daren't accelerate till we get to the top: daren't waste petrol. But then——"

The yacht panted slowly up the last few yards of the hill. When it reached the top, the green car, enveloped in a cloud of smoke, was already some three hundred yards ahead, racing along a straight level stretch of road. It was clear that Saunders had recognised a business rival in the Irishman, and was urging his car to its utmost speed.

At the summit a bend in the road had once more brought the wind on the

beam. Eves instantly hoisted the sail, and the yacht in a few moments gathered way. The road here ran through an open down; there were no hedges to blanket the yacht; and on the high ground the wind blew with the force of half a gale. Giving signs of the liveliest excitement, the Irishman, his hair flying in the wind, bent over the back of Templeton's seat, and every few seconds shouted the indications of the speedometer, his voice growing louder as the figures mounted up. "Ten—fourteen—eighteen—twenty"—he followed the pointer round the dial, and when it quivered on 33 he swung his arm round, uttering a wild "Hurroosh!" and was not a whit abashed when Templeton half turned a rebuking face towards him and warned him of the risk of plunging overboard.

There was, in truth, much reason for the man's ebullient spirits. The engine was switched off: there was little or no vibration; the yacht, as he afterwards declared, seemed to float along the road. Even when she had a decided list to starboard, the near wheels leaving the ground, he laughed as he threw his long body to windward, hanging perilously over the roadway, while Eves with mouth grim-set kept the bounding craft on a broad reach. It was soon apparent that she was more than holding her own with the long car ahead. The cloud of smoke came nearer and nearer, floating across the road to leeward like the trail from the funnel of a tramp steamer.

The green car was running an erratic course more or less in the middle of the road. Within thirty or forty yards of her Templeton insistently sounded his horn and drew over to the right, preparing to pass. Next moment he jammed on his brake hard, with an exclamation seldom heard on his phlegmatic lips. So far from steering to his own side of the road, the driver of the car had also pulled across to the right, with the evident intention of blocking the passage. But for Templeton's promptitude the bowsprit must inevitably have run into the hood of the car. The jerk threw the Irishman heavily forward over the back of the seat, and when he recovered himself he broke into violent objurgation, which had no more effect on the occupants of the car than the strident blasts of Templeton's horn. They did not even look round. A turf-cutter on the moor scratched his head and gazed open-mouthed at the novel spectacle, and on the other side two affrighted ponies galloped with tossing manes and tails through and over the whins and gorse.

For the moment Templeton was baffled. Then Eves, leaning forward, shouted, to be heard above the roaring of the car:

"Pass her on the near side, Bob."

Templeton nodded, reserving for the future his criticism that, in the circumstances, Eves might more properly have used a nautical term. He checked the pace still further until nearly fifty yards separated him from the obstructive car. Then, with his horn at full blast, he released the brake, and the yacht shot

forward. As he had expected, the car clung still more closely to the off side, leaving only the narrowest margin between the wheels and the rough edge of the turf. Suddenly, with a turn of the wheel that caused the yacht to lurch giddily, he switched on the engine and ran deftly into the open space on the near side. A yell of delight broke from the Irishman.

"Sit down and be quiet," shouted Eves, "or we'll capsize yet."

Noakes had risen in the car, and was bawling in the ear of the chauffeur. The yacht had drawn level with the car's wind screen before Templeton's manoeuvre was appreciated. Now, attempting to counter it, the chauffeur, under Noakes's vehement prompting, edged towards the left with the object of forcing the lighter-built yacht into the ditch which on this side parted the roadway from the moor. Perceiving the danger, Eves, with the capacity for rising to the occasion which had distinguished him in former enterprises with his friend, instantly eased the mainsheet: the boom swung out, and came into sharp contact, first with Noakes's head, then with the wind screen, which it shivered to fragments. The chauffeur, who had glanced round, ducked his head and in his flurry gave way for a moment. That moment was long enough. Eves hauled in the sheet, and the yacht, under the dual impulse of engine and wind, shot forward and in a few seconds was clear.

[image]

"THE BOOM SWUNG OUT, AND CAME INTO SHARP CONTACT, FIRST WITH NOAKES'S HEAD, THEN WITH THE WIND SCREEN."

"Hurroosh!" yelled the Irishman, standing with difficulty erect in the swaying vehicle and looking back along the road. "Noakes, if that's the name of him, is after shaking his fist on us. I wouldn't say but he's cursing mighty fine, but sure I can't hear him for the noise of the creature. Saunders and the driver-man might be having a shindy by the looks of it. His head might be sore on him, and he'll not deserve it,—the man, I mean: I wouldn't be wasting a word of pity on Saunders if so be it was him."

Meanwhile, Templeton, knowing that his petrol would barely last out, had slowed down.

"Tell me if they draw up with us," he called over his shoulder.

"I will, begor," said the Irishman. "She's after doing that same now, and smoking like a tug on the Liffey."

"He's driving her hard," added Eves.

"That's all right," said Templeton. "It's my turn now."

A bend in the road brought the wind only a few points on the port bow, and Templeton, sparing his petrol, allowed the yacht to lose way. The green car, hooting angrily, and leaving a huge trail of smoke, rattled on at a great pace, and moment by moment lessened the distance between it and the yacht. But Eves and Templeton between them, by their dexterous handling of steering wheel and sail, succeeded where the others had failed. The road was effectively blocked; short of running the yacht down, with the risk of heavy casualties on both sides, as Eves remarked, Noakes and his friend had no means of preventing their Irish competitor from maintaining his lead and coming first to the winning post.

For a full mile the yacht zigzagged from one side of the road to the other. Eves handled the sheet very smartly, but soon found it hopeless to attempt to cope at once with the gustiness of the wind and the sudden swerves of the yacht, and finally contented himself with letting the boom swing freely within a narrow circle, fearing every moment that a lurch would capsize them all. Another turn in the road again gave them the wind; the yacht darted forward on a straight course, and the Irishman reported in high glee that the green car, grunting like Patsy O'Halloran's pig and snorting like Mike Grady's bull, was dropping behind as fast as she could run.

"What's the time?" Templeton called suddenly over his shoulder.

"Nine minutes to the hour," replied the Irishman, consulting his watch. "Will we do it?"

Now that the exciting part of the race was apparently over, he had become alive to business. Twelve o'clock was the hour named for the lodging of tenders with the camp commandant; "and with the likes of the Army," he said, "you might be done if so be you was half a wink late. It's not that I've a word to say in favour of any matter of punctuality in the Army; but they're the way of making a mighty fuss over trifles. It was told me the name they put to it is red tape."

"We'll do it," said Templeton, "provided, first, the petrol lasts out the hill ahead; second, there aren't any lorries in the way. But in any case we must run it fine, you know. You don't want Noakes or Saunders to get in at all, I take it."

"Sorra a bit."

"Would they tender higher than you?" asked Eves.

"They might."

"What a pity we didn't give Noakes that message, Bob. Some one at the camp wanted to give him the tip to cut his tender; there was no other to hand."

"The like of that, now, and me having the name of an honest man! Will I have time enough to write a word or two with the stump of a pencil? I have my tender in my pocket folded."

"Better let it alone; we'll keep Noakes off. He's still rattling along, Bob; do we get the wind up the hill?"

"I'm afraid not. The road takes an awkward turn; just ahead there, you see. We'll have to rely on the petrol, and trust to luck."

The yacht rounded the turn, and the hill came in view—a short sharp spur about a quarter-mile in length. In a trice they dowsed the sails. Templeton switched on the engine, intending to rush the incline. Looking behind somewhat anxiously now, the Irishman declared that the green car was barging on like a mad steam engine. Roaring like a furnace, it seemed to leap over the ground, overhauling the yacht yard by yard until it was three-parts up the hill. Then the clamour suddenly ceased.

"Begor, she's stopped," cried the Irishman, exultantly.

"Big ends dropped off," said Templeton, grinning at Eves over his shoulder. "I gave him fair warning."

The yacht topped the crest. On the moor to the left a vast assemblage of huts and tents broke upon the view. By the roadside was parked a row of motor lorries. Here and there men were moving about. They stared and shouted to one another at the sight of the strange vehicle sailing towards them, or rather running now merrily on the last gill of petrol. Templeton narrowly escaped colliding with the nearest lorry, then slowed down and enquired the way to the commandant's office.

"You go in between them huts till you come to a swanky hut with a flag flying atop," replied the private addressed. "A rum turn-out, this here."

Driving on to the moor, Templeton was checked by the sentry, to whom, however, the Irishman explained that he was Patrick O'Reilly, come to tender for the camp waste.

"Pass: you'd better tender for the lot of us: we're all waste here," said the sentry. "Perhaps if you offered to buy us up they'd demob."

"I don't like that," said Templeton, gravely, as he drove on. "It's subversive of discipline."

"Don't worry," said Eves with a smile. "He saluted all right. It's two minutes to twelve: we did jolly well, old man."

Templeton drew up at the commandant's hut. O'Reilly sprang out, and after a brief colloquy with the sentry, who looked doubtfully at his bare head and touzled hair, was allowed to enter. In five minutes he returned, in animated converse with the colonel. That officer, acknowledging the punctilious salutes of Eves and Templeton, smiled at the smutty face of the latter, and remarked:

"This is a queer contrivance of yours, my man. I thought Mr. O'Reilly was a lunatic when he told me he'd arrived in a yacht, without being sick, and himself a bad sailor——"

"I am that," put in O'Reilly, parenthetically. "I wouldn't like to say how much the Irish Sea is owing me."

"But I see he's not so mad as I supposed," the colonel went on.

"Sure you'd be the better of a voyage in her yourself," said O'Reilly.

"Thank you. I think I prefer the real article. Not many of these machines in the market, are there?"

"None, sir," replied Eves, promptly. "It's the first, a brand-new invention of my friend Templeton here, second lieutenant in the Blankshire Rifles. He's a repatriated prisoner of war, employing his leave in working out ideas that germinated in captivity. That accounts for his being improperly dressed."

"Indeed! Is this the Mr. Templeton who narrowly escaped gassing my old friend Colonel Beavis?"

"A pure accident, sir, due to the colonel's adventurous spirit and a loose screw. Templeton was very much cut up about it."

"Dry up!" growled Templeton in a fierce undertone.

"Well, I congratulate Mr. O'Reilly," said the colonel, his eyes twinkling. "I gather that but for Mr. Templeton's road yacht he wouldn't have got here till after twelve, and he seemed a little hurt when I told him that a few minutes are neither here nor there. One must give a time limit, of course; but I shouldn't have turned down a good offer that happened to arrive a few minutes late. But what's this?"

A crowd of privates, shouting vociferously, was approaching from the direction of the road. A few words were distinguishable in the babel. "This way, governor." "Two to one on the long un." And as the throng turned into the lane between the huts, among the khaki figures appeared Philemon Noakes and his fur-coated companion, trotting along in feverish haste. The soldiers fell back as they neared the commandant's hut, and the two civilians advanced alone.

"Are you the colonel?" asked Noakes, panting.

"I am. You want to see me?"

"I'm the Mayor of Pudlington. This is my friend Ebenezer Saunders, who's come for to tender for the camp waste."

"As per advertisement," added Saunders.

There was something aggressive in each man's manner of speech. The colonel looked at his wrist watch.

"The time mentioned was twelve o'clock, gentlemen. It is now eight minutes past. You are eight minutes too late."

"You won't draw the line so tight," said Noakes. "A few minutes are neither here nor there in a matter of this sort, and as the Mayor of Pudlington——

"Excuse me, Mr. Mayor——"

"But it's all along o' this infernal machine," cried Noakes, angrily, throwing out his hand towards the road yacht. "It was on the wrong side o' the road, and we couldn't pass it no-how; obstructing of the king's highway: that's what it

was; and as the Mayor of Pudlington I'll have the law of them, that I will."

"Oh, come, Mr. Noakes," said Eves, pleasantly. "You tried that once before, you know. You remember my friend Templeton, even if you've forgotten me. As a matter of fact, sir," he added, turning to the colonel, "they overdrove their car, and the big ends dropped off; otherwise—well, I shouldn't have been surprised if there'd been a bit of a scrap somewhere about the top of the hill."

"There would," said O'Reilly, decisively. "And what's more, it was the car that blocked the road, and a mighty fine trouble we had, the way we'd circumvent the creature."

"It's a scandal," cried Noakes.

"A regular low-down swindle," shouted the owner of the fur coat.

"That'll do, sir," said the colonel, sharply. "You'll be good enough to leave the camp—you and the Mayor of Pudlington."

Noakes threw at Eves a venomous glance—a glance in which was concentrated inextinguishable resentment for the unmasking he had suffered two years before. He made his way with Saunders back to the road and disappeared.

"There's more in this than meets the eye," said the colonel, smiling. "Will you gentlemen come into my hut and tell me something more of the Mayor of Pudlington?"

"With pleasure, sir," replied Eves. "Come along, Bob."

"Really, I must be getting back," said Templeton. "There's the garage, you know. Besides——" He looked over his dirty overalls and grimy hands.

"Well, you'll have to get some petrol; while you're doing that I'll relate what I know of the life history of Noakes. A splendid rag, old man," he added, as he turned to follow the colonel.

THE COLD WATER CURE

I

"We'll get some lunch at my digs," said Templeton, as he started with Eves on the return journey. "I'll have time to show you one or two ideas of mine before I am due back at the garage."

"Oh, I say, Bob, I'd made up my mind to stand you a topping lunch at some hotel or other. Lunch at digs!"

Eves's look was eloquent. Templeton smiled gently.

"There's only one hotel, or rather inn," he said, "and there you can only get Government beer. It has only domestic rations. Besides, you don't know my landlady—she's a gem! She expects me, you know, and she'll have enough for two."

"'A heart resigned, submissive, meek,'" Eves quoted. "Well, old sport, I'll try to bear up, and as I've a tremendous appetite after hospital slops, you know—just buck in, will you?"

The road being mainly down-hill, and the petrol tank now full, Templeton had resolved to run back on engine power alone, and had furled the sails. Just below the crest of the hill they passed the green car, about which Noakes and his two companions were apparently engaged in a heated altercation. Noakes scowled fiercely as the road yacht dashed on.

"Rummy we should come across that old humbug!" said Eves. "Still rummier that he should be Mayor of Pudlington. I thought the mayoralty was the reward for long years of civic virtue. Old Noakes can't have been here more than a couple of years. How is it you didn't know he was mayor?"

"My dear man, I'm not interested in municipal affairs. Besides, I've only been here a few weeks, and with only two months' leave——"

"Just so. Like the busy bee, you must improve each shining hour. That bee must have been a frightful prig."

"Come, now——"

"No offence, old bean! Of course he gathered loads of honey, and all that: a jolly useful life—adventurous, too—saw a lot of the world, don't you know: always on the move. That part would suit me to a T. We're both like the bee, you see: you in your industry, and what you may call stickiness; me in my roving propensity, my incurable levity, my passion for honeydew—in the form of cigarettes. I say, Bob, I think I'll write for the magazines. I don't see why my ideas shouldn't be worth something, as well as yours."

"What ideas?"

"That's an unkind cut, after I've been spouting ideas galore. I'm afraid the mechanical mind will always be blind to the beauties of literature. 'A primrose by the river's brim'—Steady, old sport, you nearly capsized us!" Templeton had swung round suddenly into a by-lane. "I was quoting a sublime passage from one William Wordsworth."

"Well, never mind him," said Templeton, drawing up in front of a solitary cottage. "Here we are! Go straight up the stairs—you'll find a clean towel. I'll tell Mrs. Pouncey you're here, and follow you."

When the two friends entered the little sitting-room a few minutes later the landlady, a short, very stout, pleasant-faced woman of sixty or thereabouts, had just placed two steaming plates of soup on the table.

"My friend Mr. Eves, Mrs. Pouncey," said Templeton.

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Pouncey?" said Eves, shaking hands. "Mr. Templeton has been telling me you're the best cook in the three kingdoms. You know you did, Bob; don't protest. He's very hard to please, Mrs. Pouncey, very; and if he's satisfied, you may be sure that a man of my humbler tastes will be absolutely bowled over."

"Well, now, I declare I wouldn't have thought it. Mr. Templeton have never said a single grumble, not one. He's the best young man lodger as I've ever had, that I will say—no trouble at all!"

"Ah, Mrs. Pouncey! how many young men lodgers have you said the same thing about? Your last lodger, for instance, now, confess!"

"'Deed no, sir. You be very far out. My last lodger was—there, I couldn't abide en, he was that cantankerous, and such language—I never did! I know a real gentleman when I see en, and he was nothing but a make-believe, for all his fur coat. Thankful I am he was only here a few days, and that to oblige the mayor."

"Mr. Noakes?"

"Ay, sure, that be the mayor's name, and well I know it. But do 'ee take your soup, now, 'twill be cold, and cold soup lays heavy, not to speak o' the nastiness, and the pork chops grilled to a cinder."

The good woman had toddled away while speaking, and her last words came faintly through the open door.

"Jolly good soup, Bob," said Eves. "And pork chops! Splendid! The old dame is a treasure. I'll get her to tell us about our worthy mayor."

Mrs. Pouncey returned with two well-grilled pork chops and a dish of sprouts and baked potatoes.

"Absolutely topping, Mrs. Pouncey!" said Eves. "What on earth did your last lodger find to grumble at, if you treated him like this?"

"Lor' bless 'ee, sir, he'd grumble at everything, pertickler at the bill. He'd want a penny took off here, and a penny there: and he would measure out his tea hisself, and cut his own rashers. I never did see the like."

"And a friend of the mayor, too!"

"Ay, and more'n a friend, so it do seem. 'Tis said here and there 'twas a gentleman—gentleman, says I, but that's the talk!—a gentleman from London as have Mr. Noakes in his pocket, so to speak it."

"Really!"

"Ay. No wonder you be mazed, the mayor being such a terrible great man

and all. Some folks do rise quick in the world, to be sure. 'Tis only a matter of two year since he came here, from no one knowed where, and 'a took up a big contrack with the camp for building huts, and running a canteen, I think they do call it, and I don't know what all. Ay sure, he've his fingers in many a pie, but I warrant they'll get burnt, they will!"

"But how did a stranger become mayor so quickly?"

"Why, being such a great man, they put him on the Council, and t'other councillors being little small men, he got over 'em, that's what I say. Bless 'ee, he'd have got 'em to make him king, if so be there was kings out of London. Ah, he've a power of money! He bought this cottage that I've paid rent for regular this twenty year, and he telled me he'd raise the rent as soon as Parlyment will let him, if not before. And he made me take this Saunders man for twenty shillings a week, when I've never had less than twenty-five, never!"

Apple dumplings called Mrs. Pouncey from the room. When she returned with them, and Eves wanted to know how the apples got inside the crust, the dame gave a lengthy explanation which lasted till the conclusion of the meal.

"We've a few minutes," said Templeton then. "Come and see my road-sweeper."

He led Eves to an old shed at the rear of the premises. On entering, Eves's eye was caught by a large formless mass of a substance somewhat resembling putty.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Been playing with plasticine?"

"That's another little idea of mine," replied Templeton. "A new fire extinguisher."

"You had better form a company, old sport. 'Bright Ideas, Unlimited.' How's it work?"

"It's very simple. You let a shallow tank, about a quarter-inch deep, into the ceiling of a room. The bottom, flush with the plaster, is pierced with holes like a sieve, the holes are plugged with my composition, and you run water into the tank. If a fire occurs the heat melts the composition——"

"I see! Splendid! Down comes the rain and puts out the fire! But will the shower last long enough?"

"Really, I'm surprised at you, Tom! The fall from a tank like that will be equivalent to an average week's rainfall. But the point of the idea is the composition. I've tried other preparations without success, but this stuff of mine sets hard and yet melts easily. By varying the proportions of the ingredients you can get it to melt at different temperatures, but I haven't quite finished my experiments in that direction. The difficulty is to gauge the exact temperature required, but I'll manage it before long."

"It hasn't been tried yet in a building, then?"

"Not exactly; but a decent local builder was rather taken with it when I showed it to him, and he's giving it a trial at the new Literary Institute he's putting up. The building was stopped by the war, but he has already started work again, and he's willing to test the idea before the plasterers finish. He has rigged up a sort of tray on the laths in the roof of the big room, and one of these days is going to put a brazier underneath. You see, if the stuff melts too easily, it will only mean a slop on the floor, and won't do any damage."

"I see. What are you going to call the stuff?"

"Time enough for that when I've perfected the invention and sent in for my patent. Here's my road-sweeper."

He pointed to a somewhat rusty vehicle standing against one of the walls.

"I'm only waiting for a supply of petrol to try it," he added. "The old engine uses up a frightful lot. But our allowance is due in to-morrow. I say, can you stay a day or two? Mrs. Pouncey can put you up."

"Rather! I've got ten days' leave."

"That's all right, then. Now we had better get back to the garage. Wilkins will be in a bait if it's not open sharp at two."

II

As Templeton drew up in front of the garage, a bill-sticker was posting a bill on one of the side posts of the gate. The heading, hi large type, caught Eves's eye, and when he got down to open the gate, he stayed to read the announcement while Templeton drove through.

"I say, Bob, there'll be a splendid rag to-morrow," he said on rejoining his friend. "There's a meeting of parliamentary electors at the new Literary Institute—a final kick before the election on Saturday. Old Noakes is in the chair: he's a pacifist, you remember, and the bill gives short notice that the meeting will be addressed by——" (He mentioned the name of a notorious agitator.) "We'll go. Ask a few questions, perhaps."

"Soldiers in uniform are forbidden to——"

"Rats! That's all gone by the board. The soldier's a citizen now-a-days.... I say, is this Wilkins?"

"My employer," replied Templeton.

A thick-set man wearing a long coat and a motor cap was coming up the path.

"Well, any business a-doing?" he asked of Templeton.

"There have been two callers: one was a man who'd over-driven his machine and run short of oil. He was in a tearing hurry, and distinctly offensive. I did what I could for him, and warned him he'd lose his big ends if he wasn't careful. Here's the half-crown he paid me."

"Half-a-crown! No more than that?"

"Well, he paid what I asked."

"Rot it all! You didn't ask enough. A feller in a hurry, and likewise rude, ought to be made to pay. Look 'ee here, Mr. Templeton, you're a young feller, and have got a thing or two to learn: you'd best get a notion of charging if you're to be of any use to me."

"What about that, then?" asked Templeton, handing him a couple of pound notes.

"Ah, now, that's better, to be sure! How did 'ee get 'em?" asked Wilkins, pocketing the notes with a pleased smile.

"An Irishman wanted to get to the camp in a hurry. He happened to be polite, so I drove him up in my road yacht. As a matter of fact, we passed the other fellow in his car: he had picked up your mayor, and I gathered he was a business rival of the Irishman. I wasn't sorry we beat him; his big ends dropped off, as I warned him."

Eves noticed that Wilkins's face grew more and more glum as Templeton was speaking, and remembered the telephone call he had answered.

"The Irishman was so pleased that he offered me five pounds," Templeton went on, "but I thought two pounds was a fair charge."

"Then dang me if you ain't done me out of three pounds!" cried the man, irritably. "Did any one ever hear the likes of refusing good money when 'twas offered free? Done me out of three pounds—*three* pounds, look 'ee, as ought to have been in my pocket! Done me out of it, you have!"

Eves felt that this outburst was not wholly due to Templeton's moderation in charging.

"Well, Mr. Wilkins," said Templeton, quietly, "I'm sorry you're not satisfied. Perhaps we had better part."

"I don't say that," said Wilkins, calming himself with an effort. "You're a gentleman, that's where 'tis, and not bred up to understand business. I'll say no more—let it bide—but another time don't 'ee go and refuse good money; that's business. Well, I'm off up along to the town; know where I can get some petrol on the quiet; that's business too. I'll be back afore long."

"You keep queer company, old man!" said Eves, when Wilkins was out of ear-shot.

"He's trying at times, I confess—a rough diamond," said Templeton. "But I

think he's sound."

"I wonder! Somebody wanted him to give Noakes a tip, you remember. He must be very well in with Noakes, and that's suspicious in itself. His face was as long as a fiddle when you told him O'Reilly got in ahead of Noakes."

"Well, I'll give him the benefit of the doubt. Now, I've got to make a new crank pin for a motor cycle that was brought in for repair this morning. It'll take me some time, and I don't want to keep you hanging about. Why not go into the town and have a look round?"

"Righto. What time do you knock off?"

"Five."

"I'll call for you, then. So long!"

At half-past four, when Eves returned, the workshop was lighted by the two oil lamps which were its only illumination. Templeton had just finished his work, and was washing his hands at the sink.

"I've spent a profitable afternoon," said Eves, returning to his seat on the bench. "Don't think much of Pudlington, but an enquiring mind like mine can pick up pearls anywhere. I was strolling along when I came to an uncommonly ugly unfinished building, with 'Literary Institute' carved over the door. Some fellows were unloading chairs from a cart, and carrying them in. I went in too, and found your respectable friend the local builder there, superintending the fitting of some gas-burners. 'Getting ready for the meeting to-morrow?' I said to him. 'Ay, sure, sir,' said he. 'Town Hall's occypied by Food Controller and Fuel Controller, and I don't know what all, so the meeting's to be held here, though unfinished.' 'Rather a cold place,' I said. 'Bless 'ee, we'll hot 'em up to-morrow,' said he. 'The walls will sweat like you never see. We've got a proper fine furnace down underneath, and the only pity is I haven't got the ceiling plastered; 'twould have dried a bit.' Whereupon I mentioned your proposed experiment with your fire extinguisher, and the old boy became cordial at once when I told him you were a friend of mine. You've evidently impressed him, Bob."

Templeton grunted.

"It's quite true. To be a friend of yours lifts one a good many notches. 'That young gemman do have a terrible powerful piece of intelleck inside of his brain-pan,' says your builder. 'Ay, and what's more, he's a rare earnest soul, always inventing things for the good of his day and generation. He's a credit to the nation, that he be!' Of course I congratulated him and Pudlington on the temporary possession of so bright an ornament, and we had quite a friendly talk. He seemed rather doubtful whether it's legal to hold a public meeting in a building before it has been passed by the surveyor, but Noakes is above the law, or thinks he is. We'll go to-morrow, Bob: it'll be a good rag."

"I'm not sure that I want to go to the meeting," said Templeton.

"Oh, you must! I want to see Noakes's face when he spies us in the audience. By the way, I think he must be rather thick with your Wilkins. Not many minutes after I'd left the Institute I met the green car being towed along by two great farm horses. Noakes and Saunders were walking alongside. Noakes gave me his usual scowl as he passed, which I countered with my usual grin. Presently I walked round to the market-place, and there was Noakes again, in close confab with Wilkins. When they saw me they both began to talk at once, and it seemed to me that each was telling the other that he had the honour of my acquaintance. At any rate they both looked rather surprised and a good deal more than interested, and their heads were very close together when I saw them last."

"I'm sick of Noakes," said Templeton, somewhat irritably.

"What's the matter? Has he been here?"

"No, but half an hour after you left, Wilkins came back with a can of petrol, and offered it to me for my experiments in a way that was positively fawning."

"To make amends for his roughness before."

"I don't like that sort of thing. It's too much Noakes's way, and what you say throws light on it. If he and Noakes are pals—well, when I wangle, even if it's petrol, I like to do it in decent company. I disliked Wilkins's manner so much that I declined the petrol: told him I'd wait for the regular supply. The odd thing is that Noakes has not been here at the shop in my time."

"Rather lucky for you, for if he'd found you here, he would have told Wilkins you're a dangerous character, and got you fired out. He may do that yet."

"Well, let's get along home. Mrs. Pouncey will have high tea ready, and I'm ravenous."

After their meal, which was tea and supper combined, they smoked for an hour in the sitting-room. Then Templeton jumped up.

"Botheration!" he exclaimed. "I was going to work on my turbine specification, but I've left it in a drawer at the shop. I shall have to pull on my boots again and fetch it."

"Can't it wait? It's a horrid night."

"I really can't waste a whole evening. My time's getting short, and I've lots still to do."

"Well, I'll come along with you. After supper walk a mile, you know. It's about a mile there and back, I suppose."

The night was damp and murky. The country lane was unlit, and they found their way by intermittent flashes of Templeton's electric torch. There was no dwelling between Mrs. Pouncey's cottage and the garage, and at this hour, half-past eight on a winter night, they were not likely to meet either pedestrians or vehicles. So much the greater, therefore, was Templeton's surprise, when, on

approaching the spot where the garage and workshop stood, he saw a dim light through the window of the latter.

"Wilkins went off at half-past three, and said he wouldn't be back to-night," said Templeton. "I suppose he changed his mind."

To reach the door they had to pass the window. It was only natural that Eves, who was on the inside, should glance in. Catching Templeton by the arm, he drew him back out of the rays of the lamp-light, whispering:

"There's some one stooping at a drawer, trying a key, apparently. Couldn't see his face, the light's too dim."

"It's Wilkins, I expect. No one else has any right here," replied Templeton. "I'll take a look."

Peeping round the frame of the window, through the dirty pane, he was able to distinguish nothing but a man's form at the further end of the shop. The lamp, hanging from the middle of the roof, was turned very low, and the bent attitude of the man, with his back three-parts towards the window, rendered it impossible to discern his features. He was covered with a long waterproof, and a storm cap was pulled low over his head. From his movements it was clear that he was trying one key after another.

"It's not Wilkins," whispered Templeton. "I never saw him dressed like that."

"Then it's a burglar," replied Eves. "Nab him!"

They moved on tip-toe to the door. Templeton grasped the handle, murmuring:

"I'll turn it suddenly—then make a dash!"

There was absolute quiet all around, and the sound of jingling keys came faintly through the door. After a few moments' pause Templeton turned the handle noiselessly, and pushed the door open. The damp weather had, however, swollen the timber, and the slight sound it made as it strained against the doorpost attracted the attention of the man beyond. Still stooping over the drawer, he turned his head sharply.

"My hat! Noakes!" muttered Eves.

Springing into the shop past Templeton, who had halted on recognising Noakes, as if to consider matters, Eves dashed at the waterproofed figure. The moment's warning had enabled Noakes to prepare for attack. He projected a bony shoulder, prevented Eves from getting the clutch he intended, and made a rush towards the door.

"Collar him, Bob!" cried Eves.

During the next minute there was a rough-and-tumble in which Noakes's legs played as free a part as was possible to a man encased in a long waterproof. He displayed astounding agility in evading close action, and it was not until Eves

caught him by the heel as he kicked out that he was brought to the ground. "I'll sit on him," said Eves. "Ring up the police station, Bob, and ask them to send a constable to arrest a burglar."

"But are you sure—" Templeton began.

"Don't argue," said Eves. "He's a desperate character; I can hardly hold him."

Templeton went to the telephone, lifted the receiver, then turned again towards Eves.

"Don't you think, as it's Mr. Noakes——" he said.

"Mr. Noakes! The Mayor of Pudlington?" interrupted Eves. "Picking locks! Nonsense! Ring up at once, Bob, and then come and help: the ruffian will be too much for me, just out of hospital."

Templeton gave the message.

"They'll send a man at once. He'll be here in about ten minutes," he reported. "Are you sure it isn't Mr. Noakes? I could have sworn I recognised him."

"So I am—so I am," panted the prisoner, who had hitherto struggled in silence. "What the Turk do 'ee mean by assaulting me—murderous assault—Mayor of Pudlington?"

"Now, now, don't be rash!" said Eves. "You won't make matters any better by pretending to be our worthy mayor. He won't like that, you know, when you're brought into court to-morrow. I shall have to give evidence, and when I tell him that the fellow caught rifling a drawer took his name in vain——"

"But I be the mayor—Philemon Noakes; and I'll send you to jail for assault and battery, without the option of a fine. Let me go! I'm the mayor, I tell 'ee!"

"I really think he's telling the truth," said Templeton.

Just then Noakes, kicking out, dealt Templeton a heavy blow on the ankle.

"You had better lie still, whoever you are!" said the latter, warmly. "Violence won't help you!"

"Of course not—only makes things ten times worse!" said Eves. "Catch his legs, Bob; if he isn't quiet we'll have to truss him up. I never came across such an impudent scoundrel. Here's a burglar, caught in the act, claiming to be the chief magistrate! That beats everything! How's it possible? I say, Bob, there'll be a queer scene in court to-morrow. Suppose it were true, I can't for the life of me see how the mayor on the bench and the criminal in the dock are going to arrange matters. Will he hop from one to the other, and finally sentence himself? That's a Jekyll and Hyde problem I can't solve. But here's somebody coming—the bobby, I expect."

Through the half-open door came a policeman, with handcuffs hanging from his wrists.

"Here he is, constable!" said Eves. "He's been struggling, but I dare say he'll

go quietly."

"Now then, there," said the constable, "get up and come along quiet. We've been looking for you a month past. Who gives him in charge?"

"I do," said Eves, "though I suppose Mr. Templeton ought to do it. You know Mr. Templeton, constable? Temporary assistant to Mr. Wilkins."

"Ay, sure, I've seed the gentleman." Noakes had now risen, and stood before the constable, Eves on one side, Templeton on the other. His face, hitherto in shade, had come within the rays of the dim lamp.

"Daze me!" said the constable, after a hard stare. "Surely—ay, 'tis the mayor, with the beginning of a black eye!"

[image]

"'DAZE ME!' SAID THE CONSTABLE. 'SURELY—AY, 'TIS THE MAYOR.'"

"Of course I'm the mayor!" said Noakes, truculently. "These young ruffians have assaulted me. I give them in charge, Brown."

"That's cool!" said Eves. "Don't pay any attention to him, constable. He's mad, or intoxicated. Mr. Templeton had occasion to come back to the shop, and we found this fellow in the act of trying to open a drawer where Mr. Templeton keeps important papers. He got a bit ruffled, of course. He says he's the mayor, but is that likely? Take him to the station, constable: we'll give the superintendent the facts."

"He's the mayor, or his double," said the constable. "And as to arresting the mayor——"

"Don't be a fool, Brown," said Noakes. "It's all a mistake—and a mistake that'll cost these young ruffians dear. I came here to see Wilkins, and afore I could get a word out, they knocked me down and nigh squeezed the breath out of me."

"And Wilkins knows that you open his drawers in his absence?" said Eves. "Are these your keys, Bob, or Wilkins's?"

He held up the bunch of keys which Noakes had dropped.

"Neither," said Templeton. "Mine are in my pocket: Mr. Wilkins no doubt has his."

"Well, jown me if I know what to do!" said the constable. "You'd better all come along and charge each other, seems to me!"

"What's all this?" said a voice at the door.

Wilkins entered breathlessly.

"They rang me up from the station, and told me there was burglars in my shop. Where be they? Mr. Noakes, what have been going on? What have come to your eye?"

"You may well ask, Wilkins. I came to have a word with you about that estimate, you know——" Wilkins tried to look as if he knew—"and these fellows, one an assistant of yours, I understand, set on me and half murdered me—took me for a burglar, ha! ha!"

"He was trying his keys on this drawer, Mr. Wilkins," said Eves.

"And why not?" demanded Wilkins, indignantly. "Why not, I ask 'ee? 'Tis my drawer, I keep my papers there, and Mr. Noakes having come to see me about an estimate, of course he saves time and gets the estimate out ready."

"And Brown will take 'em in charge for an unprovoked assault," said Noakes.

"Well, now, Mr. Noakes," said Wilkins, soothingly, "I wouldn't go so far as that. Not if it was me. It do seem 'twas a mistake. They took 'ee for a burglar—a nat'ral mistake, that's what it was, and my advice to one and all is, let it bide and say no more about it. We don't want no newspapers getting a hold of things like this. Won't do none of us no good—that's what I say."

Eves was loth to let Noakes go scot free, but after a whispered consultation with Templeton, who pointed out the improbability of any magistrate being induced to believe, in face of Wilkins's explanation, that the mayor was a burglar, he grudgingly agreed to withdraw the charge. Templeton took the precaution of removing all his own papers from the drawer, and leaving Noakes with Wilkins, returned with Eves to Mrs. Pouncey's cottage.

"So much for your rough diamond!" said Eves. "Noakes evidently didn't know before to-day that you were here, and when I saw him confabbing with Wilkins he was no doubt asking all about you. Wilkins must have told him about your inventions, and he thought a visit to your drawer would give him an idea or two, and enable him to get in first with a patent."

"But you don't suppose Wilkins was in the plot?"

"I don't know about that, but he's clearly under Noakes's thumb. Some one said that you know a man by the company he keeps. Wilkins keeps uncommonly bad company."

"I'm disappointed in him, I confess," said Templeton. "To-morrow I'll give him a week's notice, and work on my own for the rest of my leave."

III

Next morning Templeton, after breakfast, went to the workshop as usual, leaving Eves to his own devices until lunch-time. Eves spent an hour pottering about in the shed, and was particularly interested in the fire extinguishing composition.

"Rummy old sport!" he thought. "I suppose he will strike something really good one of these days, and be a bloated millionaire while I'm pinching on a miserable pension. Wonder what temperature this stuff melts at, by the way."

He found, standing against the wall, a metal tray pierced with holes which had been plugged with the composition. A thermometer hung on a nail.

"Hanged if I don't experiment on my own account!" he thought.

He filled the tray with water from the pump in Mrs. Pouncey's garden, laid it on an iron tripod which he found in the shed, and obtaining some firewood and coke from Mrs. Pouncey, kindled a small fire in an iron brazier. This he put underneath the tray, hanging the thermometer from the tripod. In a few minutes a sizzling informed him that water was trickling through the holes, and lifting the thermometer, he discovered that it registered 76°.

"By George! What a rag!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if it can be done! Mustn't tell Bob, though!"

He put out the fire, emptied the brazier and the tray, replugged the holes and removed all traces of his experiment. Then he walked into the town, and made his way to the Literary Institute.

"Good morning, Mr. Johnson," he said to the builder, whom he found reading a newspaper in the large hall, and smiling broadly. "You've got all ready for to-night, I see. How many will the place hold?"

"Two hundred and fifty, or thereabouts," said the builder.

"That's about the whole able-bodied population of Pudlington, isn't it?"

"Why no, sir, not with the women folk. They've got votes now-a-days, and there be more women voters than men, seemingly. Have 'ee seen the *Echo*, sir?"

"Your local rag? Anything in it?"

"A rare bit o' news that you won't see every week. Look 'ee here."

He handed the *Pudlington Echo* to Eves, pointing to a paragraph headed with large type.

"MISTAKEN FOR A BURGLAR

"AMAZING EXPERIENCE OF THE MAYOR

"Our worthy mayor was involved in an awkward predicament last night. In

pursuance of an appointment with Mr. Wilkins, of the British Motor Garage, he arrived at the workshop between eight and nine o'clock, and was awaiting the proprietor, when he was suddenly seized and thrown down by a young man in the uniform of a second lieutenant, who had come up in company with Mr. Wilkins's assistant, and, not familiar with the mayor's lineaments, had mistaken him for a burglar. The police were telephoned for, and Constable Brown, on reaching the scene, found himself in an unenviable position, between cross-charges of burglary and common assault. The tension was relieved by the arrival of Mr. Wilkins, who saw at once that a pardonable mistake had been made by his assistant and the young officer, and by the exercise of his accustomed tact succeeded in bringing both parties to an amicable understanding. We have unfortunately to record that in the regrettable fracas our mayor sustained an ocular abrasion, the consequences of which, while temporarily disfiguring, will, we trust, be otherwise negligible. As a comparative newcomer Mr. Noakes may not be aware that he is in good company. Those familiar with the chronicles of our ancient borough will remember the historic bout between Ted Sloggins and Jemmy Wild, the prizefighter once Mayor of Pudlington, when the latter was knocked out in the tenth round with two broken ribs and a black eye."

"That's a nasty one!" said Eves, returning the paper.

"That last bit, sir? True, I feel it so—very nasty indeed. That feller have got his knife into the mayor, in a sly sort of way."

"Mr. Noakes isn't very popular, then? The local paper would hardly give a dig at a popular mayor."

"Well, sir, to tell 'ee the truth, there's two parties, one for and one against. Mr. Noakes is almost a newcomer, and some folks don't take kindly to his pushing ways. I don't myself, I own it. He's near driven me off my head over this meeting, and though I'd do anything in the way of business, I don't hold with his views. He was one of they 'Stop the War' kidney, and though goodness knows I'd 'a stopped the war, having a son over in France, I wouldn't stop it a moment afore we'd done what we set out to do, and thankful I am our lads have done it. That there young officer last night"—he smiled—"was you, I take it, sir."

"The curtain's dropped over that, Mr. Johnson," said Eves. "By the way, you were going to try Mr. Templeton's new fire extinguisher. Have you rigged up the apparatus?"

"Ay, sure, 'tis all ready. Come up along, and I'll show 'ee. I'll try it next week, just afore I plaster the ceiling."

He took Eves to the floor above, and showed him, between the workmen's planks and the matchboard, a large shallow tank of sheet iron resting on the

rafters. It was filled with water, and the builder explained that the holes in the bottom had been plugged with the composition a week before.

"Most ingenious," said Eves, making a mental note of the position of the tank. "If it answers, I suppose you will make a tank to cover the whole of the ceiling."

"Surely, and put it into every house, hall or church I build."

"Johnson, where are you?" came a call from below.

"'Tis Mr. Noakes himself, come to bother me again!" said Johnson in an undertone. Aloud he cried: "Coming, Mr. Noakes, coming! ... Belike you'll bide here a bit," he added with a smile.

"I'm not keen on meeting your worthy mayor," replied Eves. "I'll come down when he's gone."

Through the matchboard Eves clearly heard the conversation between the two men.

"Look 'ee here, Johnson," began Noakes, irritably, "this won't do. The place is as cold as an ice-house, and my orders was to heat en well. Folks won't be no good listening to speeches if they're all of a shiver."

"Why, bless 'ee, Mr. Noakes, 'tis only ten o'clock. There's plenty of time to get the room comfortable warm by seven. The furnace is going, and you don't want the place like a greenhouse, do 'ee? Folks 'ud all drop asleep."

"There's a medium, Johnson. I count on you to regulate the furnace so's we're cosy-like. 'Tis a raw morning, and 'twill be worse to-night. Keep the furnace going steady, and come four o'clock shet all the winders to keep out the night air."

"But what about ventilation? If so be there's a good audience you'll have women fainting, and I don't know what all."

"There'll be plenty of ventilation through the matchboard," said Noakes, looking upward. "Besides, we've always the winders to cool the air if need be, but if you ain't got a good fire—why there you are! See that my orders are carried out, Johnson."

"Very good. You shall have it like an oven if you like: 'tis not for me to say."

Noakes, whose face suggested the recent application of a beefsteak, inspected the rows of chairs, mounted the platform and re-arranged the table, scolded the charwoman who had left her dust-pan on the chairman's seat, and finally departed. Then Eves rejoined the builder.

"They'll be warm afore they gets to work," said the latter, smiling, "And if so be there's any opposition, I won't say but what tempers 'll rise to biling point. However!"

"A queer man, your mayor!" said Eves. "By the way, I'd like to have a look at your furnace."

"Surely, sir. Come wi' me."

He led Eves into the basement, where a young man in shirt-sleeves was stoking the fire.

"I'll have to keep 'ee to-night, Fred," said the builder, "and sorry I be to say it, but the mayor's just been talking to me, and wants the place hotted up. You must stay till eight, my lad, and leave a good fire when you go: there's no telling how long the speechifying will last; these 'lection meetings are that uncertain."

The stoker brushed his arm across his damp brow, and muttered something uncomplimentary of the mayor. Johnson expounded to Eves the merits of his heating system, and followed him up the stairs again.

"The mayor's a busy man just now," said Eves. "Isn't there some sort of a ceremony coming on?"

"Ay, so 'tis, a ceremony that's come down from very ancient days, very ancient indeed, when we was all heathens, so it seems. 'Tis the anointing of the British Stone, they do call it, a rare old block of granite all by itself in a field some way north o' the town. Nobody knows how it come there, but 'tis said there was a battle on the spot, I don't know how many hundred years ago, and a whole cemetery of bones down below. Whatever the truth is, the mayor and corporation marches out in full rig once a year, and the mayor breaks a bottle o' cider, the wine o' the country, atop of the stone. I say 'tis just an excuse for a randy, for they make a sort of fair o't, wi' stalls and merry-go-rounds, and I don't know what all. There won't be so much fun as usual this year, though, owing to shortage of sugar for sweets and cakes and such. Still, maybe 'twill be worth your seeing, being so ancient."

"Rather! I'm tremendously keen on rags, ancient or modern. I'll be there!"

Eves bade the builder good-bye at the door of the hall, and the latter went up the street to his office. As soon as his back was turned, Eves hastened below to the furnace room.

"Pretty thirsty work, isn't it?" he said to the man. "I don't wonder you're not keen to be kept so long at it."

"'Tisn't that, sir," said the stoker. "The truth o't is I was going to take my girl to the cinema to-night. It begins at seven, and she'll be in a taking, 'cos they're showing some war pictures, and I'm in one of 'em, and she's mad on seeing me, though I tell her I ain't doing nothing, only looking down my nose at a blooming Hun prisoner."

"Naturally she wants to see you, and squeeze your hand, and—you know. I should myself. Well, I'll tell you what. I'll come about 6.45 and release you."

The man stared.

"I mean it, no kid," Eves went on. "I intended coming to the meeting, but there'll be nothing very interesting until half time, and the stoking will be finished

by then."

"But you'll mess your clothes, sir, not to speak of your hands."

"Oh, no! I'll see to that. Besides, you know, we didn't fret ourselves about dirt in the trenches. That's all right, then, and look here—get your young woman a box of chocolates, a pound box—all one price, four shillings. She'll like your picture all the more."

He handed the man a couple of half-crowns, cut short his effusive thanks, and made his way back to the cottage.

"Bob come home, Mrs. Pouncey?" he asked the old dame.

"Not yet, sir, and I do hope he won't be late, for I've got as tender a loin of young pig as ever I've roasted."

"Capital! I'm ravenous, I always am. It's a disease, Mrs. Pouncey. Don't I show it in my face?"

"Bless your heart, sir, your face does me good: it do look so happy!"

"Happy thoughts, old dear. I've had a particularly happy thought all the morning, and it shines out on my ingenuous countenance. Some folks never show anything, you know. My friend Templeton, now—ah! here he is! Roast pork, Bob—hurry up!"

IV

After early supper that evening, Eves and Templeton, giving each an arm to Mrs. Pouncey, set off for the Literary Institute. The good woman was greatly excited at the prospect of giving her vote for the first time next day, and had announced her intention of voting for "the gentleman," whereupon Eves had reproached her, with well-assumed severity.

"That is not the right spirit, I am sure of it," he said. "You are going to exercise for the first time the priceless privilege, or right, or duty, of the franchise: a most solemn responsibility, Mrs. Pouncey. Yet you have made up your mind to vote for 'the gentleman' without considering what views he professes, and without hearing the other side, which may be one of Nature's gentlemen."

"I like 'em best bred, same as pig," said Mrs. Pouncey, stoutly.

"I don't dispute your taste," returned Eves, "but I think you owe it to the principle of fair play at least to hear what the other fellow may have to say. This is your last chance: to-morrow is the fatal day: like the man in the poem, you must make up your mind between truth and falsehood, 'twixt the good and evil

side."

"Oh! how you do talk, Mr. Eves!" said Mrs. Pouncey. "I'll go, then, to please you, and I hope as I shan't be sorry for it."

"I don't think you will; in fact I think you will have quite a pleasant entertainment. Mr. Noakes has insisted on the hall being warm and cosy-like, and the chairs are quite good. I'll find you a good place at the back of the hall."

"Not too far back, then, for my hearing bain't what it was."

"But your eyes are good—wonderfully good for a lady of forty or so. You shall sit where you can hear—and see—everything."

Templeton had privately taken Eves to task for persuading the old dame to venture out on a cold night; but Eves had only chuckled.

The young officers were both in mufti, Eves having borrowed an old suit from his friend.

It was twenty minutes to seven when they reached the hall. The first few rows of chairs were already occupied, and people were streaming in. Eves piloted Mrs. Pouncey to a seat in the middle of the sixth row from the back wall.

"It do be warmish, to be sure," she said, removing her tippet.

"Thanks to the mayor! Bob, look after Mrs. Pouncey. I'll be back presently."

He dodged his way through the incoming stream, and disappeared.

Templeton sat beside Mrs. Pouncey, looking around the audience with an air of mild interest, and quite unconscious that the good lady was basking in the glory reflected upon her by the companionship of the "young feller as had his name in the paper." She nodded and smiled at her friends and acquaintances, and bridled visibly when she saw heads put together, nods in her direction, curious glances at Templeton, and lips whispering into ready ears.

The hall gradually filled. Tradesmen of the town, farmers from the outskirts, a sprinkling of khaki, and a considerable number of women, occupied all the chairs, and overflowed into the aisles along the walls. Conversation buzzed; the broad Doric of the county mingled quaintly with the north-country burr and the cockney twang of the soldiers whom chance had camped in the neighbourhood.

"Where be Mr. Eves, I wonder?" said Mrs. Pouncey, presently. She was in truth disappointed. "Mr. Templeton was a nice young gentleman, to be sure" (so she afterwards confided to a gossip), "but he was that quiet—well, you didn't like to speak to him promiscous-like, for fear you spoiled the high thoughts a-rooting in his mind. But that Mr. Eves, now—well, you weren't afeared of high thoughts with him. He was a merry feller, that he was, full of his fun; and talk—my dear, you should have heard him; 'twas just as if you poured out a kettle till it run dry, and the most beautiful long words, I do assure 'ee."

"Where be Mr. Eves, I wonder?"

The question roused Templeton from his abstracted scrutiny of the audience. He glanced at his watch; it was two minutes to seven. Some of the soldiers were already stamping their feet and calling "Time!" He looked up and down the hall, along the walls, into the doorway. Eves was not to be seen. A misgiving seized him. Eves had been very keen on coming to this meeting. Was he contemplating a "rag"? The idea made Templeton perspire.

An outburst of cheers and clapping of hands drew his attention from his uneasy thoughts. The platform party had arrived. Noakes, wearing his chain of office, stepped first on to the platform. He was followed by a lean, hungry-looking man with fiery eyes, clean-shaven, his reddish hair brushed up from the scalp. Templeton recognised the features of a fanatical agitator whose portrait had appeared in the picture papers. The local Labour candidate, a burly fellow with a jolly red face and closely trimmed beard, took his seat beside the speaker of the evening, and the remaining chairs on the platform were occupied by his principal supporters, male and female.

The cheers subsided, and the mayor rose. In the silence a high-pitched voice enquired from the rear of the hall, "Who said burglar?" Some of the audience laughed, some cried "Shame!" and a shrill cry of "It wasn't me!" and a scuffle announced that the chucker-out had proved more than equal to the occasion. Noakes smiled blandly until the noise had ceased: then he began.

"Ladies and gentlemen."

But there is no need to report his opening speech, which indeed was unusually brief for a chairman's. Templeton had begun to think better of him, until, after announcing that he would not stand between the audience and their great comrade from London, he said that, when the speech of the evening was finished, he would venture to make a few remarks by way of applying its principles to local circumstances. He then introduced his friend and comrade, and sat down.

Nor is it worth while, perhaps, to follow the "comrade from London" through his hour's declamation. "The fellow could speak," said Templeton, afterwards, "and what he said wasn't all rot. But it was full of the most hopelessly unpractical ideas, streaked with a vein of bitterness against every thing and every body, and absolutely vitiated for me by the assumption that every rich man is a knave, and every poor man a martyr. Noakes ought to have let well alone, but he tried to dot the i's and simply provoked Eves's question. If he had closed the meeting after the big speech, there'd have been no trouble."

Whether it was that the bucolic mind moved too slowly to keep pace with the orator's flying periods, or that the townsmen from London and the North were spell-bound by his fervid eloquence, or simply that the growing heat of the hall induced lethargy; certain it is that the meeting was quite orderly and decorous during the great speech. Not until the chairman was again on his feet

did trouble arise, and that was due to a simple question put by Eves. But we must go back a little.

When Eves descended into the furnace room, and released the stoker, he stripped off coat, waistcoat and collar, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and started energetically upon his self-assumed task. Hardly two minutes had elapsed when he heard a rasping voice behind him.

"That's the way. Keep it going steady, my man. There's a thermometer on the wall just inside the hall; run up every now and again and take a look at it: never let it drop below 60°."

"Ay sure," said Eves, counterfeiting the local brogue, and Noakes, who had been standing on the bottom step, went away gratified that his orders were being carried out so well.

"Not below 60°!" said Eves under his breath. "Sixteen degrees to go! Well, it's a long, long way to Tipperary, but my heart is *there*!" And he ladled coal and coke into the furnace with the fresh enthusiasm of an amateur.

It occurred to him that if he was to slip up into the hall for the purpose of examining the thermometer it would be just as well to look the part he was playing. So he smeared his face and arms, and what was visible of his shirt, with coal dust, much assisted by the dampness of his perspiring skin.

He paid his first visit to the thermometer just as the meeting opened. It hung on the wall near a group of Tommies who had been unable to obtain seats. They eyed him with a certain humorous sympathy. The thermometer registered 62°.

During the hour-long oration Eves was up and down several times, noting with satisfaction that the mercury was steadily rising, yet a little doubtful whether it would reach the critical point before the close of the meeting. He noticed towards the end of the hour that the heat was telling on some members of the audience. Women were fanning themselves; two or three plethoric farmers had fallen asleep: all the Tommies had unbuttoned their tunics. "Some fug, mate!" one of them remarked in a stage whisper. Eves only smiled in answer; he had seen that the mercury now touched 74°, and having stoked up the furnace to its full capacity, was satisfied that he could do no more, and stood among the soldiers.

The great speech ended in wild and whirling words: the speaker sat down amid applause, and Noakes arose.

"Now, my friends, we've heard a terrible fine speech, that we have, and I agree with every word of it. Afore I call upon our candidate—he'll be our member to-morrow—to propose a vote of thanks to our comrade, I've a thing or two to say for to bring it home to the hearts o' the men and women o' Pudlington. Capitalism, as he truly said, is the deadly poison as is driving a nail into the roots

o' the nation: I couldn't say better nor that. Well, then, neighbours all, what I do say is, don't 'ee go and vote for no capitalist as belongs to a covey of profiteers, birds of prey as peck out the vitals o' the widder and the orphan. Ah, neighbours! my heart bleeds as I think o' the poor lone widder woman as pays dear for her bread, and can't get no cheese, scraping to pay the rate collector as he——"

"Who raised Widow Pouncey's rent?" came a clear voice from the back of the hall.

The mayor paused, and cast a swift glance in the direction of the questioner. He had recognised the voice, and sought for that well-remembered figure in officer's khaki. The somnolent audience was roused, every head was turned, many people had risen from their seats. Mrs. Pouncey, who had been dozing, her head constantly wobbling over towards Templeton's shoulder, suddenly sat erect, and exclaimed with a cry of delight: "That's Mr. Eves at last, bless him!" Eves himself, having launched his question, and ascertained that the mercury stood at 75°, turned with a smile towards the eager Tommies who wanted to know all about Widow Pouncey.

Noakes recovered from the shock before the first thrill of excitement had passed off.

"'Tis low manners to interrupt," he said in his smoothest tones, still trying to discover Eves's whereabouts, but in vain. "I was a-going to say——"

"Answer the question!" came in a chorused roar from the soldiers. "Who raised Widow Pouncey's rent?"

"Shall I tell 'em, sir?" whispered Mrs. Pouncey.

"No, no!" advised Templeton, anxious to avoid publicity. "Better say nothing."

"Ay, I be that shy, and the room so terrible hot."

"As chairman of this meeting," said Noakes, with a patient smile, "I rule that questions can't be asked now."

"Who—raised—Widow—Pouncey's—rent?" sang the Tommies, to the tune of "Here we suffer grief and pain" *da capo*.

"Who was it, mate?" asked one of them.

"I dare say he'll tell us presently," said Eves, "if you keep it up a little longer."

He had his eyes on the thermometer.

The "comrade from London" got up and spoke earnestly in Noakes's ear, while the chorus continued. The mayor gave a sickly smile and held up his hand. There was silence.

"My friend on my right," said the mayor, "reminds me as there's nothing more powerful than the truth."

"Righto!" yelled the Tommies. "Who—raised——"

"*Nobody!*" shouted the mayor. "'Tis a lie!"

"What's a lie?" cried one of the men. The others looked enquiringly at Eves.

"I say 'tis a lie!" repeated the mayor. "Mrs. Pouncey pays me five shilling a week, the same as she's paid——"

He stopped, for three parts of the way down the hall there rose a stout figure, with face flushed and bonnet awry. There was a moment's breathless silence, then Mrs. Pouncey, with forefinger outstretched towards the mayor, spoke out.

"Ay, the same as I've paid honest for twenty year, afore ever you come into the town, and 'twas you as said 'twould be doubled as soon as Parlyment lets you, if not afore, and not a word of a lie in it, Mr. Noakes."

The old woman collapsed into her seat, amid murmurs of "Shame!"

"Good old Mrs. Pouncey!" "Who said profiteer?" "Noakes raised Widow Pouncey's rent!" "Chuck him out!" "Get out, old crocodile!"

The hall rang with various cries. Eves, smiling broadly, glanced at the thermometer The mercury touched 76°. Noakes leant forward over the table, and shaking his fists, roared:

"As chairman of this meeting, and Mayor of Pudlington, here I be, and here I bide."

He started back suddenly, putting a finger between his collar and his neck, and looking upward. Next moment he dropped his head and brushed a drop of water from his nose. Several of the platform party turned their faces up, started back, and upset their chairs. Two or three thin streams of water, as from the eyelets in the spray of a shower bath, were descending from the unplastered ceiling. Noakes edged a little to the left, and was opening his mouth again, when with a hiss and clatter like a heavy shower of rain upon a glass house, the whole contents of Templeton's experimental tank poured down between the laths of the matchboard. Noakes gasped and spluttered, the ladies of his party shrieked, all the occupants of the platform stampeded like a flock of sheep, overturning their chairs, obstructing one another in their mad flight for the stairs. For one moment of amazement the audience was silent; then a roar of inextinguishable laughter broke from nearly three hundred throats, whistles and cat-calls resounded, the Tommies looked round for the stoker, whom, by some obscure instinct or intuition, they connected with the catastrophic shower. But Eves had slipped away.

[image]

"THE WHOLE CONTENTS OF TEMPLETON'S EXPERIMENTAL TANK POURED DOWN."

A special Election Edition of the *Pudlington Echo* appeared next day, and was bought up eagerly by the crowds who, in spite of the pouring rain, had flocked into the town to record their votes. The Editor had filled half a column with a descriptive paragraph in his best style.

"SHOWER BATH AT A MEETING

"REMARKABLE INCIDENT

"THE MAYOR MISSES HIS UMBRELLA

"The meeting at the Literary Institute in support of the candidature of Mr. Benjamin Moggridge was broken up by a most remarkable unrehearsed effect, which is probably without parallel in the political life of this country. The mayor, Alderman Noakes, was in the act of protesting, with all the dignity pertaining to his exalted office, against the demands of certain unruly spirits that he should vacate the chair, when a quantity of water, calculated to be equal to a rainfall of 2.8 ins., descended with startling suddenness and almost tropical violence upon the platform, bringing the meeting to a summary end. We understand that this inauspicious close to Mr. Moggridge's campaign was due to the unexpected operation of a new fire extinguisher, which the builder, our well-known and respected fellow citizen Mr. James Johnson, had located above the hall with a view to experimenting on a suitable occasion. The premature exhibition of this remarkable invention, which promises to be an epoch-making success, appears to have originated in the laudable desire of Mr. Noakes that the large audience should be in no way inconvenienced by the inclemency of the weather. His orders that the hall, which, in its unfinished state, might otherwise have sown the seeds of dangerous and possibly fatal complaints, should be heated to a wholesome degree of temperature, were carried out with what proved to be supererogatory solicitude; but our worthy mayor will doubtless console himself for his temporary discomfiture—the second this week, it will be remembered—with the reflection that the efficacy of the new fire extinguisher was abundantly demonstrated, and that the future immunity of the Literary Institute from the ravages of the devouring monster is assured."

A BRUSH WITH THE ENEMY

I

Eves was dozing comfortably beneath a pile of blankets. It was a cold morning, and though he had been awakened when Templeton rose from the adjacent bed, he had merely snorted in reply to his friend's declaration that it was time to get up, and turned over on the other side.

His slumbering ears were just conscious of a shout from below; but he paid no heed to it, even when it was repeated. He was settling down in luxurious warmth to that early morning sleep which so deliciously rounds off the night's repose, when two sinewy hands wrenched away the bedclothes wherein he had rolled himself, and Templeton shouted:

"Get up, you slugabed. It's come!"

"Cover me up, confound you!" cried Eves, wrathfully. "I shall catch my death of cold."

"Get up. I've been dressed half an hour. It's come, I tell you."

Eves bent his knees and pulled his pyjamas down over his ankles.

"I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't care. Mrs. Pouncey"—he raised his voice—"come and drag this murdering ruffian away. He's giving me pneumonia."

"Don't be an ass, Tom. Breakfast is nearly ready, and as the nozzle has just come by parcel post, I want to fix it and see how it works before I go off to the shop."

"You and your inventions will be the death of me," grumbled Eves, hugging himself. Then with a sudden movement he caught up his pillow, slammed it at Templeton's head, followed it up with a rush, and began to throw off his pyjamas. "Get out!" he cried. "I'll tub and dress in five minutes—not for you, old greaser, but for the bacon I smell frying."

"Well, I'll have time to fit on the nozzle before you're down."

He dashed out of the room, took the staircase in three resounding leaps, and ran bare-headed through the rain to the shed.

Eves smiled as he watched him through the window.

"Old Bob's excited this morning," he thought. "Another rag, I wonder?"

Templeton's usual stolidity was in fact quite broken down by the arrival of the nozzle made to his own design, for which he had been waiting in order to complete his reconstruction of the ancient road-sweeper. At breakfast he was too much excited to do full justice to the dish of bacon and eggs which the excellent Mrs. Pouncey had provided.

"It's just the thing, Tom," he cried. "It fits perfectly, and I believe the old

'bus will go like one o'clock. The only thing left, if it does work, is to complete my specification and fire it in at the Patent Office."

"I don't see that. Nobody wants a road-sweeper to go like a Rolls-Royce."

"You don't understand. I'm not out for making road-sweepers. I only bought the old thing to experiment on. It's the reversible steering I'm going to patent. Look here; here's my rough draft. That'll give you an idea of what I'm driving at."

Eves took the paper handed to him, and read aloud:

"'I, Robert Templeton, of the Red House, Wonston, Hampshire, in the Kingdom of England, lately a lieutenant in His Majesty's Forces, do hereby declare the nature of this invention and in what manner the same is to be performed to be particularly described and ascertained in and by the following——'

Oh, I say! I can't wade through all this balderdash. Tell me in plain English what you're after."

"Well, in plain English, then, my motor is provided with two sets of steering-gear, and the clutch couplings are so arranged that I can engage one and disengage the other simply by shifting round on the seat, on the pivot of which a cam is keyed——"

"For goodness' sake, Bob, spare me the rest, if that's plain English. D'you mean that you can drive your 'bus forward or backward as you please?"

"You can put it like that if you like, only, of course, the 'bus is always going forward, because when you shift round on the seat——"

"Exactly. Not a word more. Why couldn't you say that in a sentence instead of meandering through page after page? Why, hang it all, this will make a book before you've done with it."

"It does seem a little long-winded," Templeton admitted, seriously, "but you've no idea how particular the Patent Office people are. You have to be correct in the smallest detail, and draw diagrams showing everything. There's a lot of work to be done on this draft yet before it's ready."

"Well, let's go and see how it works in practice. I'd die happy if I thought one of your old inventions was really going to make your fortune."

"I'm afraid there isn't time now. I must hurry off to the shop. But we'll try it to-night when I get back. It's a pity old Wilkins insisted on my working out my week's notice; I'd have liked to devote all my time to it."

"Can't you forfeit your screw or something?"

"I offered to, but Wilkins wouldn't hear of it, and as I hate bothers, and my

leaving without notice would certainly put him in a hole, I'll stick it till Saturday. Are you coming with me to the shop?"

"I'll walk with you so far; then I'll go on to the town and inquire tenderly after Noakes. We'll meet at the 'Three Tuns' for lunch. Mrs. Pouncey will be glad of a day off."

Encased in macintoshes, they trudged up the muddy lane. At the corner they met a farmer driving his cart westward. He nodded to Templeton.

"You've gotten she at last, zur," he said, with a smile.

"Yes; all right now, Mr. West."

"Ay. I knowed she'd come, gie un time. Gie un time, I said, and she'll come. Well, marnen to 'ee, zur."

"Who's your she, Bob?" asked Eves as they went on.

"Oh, he means the nozzle. They're fond of the feminine about here."

"But how on earth does he know anything about the nozzle? It came by post, you said?"

"Yes. I suppose the postman told him. You're not used to country ways."

"But how did the postman know what was in the parcel? They don't open things, I suppose?"

"Of course not. I dare say I mentioned to the postman one day what I was expecting, and they gossip about anything and everything here."

"What a place! Look here, my son, you'll have one of your inventions forestalled one of these days if you don't keep your mouth shut. Then you'd be sorry."

It was not Eves's way to keep his mouth shut, and he expatiated on the evils of talkativeness all the way to the workshop, where the friends parted. The same topic was revived when they met at the "Three Tuns" for lunch.

"Wilkins was unusually amiable to-day," Templeton happened to remark. "He seemed quite pleased that the nozzle is a success."

"Were you juggins enough to tell him that?" asked Eves with a touch of scorn.

"Well, what else could I do when he asked me point-blank? I didn't mention it first."

"I suppose he heard of it from the postman or from Farmer West, or from any other inhabitant of this gossiping old monkey-house. Wilkins is the last man who ought to know anything about your private affairs. Upon my word, I think I'd better get demobilised and take a job as your keeper. You're not fit to be trusted alone."

After lunch Eves accompanied Templeton to the shop, and watched over him with fatherly interest through the afternoon. He was amused to see Templeton from time to time break off his work on a purely mechanical job, hurry to

his coat hanging on a peg, extract the specification from his breast-pocket, and make some trifling alteration in text or diagram.

"Is that the result of what they call unconscious cerebration?" he asked. "Or can your mighty mind attend to two things at once? You're a wonder, Bobby, and I hope I shall live long enough to write you a thumping obituary notice."

II

Next day, immediately after breakfast, Eves went off on his own devices, and did not see Templeton again until supper-time.

"You look rather down in the mouth. Bob," he said. "Anything wrong?"

"I'm a bit worried," Templeton replied. "I don't think I'm naturally suspicious——"

"Rather not! You're as innocent as a babe. Any old diddler could suck you in. But what's happened?"

"This afternoon I had to go out for an hour or so to try a car. Wilkins was away, so I left the shop closed. While I was running the car I had an idea for my specification and when I got back I took it out of my coat to alter it. And I found this."

He handed Eves the paper.

"Well? It's the same old thing—same old rigmarole, isn't it?"

"That smudge of ink!"

"Your elbow—but, of course, it's all in pencil. You don't mean—

"As you say, it's all in pencil. It hasn't been near ink, so far as I know. At any rate, that smudge wasn't there this morning."

Eves whistled.

"Wilkins knew about your specification, of course; everybody knows everything in this Arcadia. My prophetic soul! He's been copying your draft, Bob, and being an untidy penman, left his mark behind. He must have been uncommon slippy to copy it all in an hour, though, with all these erasures and interlinings. Any one else got a key of the shop?"

"No one, so far as I know."

"Noakes? You remember when we caught him at the drawer? My hat! They don't stick at trifles. This is felony, or I'm a Dutchman. Wilkins, or Noakes, or both of them, want to get in first at the Patent Office; they've stolen your specification."

"That's a serious charge. We've no proof."

"My dear chap, it's as plain as a pikestaff. But look here, what can be done? Look at the worst; say they have copied your stuff, what then?"

"If they file their application at the Patent Office it will be no end of a bother and expense to prove it's mine."

"I'd swear that before any beak in the country. But let's keep to the point. They couldn't get to the Patent Office to-night?"

"No; it closes at five; opens at ten in the morning."

"What time's the last train up?"

"It left twenty minutes ago," said Templeton, after a glance at his watch.

"And in the morning?"

"The first train reaches London something after eleven."

Eves mused for a few seconds, drumming on the table.

"I tell you what," he said at length. "You set to work and make a fair copy of this stuff, and we'll go up by the first train to-morrow and see if—Hallo! here's a car. Rather late for a visit."

The panting of an automobile engine was distinctly audible. There was a rap on the outer door. Mrs. Pouncey shuffled along the passage; voices were heard; then the landlady entered.

"A gentleman to see you, sir; O'Reilly by name."

"Our excitable Irishman," said Eves.

"Ask him in, Mrs. Pouncey, please," said Templeton.

O'Reilly came in like a tornado, waving his arms and wearing his capacious smile.

"Sure, I'm delighted to see the two of you, and me not knowing the way," he said as he shook hands. "The Government, or the colonel anyway, has taken my tender for the camp waste, and 'tis to you I owe it, and I'll beg you to drink to the colonel, or anyway the Government; I have the champagne in my pocket ready."

He produced a bottle from the deep pocket of his waterproof coat.

"Jolly good of you, Mr. O'Reilly," said Eves. "You've come in the nick of time. My friend Templeton wants something to cheer him up."

"Do you say so? What might be the trouble, now?"

"Expound, Bob; your invention, I mean. I should only make a mess of it."

"It was just a notion for driving a car in the opposite direction to what it has been going, the driver swinging round on his seat and automatically bringing into action steering-gear affecting the back wheels instead of the front, or vice versa."

"Saves turning in a narrow lane, you see," added Eves.

"Bedad, that would be a blessing to me this dark night," said O'Reilly. "But

what is the trouble? Funds run out? Would you show me the plans, I'd find the capital—provided they'll work out, of course."

"Splendid!" cried Eves. "Here's the draft specification—but there's the rub; that smudge of ink. Look here, Bob, just set to work and copy your diagrams while I tell Mr. O'Reilly all about it, and he opens the fizz. We've no wine-glasses, only tumblers, but no one will mind that."

O'Reilly's face grew grave as he listened to the story told by Eves.

"That's bad," he said. "I stopped at the station a while ago to get a London evening paper, and I saw that mayor of yours, Noakes, step into the London train. There was another fellow with him, seeing him off."

"What sort of man?" asked Eves.

"A thick ruffian of a fellow in a long coat and a motor cap. I can't tell you which of them I dislike the most, by the faces of 'em, I mean—him or Noakes."

"That was Wilkins. There's no doubt I was right, Bob; Noakes has slunk off to London to get in first; and that was the last train!"

"Drink, my boys," said O'Reilly, who had meanwhile opened his bottle. "Health to ourselves, and confusion to Noakes. We'll get the top-side of him yet. There's one way to do it. 'Tis nine o'clock, and we are a hundred and sixty miles from London—that and a bit over. I'll drive you up in my car."

"Magnificent," cried Eves. "How long will your diagrams take, Bob?"

"Under an hour; but there's the specification to copy out."

"I'll do that. Hand over. We'll be ready in an hour, Mr. O'Reilly."

"Then I'll run back to the town and fill up my tank and see to my tyres and lamps," said O'Reilly. "Be you ready when I call for you, and with luck and no punctures we'll be in London by six o'clock."

He gulped a glass of champagne and hurried from the room.

The two lads went on steadily with their tasks. Templeton was finished first, and going to his desk scrawled a hasty note, which he placed in an envelope, and was addressing when Eves sprang up.

"That's done," he said, flinging down his pen. "What are you writing to Wilkins for?"

"Just to tell him I shan't be at the shop till Thursday."

"I wouldn't tell the brute anything."

"Well, you see, there's nothing proved yet, and——"

"And Noakes, I suppose, has gone up to town to leave his card on the King! Bob, you're an ass. But drink up your fizz; it's pretty flat. I hear the car. It'll be a pretty cold ride; rather sport, though."

"I hope we shan't have a spill. O'Reilly's a bit wild, you know. I wish we hadn't drunk that champagne."

"Oh, you're hopeless. Get on your coat, and don't worry. It'll be a splendid

rag."

Ten minutes sufficed for their donning their thickest outer garments and soothing the agitation into which the announcement of their journey threw Mrs. Pouncey. Then they started.

It is to be feared that Eves's expectation of a "splendid rag" was somewhat disappointed. There was a certain excitement in the first hour's run over the quiet country roads, when the car, behind its glaring headlights, seemed to be continually dashing itself against a wall of impenetrable blackness. But it soon became monotonous. The air was cold and damp, and in spite of their thick clothes and the windscreen the two passengers soon became unpleasantly chilled. O'Reilly, a business man as well as an Irishman, had a proper respect for his car, and drove carefully through the towns. His enthusiasm for the Government was considerably damped when first at Bournemouth and then at Southampton he found all the hotels closed, and failed to obtain anything in the way of liquid refreshment stronger than spade coffee. These were the moments when Templeton felt most comfortable, and he confided to Eves his belief that after all they would arrive safely at their journey's end. By the time they reached Winchester the feet of both were tingling with cold; at Guildford even Eves had become morose; and it was not until they narrowly escaped a collision with an Army lorry as they swung round to cross Vauxhall Bridge that Eves felt the only thrill their journey provided.

It was nearly half-past six when O'Reilly drew up at the door of his rooms in a quiet Westminster street.

"You'll be cold, sure," he said. "I'll let you in and show you the bath-room; there'll be hot water. I'll garage the car, and by the time you're dry I'll be back. I don't dare wake my housekeeper. The last trump wouldn't get her out of bed before half-past seven. But her heart is never cold, and at half-past eight she'll give us a breakfast fit for the three kings of Carrickmagree. Not but what we'll forage out something before then."

Bathed, warmed, and fed, the three boarded a motor-bus soon after nine o'clock, and were set down at the end of Chancery Lane. As they walked up the street Eves suddenly pulled them into a shop doorway.

"There's old Noakes about ten yards ahead," he said. "The Patent Office doesn't open till ten, I think you said, Bob?"

"That's so."

"Then he's about forty minutes to wait. Surely he won't hang about the door. Let us follow him carefully."

They had taken only a few steps when they saw Noakes, swinging a fat umbrella, enter a typewriting agency.

"He's going to have your specification copied," said Eves.

"Sure, we'll be safe till ten," said O'Reilly with a chuckle. "The girls will keep the likes of him waiting. Now do you come with me to a patent agent, one of my friends. He'll put us up to the way of getting over Noakes."

The agent's office was but a few yards up the street. The agent himself had not yet arrived; his typist-secretary explained that he was not expected until ten, and might be later.

"Well, then, you'll be after doing us a kindness. My friend here has a specification which Mr. Jones is going to file for me, and he'll need it copied in duplicate at once. Indeed, he'll be mighty pleased to find it ready for him; he's been longing to get his hand on it these many weeks, and you will not disappoint him, will you now?"

"I won't disappoint you, Mr. O'Reilly," said the girl, with a smile.

She sat down at her machine, rattled away on the keys, and in twenty minutes handed to O'Reilly two clean copies of the specification. Her employer arrived on the stroke of ten. A few words from O'Reilly apprised him of the urgency of the matter, and he at once accompanied the three to the Patent Office and filed the formal application.

They left the office in couples, O'Reilly going ahead with his friend. The other two noticed that O'Reilly edged away to one side quickly, leaving a gap through which came hurriedly a shambling figure in a wideawake and a long brown ulster, in one hand a large envelope, in the other his huge umbrella.

"Our worthy mayor," whispered Eves, giving Templeton a nudge.

Apparently Noakes had not recognised O'Reilly, but his eyes widened and his chin dropped as he came face to face with Eves and Templeton. The shock of amazement caused him to halt with a jerk, bringing him into sharp collision with an errand boy hurrying along behind him, a basket of fish upon his arm.

"Here, old 'un, mind my toes," said the lad, not ill-temperedly, at the same time sticking out his elbow to ward off Noakes's obstructing bulk. His action was as a spark to powder. With the impulse of an angry, ill-conditioned man to vent his wrath on the nearest object, Noakes swung round and brought his umbrella heavily down upon the lad's shoulders.

"I'll learn you!" he cried, truculently.

The response was unexpected. Snatching up a prime cod by the tail, the lad dashed its head full in Noakes's face. Noakes winced at the cold, slimy contact, staggered, then lurched forward, raising his umbrella once more to strike. The lad was too quick for him. Dropping his basket, he wrenched the umbrella away, flung it into the gutter, and, squaring his shoulders, commenced that curious piston-like movement of the two arms which is the street boy's preliminary to a sparring bout. Suddenly his right fist shot out, and planted a blow in the man's midriff. A crowd quickly assembled.

[image]

"THE LAD DASHED ITS HEAD FULL IN NOAKES'S FACE."

"I say, d'you know that the gentleman you are assaulting is the Mayor of Pudlington?" said Eves, stepping up to the errand boy.

"Don't care who he is. He ain't going to hit me for nothing, not if he's the Lord Mayor."

But the sight of a burly policeman approaching from the corner of the street brought discretion. He picked up his basket and ran off, turning to give Noakes a parting salute with his thumb to his nose.

III

O'Reilly treated the two lads to what Eves described as a topping lunch, and afterwards spent half an hour in a close examination of the specification.

"I like the looks of it," he said, finally. "Have you given it a trial?"

"Not yet," replied Templeton. "I've rigged up the mechanism, rather roughly, on an old road-sweeper I got cheap, and a little more tinkering should put it in working order. I might be able to try it on Saturday afternoon when I'm clear of the shop."

"Well, then, I'm the way of making you an offer. I'll run down on Saturday and watch your trial. If the creature works, I'll pay for the installation on a respectable car, and finance you up to a thousand pounds. You'll pay me six per cent. interest and repay the capital just when you can."

"It's really too good of you, Mr. O'Reilly," said Templeton.

"Sorra a bit, my boy. I'm doing you no favour; 'tis business, and there's no denying it."

"Splendid!" said Eves. "You've got your chance at last, Bob. Remember me, old man, when the profits come rolling in. I've stood by you in many old rags. I tell you what, I'll write your advertisements, and make your reversible steering as famous as Beecham's pills."

"I wouldn't wonder but you've got a flowery style, Mr. Eves," said O'Reilly. "Now, if so be you mean to catch your train, you'd better be off. I'll see you on Saturday."

They took a taxi and arrived at the station in good time. After securing seats, Eves walked the length of the train to see whether Noakes was their fellow-passenger. There was no sign of him. Eves kept an eye on the platform from the window of his compartment until the train moved off, but Noakes had not appeared.

"He'll go on the razzle, I suppose," he remarked, as he dropped into the corner opposite Templeton. "But he can't keep it up long. Isn't Saturday the day for that old ceremony—what do they call it?—anointing the British Stone? I'd made up my mind to see that; it will be a bit of a rag to finish up my holiday with. I suppose you'll be too much occupied with your road-sweeper to bother about it?"

"Well, you see, the afternoons are short now, and as O'Reilly is coming down specially——"

"Just so. Business before pleasure. I foresee the end of our old friendship. 'But O the heavy change now thou art gone!' Milton, old chap. That's what I shall say when I think of the spiffing rags we've had together, and mourn for the days that are no more. Hand over that Punch, or I shall burst into tears. Perhaps I shall anyhow."

Next morning, when Templeton arrived at the shop, he found Wilkins standing at the door, an image of truculence.

"You didn't turn up yesterday," he cried. "What was you after, eh?"

"As I explained in my note, I had to make a sudden journey to London."

"I don't want none of your explanations. You had ought to ask my permission, going gallivanting sudden like that. I won't have no more of it. You're sacked; you understand that? Sacked without notice. Here's half a week's wages; you shan't have nothing against me. Hook it! Now! This very minute!"

"With the greatest pleasure in life," said Templeton, coolly. "Good morning."

He was not aware, until informed by the omniscient postman, that Wilkins had received on the previous morning a telegram from Noakes, the cryptic wording of which had already been thoroughly discussed in the neighbourhood: "Boy in first sack immediate."

Delighted at the leisure afforded by his dismissal, Templeton returned to his lodging, and spent the remainder of that day and the whole of the next in working at the road-sweeper. Eves watched him for an hour or two, but finding his friend's patient labour too slow for his taste, he went through the town to the scene of Saturday's ceremony, and amused himself by looking on at the preparations, and chatting with any one who would listen to him. The British Stone was a sort of truncated monolith standing in a meadow about a couple of acres in extent. A small square enclosure had been roped off around it, and within stood

a low wooden platform from which the mayor, after breaking a bottle of cider on the stone, would deliver the annual oration in honour of the town and its ancient worthies. Against the hedge, on all four sides of the meadow, were ranged caravans, roundabouts, Aunt Sallies, raree-shows, and all the paraphernalia of a country fair, with stalls for the sale of hot drinks and such comestibles as the Food Regulations had not debarred. The continuous wet weather and the passage of many vehicles had made the entrance to the field a slough, and many of the showmen wore gloomy faces at the expectation that fewer spectators than usual would attend the ceremony. They asked quite reasonably whether the women folk, their best customers, would brave the risk of sinking ankle-deep in mud.

Saturday morning came. A thin drizzle was falling; the sky was gloomy, and Mrs. Pouncey foretold that it was to be a "mizzly day." Templeton, however, was so anxious to prove the merits of his invention to O'Reilly in the afternoon, that immediately after breakfast, nothing daunted by the weather, he suggested that Eves should accompany him on a trial spin. They ran the road-sweeper up the muddy lane to the high road, Eves remarking that there was great scope for the activities for which the machine was designed. The macadamised surface of the highway was less miry, and Templeton assured his friend that he would not get very much splashed if the speed of the sweeper was kept low.

Templeton occupied the driver's seat; Eves stood on a rail above the fixed brushes behind, holding on to the framework. The machine ran steadily up the road, but when Templeton slowed down and turned upon the pivot which was to bring into action the steering-gear at the rear, the vehicle, instead of moving straight hi the opposite direction, showed a tendency to sheer off to one side. Moreover, it turned out that the gear which raised the brushes clear of the road was out of order. Every now and then the brushes dropped, and the machine reverted to its original use. At these times Eves's boots and puttees received a generous bespattering of mud and water, and when the brushes began to "race," sending a spray of mud not merely across the road, but into his face, he protested loudly.

"Why didn't you wait till you could rig cranks, or whatever they are, on a decent car instead of this ramshackle old piece of antiquity?" he grumbled.

"Sorry, old man," said Templeton; "I'll go a bit slower."

"Besides," Eves went on, "your reversible arrangements don't act. You can't steer the thing straight. It goes like a crab, or a drunk. Swing round again, for goodness' sake. Here's a wagon coming; I don't want to be chucked under the wheels."

"All right," said Templeton, with composure, turning round. "It's only a slight hitch. Of course, the clutch connection is roughly made; I did the best I could with my materials; but you see the idea's all right, and it'll be easy enough

to correct the defects."

"You won't think of showing the thing to O'Reilly in its present state?"

"Why not? He's a practical man." Templeton began to get a little warm. "It's chaps like you who know nothing about machinery that lose heart at a trifling setback. And very likely another half-hour's work in the shed will greatly improve things. This is a trial spin; you can't expect everything to go like clockwork first go off."

"Jolly good speech, old man. Best I've heard of yours. My faith in you is restored. By all means run the thing back to the shed; but, if you don't mind, I'll dismount when we come to the lane. I don't mind a shower-bath from above, but from below—no, thank you. I've swallowed enough mud in Flanders."

Templeton spent the rest of the morning in overhauling his mechanism, and Eves in removing the worst of the mud splotches from his clothes. They had just finished lunch, when O'Reilly drove up in a growler hired at the station.

"Faith, 'tis a terrible day for wetness," he said. "But here I am, and I'll be glad now to take a look at your machine. Have you it in working order?"

"We gave it a short trial this morning," said Templeton. "It didn't behave quite so well as I had hoped, but I've spent a couple of hours on it since, and it ought to go better now."

"I like your modesty, my boy. 'Tis a rare thing in inventors."

"He's far too modest," said Eves. "That's why I've appointed myself his advertising agent. It's an old road-sweeper, remember; he's been working under difficulties. In my opinion—of course, I'm not an expert—the thing's a great success; you should see the amount of mud it scooped up."

"I saw a mighty deal of mud as I came down the lane. You will not try it here, sure?"

"We tried it along the road," said Templeton. "And I've been thinking of a better place. On the other side of the town the road is tarred, and the machine will run much more smoothly. Besides, there's very little mud."

"A bright idea," said Eves. "I propose that you drive the machine over the muddy roads while Mr. O'Reilly and I follow in the growler. We'll get out when we come to the tarred highway, and I'll perch up where I was before, and try to keep those brushes in order."

The suggestion was accepted. O'Reilly looked on critically as Templeton drove the sweeper slowly up the lane; then he stepped into the cab and told the driver to follow at a reasonable distance. Eves joined him.

As they proceeded along the road they passed at intervals small groups of farmers and labourers with their wives and children, who, defying the weather, had donned their Sunday best for the civic ceremony.

"Is it the likes of a wake, then?" O'Reilly asked. "Or a horse-race, maybe?"

"Only a country beano," replied Eves, and told what he knew of the afternoon's proceedings.

"That's disappointing, now. I'd have liked to see a good race, but I've no wish in the world to hear Noakes make a speech."

Arriving at the tarred highway the two alighted from the cab. Eves took up his post above the brushes as before, and O'Reilly, eager to watch the working of Templeton's apparatus at close quarters, chose a somewhat precarious position on the opposite side of the framework.

"Now, Tom," said Templeton, his manner betraying a little nervousness, "if you see the gear dropping, just raise it. There's very little mud, but there are pools here and there, and I don't want to splash you. I propose to run straight ahead for a few minutes till I get up a fair speed, for I fancy the mechanism will work better then. Are you ready?"

"Righto. The road's clear."

Templeton started his engine. The machine moved forward, at first slowly, but gradually gathering way. Eves kept a watchful eye on the brushes, and when they showed no sign of dropping he remarked to O'Reilly, "I think old Bob's done the trick this time."

"Maybe," replied O'Reilly, in an undertone, "but this reversing gear, now."

The speed continually increased until it reached a rate of about fifteen miles an hour. There was no traffic on the road, and Templeton was on the point of slowing down, preparatory to stopping and turning, when, rounding a slight bend, he came to a cross-road just as the head of the civic procession arrived at the corner. The town sergeant, bearing the mace, led the way; behind him came Noakes, in his mayoral robes, followed immediately by the councillors, the senior of whom carried a magnum bottle of cider.

Templeton caught sight of the procession just in time to avoid a collision. Forgetting in the excitement of the moment the necessity of slowing down before bringing the reverse into action, he swung round on the pivot. The effect was amazing. The machine, instead of running in the opposite direction, plunged forward with zigzag rushes, charging into the procession. Templeton lost his head, forgot his brakes, and made frantic efforts to stop the engine, but something had stuck. Eves, between alarm and amusement at the stampede of the civic dignitaries, forgot to keep his eye on the brushes, which had dropped owing to the change of gear, and now began to race. Unlike the highway, the cross-road was deep in mud, and as the machine ran from side to side, dashing first into one hedge, then the other, the brushes flung up mud in all directions. Eves and O'Reilly were splashed from head to foot, but the full effect of this outrageous behaviour of the road-sweeper was felt by Noakes and the councillors immediately behind him. They had sought safety by backing into the hedge opposite to

that at which the machine appeared to be charging as it approached them. Unhappily for them, it suddenly altered its direction, passed within a few inches of their shrinking forms, and covered them with a deluge of liquid mud. There was a crash as the bottle of cider fell and splintered into fragments, and loud cries of alarm and objurgation from the bespattered victims.

[image]

"COVERED THEM WITH A DELUGE OF LIQUID MUD."

The incident occupied barely half a minute. Templeton recovered himself, stopped his engine, rammed on his brakes, and, least bemired of all the actors, got down to make his apologies. Eves and O'Reilly by this time were shaking with laughter. Noakes, seeing that the machine had come to a stop, approached the contrite driver with uplifted fist, too irate even to speak. He had tried to rub the splashes of mud from his cheeks, with the result that he had only spread them.

"I am really very sorry, Mr. Noakes," said Templeton. "I was trying a new invention, and I can't say how much I regret——"

"Od rabbit you and your inventions," roared Noakes. "You did it o' purpose, you viper. I'll have you up, I will, for creating a nuisance——"

"Driving to the danger of the public, be jowned to 'em," put in a councillor who had suffered scarcely less than the mayor.

"Ay, the danger of the public and bodily injury to the mayor," cried Noakes. "No option of a fine, neither; you'll go to jail, sure as my name be Philemon Noakes."

"Come, come, now," said O'Reilly, thinking it time to intervene. "Sure, any one could see it was nothing but an accident that might have happened to the Lord Mayor of Dublin himself. You gentlemen have got splashed; faith, so have I. Look at me! The right way to look at it is that we're all suffering in a good cause—martyrs of science, and I wouldn't say but we've got off lightly."

"There's summat in that, Neighbour Noakes," said a councillor who, being at the rear of the procession, had not come within range of the rotating brushes. "Ay, what I say is, these young fellers what have served their country want to be encouraged, and if so be a little mud flies—why, there 'tis; it will brush off, and 'tis all one."

"There'll be no 'nointing to-day, that's certain," said another. "Seems to me we'd best all go home along before they get wind of it in the meadow up yonder. None of us wants a crowd ramping round and admiring of our muddy faces. The old stone won't hurt for want of its drop o' liquor for once."

"That's true," added a third. "And as for speeches—well, speaking as man to man, speeches are a weariness of the flesh to me. Let's go home along, neighbours, and drink a drop o' something hot, with our toes on the fire."

The suggestion won favour with the majority, and Noakes, irritably conscious of his unseemly appearance, allowed himself to be escorted towards the town. A few of the more curious waited to see what further antics the road-sweeper performed. But they were disappointed. A brief examination of the mechanism revealed to Templeton the cause of his failure. He made certain adjustments which enabled him to drive the machine home at a moderate pace, and without further experiments with the reversible steering. Eves and O'Reilly followed, prudently, in the cab.

"My hat, what a rag!" said Eves to his companion on the way. "But I'm afraid old Bob has come a cropper, poor old boy! It's not the first time; but I'll say this for him, he always comes up smiling."

"And he'll smile to a good tune if I don't be mistaken," said O'Reilly. "He's got hold of a good idea, and with the help of an engineer friend of mine he'll make something of it. I'll see to that."

The next week's local paper contained a copious but by no means a wholly accurate account of the incident. The deplorable appearance of the mayor was described, however, with excessive particularity. Unkindest cut of all, the editor pointed the moral:

"We have already more than once drawn the attention of the mayor and corporation to the disgracefully muddy state of our roads in winter-time. Now that our civic worthies have suffered in their own persons, and the town has been deprived for the first time in a hundred and forty years of its ancient and time-honoured ceremony, perhaps something will be done, or are we to wait until the present mayor's tenure of office has expired?"

A few months later Eves received from Templeton a long letter which gave him a good deal of pleasure. Templeton related that his invention, tested under more favourable conditions, had more than fulfilled his hopes. O'Reilly was enthusiastic about it, and had arranged to set up a small factory for him. But almost as agreeable was the news about the Mayor of Pudlington:

"Noakes was never popular," Templeton wrote, "and the sorry figure he cut in certain episodes we know of brought him into ridicule, which is always fatal. It

began to be whispered, too, that there was something shady in his transactions over contracts and canteens, and what not. Anyhow, one fine day he disappeared, and I hear that there are warrants out against him. I'm not vindictive, but I can't say I shall be sorry if he is caught."

"Just like old Bob," said Eves to himself. He sat down to dash off a reply:

"I'm jolly glad, old man. 'There is a tide,' etc. (Shakespeare). I always said you'd make your fortune, though I must own I never thought it would be through a mad road-sweeper. I'm going to be demobbed after all, so I'll take on your advertising stunt as soon as you like. As to Noakes, I don't care whether he's caught or not. He was always a glorious rag, and I rather fancy he more or less inspired some of your bright ideas."

THE END

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