

## English People

by  
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*Die Liebe ging auf dunkler Bahn . . .*

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### PART I

#### CHAPTER I

The close-cut grass of the playing-field lay stretched out sleepily under the hot July sun. Groups of dignified oaks and elms threw patches of shade on to the long grass fringing the field, and in most of these patches non-combatants sat about on benches and deck-chairs or lolled on the ground. The chimneys and gables of Welldon Theological College, clustered together behind the trees on the other side, looked actually closer than the white figures of the players dotted about the pitch. These latter, either because of the hot walk which would have been necessary in order to reach them, or because of the grave silence in which the game was being conducted, seemed to be a very long way off.

One of these non-combatants, who was lying on the ground and sucking a piece of grass, turned to his friend sitting in a deck-chair beside him:—

“Are you glad you’re leaving, John?”

After about a second’s pause, John Trinder replied in a clear, decided voice:

“Yes. Just about as glad as I was to come. I wouldn’t have missed this last year for anything.”

His friend said nothing, but, plucking a fresh stalk of grass, carefully pulled the tender inner growth out of the tough sheath, inserted it between his teeth and began to crunch. Cricket-matches do not encourage conversation. Both men remained silent for some time, contemplating rather than watching the game. The long-white-coated umpires, the two batsmen, and the field all seemed to be standing about more or less aimlessly in the hot sun, and even the occasional contortions of the bowler did not look very much like work. John’s thoughts began wandering serenely here and there, while his eyes travelled ever to the College and back again, until every now and then the sharp chock of bat on ball, though not startling enough to break his mood, recalled them to the game. These harmless little reports seemed to coagulate the whole afternoon about themselves and focus it to a point in his memory; they pretended to distract the attention, and actually heightened it.

But it was not long before Trinder’s reverie suffered an interruption of another kind. Three young men, who had been strolling idly round the field laughing and talking in a fit of extra high spirits, had reached the spot where they were sitting. They stopped and stood for a few moments gazing at the pair without speaking. Then one of them suddenly left the group and literally hurled himself upon the grass-sucker — Henryson. For two or three minutes there was a panting

rough-and-tumble in the grass, of which the other three could see nothing but a sort of synthetic octopus of plunging sleeves and trousers and ties, varied occasionally by the appearance of a tousled, surprised-looking head. The attack had been made quite without provocation and the struggle was equally good-natured on both sides. It was a standing form of amusement. On this occasion, however, it occurred to John, as he watched them with the same philosophic calm which he had just been devoting to the match, that the sportive couple resembled two large dogs. A sharpish, sardonic phrase to that effect came into his mind, to be immediately dismissed again. But the spell of the afternoon's mood was broken. As the three strollers moved on, the aggressor hurling back mock-terrible threats over his shoulder at Henryson, John turned his thoughts towards the future. He now began thinking of the kind of circle which he and his future wife would probably collect round them, as time went on, — humourous, imaginative people, unassuming, filled with a deep and understanding love for the Church's greatest mysteries — and yet — somehow — carrying it off with a *je-ne-sais-quoi*, a lightness of touch — “children (in those words of Thomas Aquinas, on which he had recently fastened with such delight) in heart, but not in intellect”. And then everything else vanished in the overwhelming recollection that the day after next, no later, he would actually be seeing Margaret again — taking her in his arms. He smiled to himself and turned to Henryson:

“You'll have a long journey tomorrow”, he said, “and probably a hot one! What time do you think you'll get home?”

“Oh, about ten-o'clock at night,” and Henryson started off on a long account of the different stages of his cross-country journey, detailing the waits which it would involve at numerous junctions. John said nothing, when he finished, and after a pause he added:

“I suppose you'll get back quite early?”

“Tea!” said John. “My brother's promised to be in soon after.”

“Does he live at home with you?”

“Yes, but I don't see very much of him. He's a chap who has all sorts of ideas of his own that he goes running off after. You know: one of those fellows who's never really got over the war.”

“Oh!”

“It took me a good time to settle down myself, you know!”

“Yes.” Henryson was younger, and had gone straight from school to his University. The two men had not met until they both reached the theological college, where they had struck up the temporary acquaintance, which was the cause of the present conversation.

John, — his own thoughts, as usual, somewhat nonplussed by the shifting image of his elder brother — did not pursue the subject. It was evidently too far outside Henryson's experience to interest him much. Instead, he remarked after a pause:

“I'm looking forward to the Warden tonight.”

“Dear old Toppo!” said Henryson. At the end of each term Dr. Startop, the Warden, made a practice of gathering together the men who were leaving for a final word of warning, encouragement, and benediction, before they left his care. His

pupils heard him speak and lecture often enough, and as he was a sincere and modest, as well as a rather wise man, his words were usually liked and often remembered. But there was a definite rumour current in Welldon that these valedictory addresses of his were especially pithy.

The two men stayed where they were, until the groundsman began to draw stumps, and then they got up and wandered across the field back to college and supper. The Hall smelt faintly of furniture-polish and new wood; and in the summer it always seemed to echo a little hollowly, a little like the interior of a covered swimming-bath, to the criss-cross conversations of the theological students, who sat this evening, half of them still in flannels and half of them in tweeds and dark serges, on either side of long, narrow, parallel tables. During the meal Trinder looked up more than once at Dr. Startop, who sat in the middle of a shorter table athwart the ends of the others, with the same sense of pleasurable anticipation that he had expressed to Henryson. When it was over, he joined some of his fellow 'addressees', as they called themselves, for coffee in somebody's rooms. By half past eight, he was seated, in their company, in a small lecture-room, and a minute later the Warden — an oldish man with fine grey hair — walked in and took his place on the dais. His eyebrows appeared always to be slightly raised and his clean-shaven face, which was rather long and thin, was puckered into a curious superfluity of lines.

"Who won?" he asked, looking round with a smile.

"Who do you think, Topsy?" someone enquired. Startop encouraged these familiarities of address. There was something in the tone of the question which, so far from being offensive, made it sound as distant and respectful and if the words had been: "Can you guess, Sir?"

"Well," he said, "I should think — possibly — do you know — it might have been the College."

"And it was!" cried one enthusiast with a laugh — the signal for a general buzz of remarks, in the course of which somebody was heard quoting, as though from a sort of imaginary Hibbert Journal article, a pompous reference to Dr. Startop's "brilliant exegesis". Trinder contributed the tag about genius being the art of guessing correctly. And then, as silence fell again:

"A happy omen!" said the Warden, and began his address.

"Your time at this College," he said, "which, I hope and believe, has been for most of you a happy one, has been wholly devoted to the development of your own powers and abilities as priests called to the service of Our Blessed Lord. I wish to speak with you tonight, not so much of yourselves and your duties, as of some of those obstacles which you are sure to find in your path. You, who are leaving Welldon tomorrow, will one and all be called to occupy before long a very peculiar position in life. Just think exactly what it means! No doubt you have already thought many times! You are going to become Clergymen, in England, in the Twentieth Century. Let us try and realise together something of what that implies.

"We will begin, then, if you please, with the first thing that we here naturally associate in our minds with the person of a Christian priest — I mean respect. Now do not for a moment imagine that, in the world into which you are going, this is going to fall at your feet. I do not wish you to misunderstand me. You will of course win the respect of wise and generous men for your good qualities; what I mean is:

do not, if you yourselves are wise, hope to be respected . . . shall I say “qua Clergy”? On the contrary, with a large proportion of your fellow-countrymen, you will find this label — and your cloth — a positive handicap in the winning of their respect and intimacy. In six months’ time most of you, sitting here, will be — what? — curates. Now there are vast, really enormous, circles of your fellow-men (here the ghost of a smile played over the Warden’s sensitive mouth) in which that remark alone would be enough to establish my reputation as a humorist. Indeed, there is scarcely a farce, scarcely a modern comedy . . . but most of you, I imagine, will have observed these things for yourselves. All the same I want to think about them with you tonight.

“Whenever you go into strange society, I want you to be prepared for treatment which you may find it hard to distinguish from insult — insult all the more painful from being of that indefinite kind which cannot be openly rebuked. You will be insulted positively, by remarks at the expense of your cloth and your Church; you will be insulted negatively by all sorts of tacit a priori assumptions as to your character, prejudices, hypocrisy, incompetence. Everywhere it will be assumed that you are guilty of something, that you have failed, that you have been “shown up”, or, at the very least, that you are a fool. Pick up any book on the social evils: you are sure to find a chapter setting forth, generally in ironical terms, firstly, how much the Church might have done, what an opportunity it had, etc., of grappling with the evil in question and winning respect in the process; and secondly, how little in fact it has done — how it has failed, betrayed its trust, persecuted its Founder, etc. Any book you like. It doesn’t matter. I really believe I could write them all myself.

“Not that I think you will be discouraged by these obstacles. If I know you at all, I know you much better. On the contrary, those of you who are truly tolerant and tender will no doubt feel — not without great heaviness of heart — that, if the modern fashion of consistently misrepresenting the Church and her Ministers is a grotesque aberration of fashion, yet it is not wholly grotesque. You will resolve to atone, as far as you may, for the weakness and failings of any of your predecessors by the firmness of your own characters. You will say to yourselves: I at least will be a credit to the Church! I hope you will say that to yourselves.

“But now, when you have girded up your loins and made your personal effort — just now will you run the risk of being most bitterly disappointed — the bitterest disappointment of all! Again, I would not have you misunderstand me. I need hardly say I hope and trust that you — all of you here — will be a credit to the Church (if we can dare to use such a phrase), but do not imagine (if you would avoid bitterness) that you yourselves will see that credit accruing either to yourselves or to the Church. No! The good qualities that you naturally possess, and those that you may laboriously acquire, will be alike in this, that they will be taken for granted by the world. You have made your difficult sacrifice — given up your last spare evening — or the little margin of your income; and you are thinking to yourself: This will show them that, if we are fools, we are at least not knaves! Not at all! The world will simply say: So he ought! He is a clergyman. Then it will go on with what it was doing and forget all about the matter. So, at least, it will seem to you at the time. That, perhaps, or something of that kind, will be your first disappointment; it will not be your last.

“If you can forgive me (you know I am no friend of pessimism), I am going to take ‘disappointment’ as the text of my little sermon to you tonight. Disappointments are like the tares in Our Lord’s parable — they spring up everywhere. We do not have to look for them. So it is, my friends, in every life, and so must it be — not least — in yours, at any rate if you are as ardent as I would have you be. We have considered one already. There are others waiting behind it. One of these is the indifference which you will encounter on all sides. You — some of you — see yourselves, I know, as going out to do battle for the Faith; you have felt your time here as a time of preparation, of equipment, of training for intellectual strike; and now the armour is fashioned, and it is girded on, and you are stepping forth. What will you say, then, when you find that no-one thinks it worth while to fight? Here you sit up late in your rooms thinking, talking, arguing, reducing (as far as you can) all things to their first principles — that is to say, to the will of the Father. Out there, in the world — in the little country parish to which Jukes may be called, or the large opulent suburb, where perhaps Lavy’s church is even now being erected — you will find few people capable of sustained thought at all, and of those few, none, it may be, who are anxious or even willing to talk openly with you of God, nay, of Life, of anything that can be truly near your hearts. Here perhaps, an acrimonious rationalist, stranded from the great disputes of the last century, or there some cantankerous chapel-goer, enamoured of the sound of his own voice and the chain of his own ideas, will be happy to use you as his receptacle. But of discussion, of dialectic, of theology — nothing!

“I must not keep you too long. I will pass over the next example I was going to take — that of the swan who turns out to be only a goose — or fox! I mean of course the earnest parishioner who comes in all humility to ask your counsel over his eternal welfare, and who, you soon discover, is in reality merely fond of the limelight, or has a very good secular reason for wanting to prejudice you in his favour. We will not describe this beast any more closely. But there is still another disappointment for which I want you to be prepared in your hearts. I do not want you to be too terribly saddened by a sudden realisation that you are squandering the zeal and energy and love of the best years of your lives on an empty building. I do not think this need be the case — or even that it will be. But you must be prepared for it. Not only must you be prepared to find yourselves delivering a stirring discourse, rich with the fruits of bitter experience, warm with your own life’s blood — a discourse, let us say, on the Active Life — to a handful of invalid ladies; but you must be forearmed against yet another sorrow — a deeper one, I hope, than the last. I mean the week-day sorrow of hearing — not your own sermons — but the offices of the Church, spoken to the empty air.

“I shall not repeat now what I have so often said to you of the only possible attitude for a true priest in such circumstances. You and I know, and I trust we shall none of us ever forget, that the praise of God according to the rubrics of the Prayer-Book does not, like a concert or a play, depend upon an audience for its reality. Tonight I want rather to warn you against the opposite error of becoming so absorbed in the rhythm and beauty of ritual worship that you actually grow indifferent to the presence of a congregation. This may be right for the priests of some other religion. It is certainly not right for a priest of the Christian religion.

“It is between these two extremes, then, of embitterment and indifference that you are called, as the followers of Christ Jesus, to pick your difficult way. That is what I most want to emphasise; that is why I have taken disappointment as my text. For in this sense — in the sense in which I have been speaking to you, I would have you actually seek disappointment. For what is it, after all, to be disappointed? It is to be surprised. To be disappointed implies, firstly, that you have not been indifferent to failure — like the Stoic: and, secondly, that you have not acted — and felt! — on the assumption of failure — like the Cynic. If, therefore, your life begins at any time to seem to you like one long chain of disappointments, do not be too utterly cast down. For it will mean that you have taken at least one fence, and that a high one, in the track of a Christian life — you will not have allowed the world to form its callous crust over your hearts, as a device to save yourselves pain. You will not have hidden from the enemy.

“My dear friends — I only just stopped myself calling you ‘my dear boys’ — do not accuse me in your hearts of casting an untimely gloom. Nothing could have been further from my intentions. You must know, I think, that I should never have dwelt as long as I have on what some would call the dark side of the picture, if I did not know that you carry the light in your own hearts. I will not speak of ‘rewards’, for it is not a word I am fond of. I will say nothing of the comfort that lies in the mere knowledge that we are doing, with all our might, what we believe God would have us do. That is no mean thing; but it is not the important thing, not the Thing itself. When I say that you carry the light in your hearts, I mean, as you well know, that you carry Christ himself in your hearts. It is not the comfortable conviction that this is right and that is wrong, but the immediate consciousness of Him, His own Substance, working there, living there, breathing there, burning there, speaking there, which shall enable you — if you will but continue all your lives to listen for His voice — to meet disappointment with a merry heart, nay, not only to meet it, but to be thankful for it as one of His choicest gifts. Ah! if I only had words to speak to you of the sweetness . . .” The Warden paused. There had come into his face an almost rapt look, and into his voice a sort of singing tenderness which John had never heard there before. But now he paused and dropped back, quite naturally and gracefully, into the tone in which he had been speaking before. He finished his address quickly on the same note of earnestness.

The peoples of Europe, he said, were not really indifferent at the bottom of their hearts to the meaning of Life and the word of the Gospels. If his pupils only had the tact and sympathy to get into touch with the men and women they met, they would find that nearly every one of them, in the depths of his soul, was puzzling in his own pitiful way over the mighty problems of conduct and destiny. He pointed to the increase of suicides and of so-called nervous diseases as evidence of this.

“The solution to the problem,” he concluded, “is not something which has to be ‘discovered’; it is something which has been forgotten. The Church is the one unbroken link remaining between our own time and that in which men could carry in their hearts and faces the serene knowledge that our Blessed Saviour answered these questions once and for all upon the Cross. The Church, with its glorious historical tradition, stands in the world today, as one dim, struggling thread of association might linger in the mind of some unfortunate man who had lost his

memory. And the future of this troubled civilisation depends, believe me, firstly upon whether or no this link remains unbroken, and secondly upon whether or no it is thickened out by powerful young helpers into a strong cord and a mighty rope — a rope tough enough to pull the maddened peoples back to their senses — or should I have said from their senses? Let us pray:—” The Warden knelt in his place, and after him all the theological students. For a long time — several minutes — there was unbroken silence, and then, in a low, unemotional voice, he began:—

“Oh Lord, our Heavenly Father, seeing that it has pleased Thee in our time, for the perfect evolution of Thy inscrutable purpose, to send confusion into the minds and hearts of so many, strengthen now the minds and hearts of these, so few as they be, that they may have power to do Thy glorious work. If it be Thy will, grant them such wisdom and love that they may shine with Thy light into the dark corners of the earth and carry Thy Word of Life into the hearts and minds of their fellow men. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, amen!”

After a further pause the speaker rose and left the room. There was a faint rustling and scraping of feet, as the men got up from their knees and, after some hesitation, began to move towards the door. One youth, however, with a large colourless face something like a slab of lard, felt moved to comment:

“What on earth” — he began — “could you follow it all?” And his neighbour replied that he had had considerable difficulty and that he really thought Topy might have found something useful to say, or at least have been a bit more cheery, on their last evening. “What’s wrong with civilisation anyway?” he added. “The world’s the world and always has been — always will be!” But they were exceptions; most of the men were obviously moved and seemed inclined to drift back to their rooms without saying much. As for John, there were good reasons why he should have been attentive. Even apart from his deep personal affection, he could always listen with complete absorption while Startop developed his concept of ‘the good priest’, and of the objective significance and concrete reality of the sacramental drama. But this was not all. Tonight, as he had heard him expatiating with a certain freedom on the difficulties of a clerical career in a pagan world, he had experienced to the full that sense of comfort and elation which always comes from the discovery that somebody older and wiser than oneself “knows about it all, he knows, he knows!” It is this delightful feeling that first sends a good many people to the poets. And a breath of such open-eyed courage is never more refreshing than when it comes after over-much intercourse with breezy confidence and mere insensibility to pain.

It was on the crest of this warm emotion that he lay down to sleep, surrendering himself to prayer, as always at night, after he got into bed. He expected to sink gently into unconsciousness, as though into the very lap of that love and understanding with which he felt himself surrounded. But the sequence of ideas in the Warden’s discourse had taken too powerful a hold on his intellect, and before long he was wide awake, staring into the darkness, and thinking restlessly of a jumble of all things. His mind had developed that silly, mechanical liveliness that sometimes comes at night, when one can almost feel the grey matter jumping; and it was nearly two-o-clock before he finally slept.

## CHAPTER II

At three-o'clock the next afternoon Janet Elizabeth Trinder shut up the book she was reading and jumped out of her arm-chair with something not unlike a bang. She shook her skirt down, gave a quick glance at the clock, and hurried upstairs to John's room. The distempered walls were hung with photographs and a few Medici prints of Italian masters; but on one side nearly the whole wall was taken up with rough deal shelves, containing a variety of volumes of all ages from school-stories to Higher Criticism. She got out some towels from the linen-cupboard on the landing and hung them on his wash-stand. Then she turned suddenly, ran downstairs to the dining-room, where she had been sitting, and seized half the flowers out of the bowl on the table. These she put into another vase, which she carried upstairs and placed on the little table by John's bed. Again she stopped and looked all round the room. This time she went to the mantelpiece and, picking up the photograph of Margaret, she put it on the table by the flowers. It was a professional photograph, in which Margaret leaned a sad white face on two fingers and gazed at you mournfully out of large, gazelle-like eyes. Janet stood looking at it for a moment. Then she caught it up, put it back on the mantelpiece, and replaced it by a little passe-partouted snapshot, in which Margaret, as dark as a gypsy, with a spotted handkerchief tied round her head, was grinning at the camera and shading her eyes from the sun with her hand. She went to the door, looked back, nodded once at the clean curtains and toilet-cover, and then turned and went out. She ran downstairs, laid tea for two in the dining-room, put a kettle on the gas in the kitchen, and immediately plunged back into Emma, which she was reading for the third time. The violent rapidity with which she had conducted this cycle of operations vanished, the moment she opened the book. There she sat, her head bent over it, alone in the house, as still as stone. It was as if a bubbling torrent had suddenly turned a corner and found the sea.

About a quarter of an hour later a taxi drove up, and, through the window, she saw John get out of it and stand fumbling for the fare. A look of animation came into her full-blooded, rather plain face, as she got up and went to the door.

"You're back, then!"

He put down his bag and kissed her.

"Tea!" she said, with a firm nod, and went into the kitchen to fetch it.

After it was over, they leaned back in their armchairs in the drawing-room, and John took out his pipe. Janet looked at him, first with a smile, and then intently, as though she were pondering something:

"I can hardly believe", she said at last, with the little stammer which gave one the impression that she was too impatient to speak properly: "that in three weeks' time you'll be wearing, you'll be wearing a funny collar!"

The smile with which her brother met this remark looked to her to be a little sheepish. They were not perfectly at ease with one another on this subject. When John had left the Army in 1919, after a fairly easy two years' of service, he had really seemed to have no definite ideas on any subject; yet, after two terms at Oxford, he had suddenly announced this curious intention of taking Holy Orders. The news had come as a sort of bombshell to his brother and sister, since all three had been brought up with a strictly agnostic background. Janet especially found it hard to



reconcile his conduct with her notions of intellectual honesty. Yet she shrank, in conversation, from saying anything that implied this too bluntly; and, in all their tortuous discussions on Science, Religion, the Thirty-Nine Articles and so forth, they had never really come right down to the point of misunderstanding, much as John himself would have liked to. He was still young enough to pique himself a little on his own originality, courage, broad-mindedness, etc. in taking the step he had decided upon, in spite of his antecedents, and this was apparent this afternoon in a just perceptible tightness of the full lips, as they smiled round his pipe.

There was yet another obstacle in the way of a proper understanding between them. Erasmus Trinder, their father, had had all the instincts and most of the convictions of the thoroughgoing rationalist. An unhappy childhood with pietistic parents and a certain innate delicacy of aesthetic perception had combined to turn him into a worshipper of Samuel Butler — the author of Erewhon. He had swallowed Butler whole, digesting the crudities with the niceties, and his temperament had never quite recovered from the dose. His wife, in whom his deeply affectionate nature had once discovered a marvellous refuge from a harsh and hypocritical world, had died at the birth of their third child (John) and this, added to the rest, had left a streak of gall in him, which sometimes quite obviously — quite painfully — warped his judgment. His intimacy with all his children was remarkable, but Janet, the eldest, had become to him almost a second wife. Everyone remarked how her whole manner and outlook changed after his death in the first year of the War.

John — for temperamental reasons — had begun to discern, at a precociously early age, the irrational element in his father's outlook, notably his anti-clericalism; and the pleasant sense of superior wisdom, which this youthful perspicacity had given him, had no doubt played some part in determining his own subsequent inclination to the Church. He would still sometimes let slip a remark which seemed to Janet to spring from an excessively patronising attitude towards old Trinder's intelligence. Promptly, on such occasions, and as hard as ever she could, she snubbed him.

"How father would have hated it!" Janet went on now, after a pause through which John smoked on in silence; for she suddenly felt impatient with him and wanted to make him say something. She succeeded. He was nettled by the remark, which he thought tactless — at a time like this, too, when he needed everybody's blessing!

"Oh, well, of course, father — in that sort of thing . . ." he said, trailing off into silence with a complacent movement of his hand.

"A little of his brains wouldn't do you any harm, young man!" Janet had to blink her eyes and nod her head sharply, to avoid stammering over the word "brains." It was often like this; a jerk had to come out somewhere, and she could choose whether it should be in her voice or her limbs. Once more John did not answer, and this time, instead of feeling annoyed, she was distressed by her own bridling harshness. The effort she had to make to speak seemed to pull her up and give her time to reflect.

"It's very b-rave of you, John," she said, in a quieter tone; and he looked pleased and abashed, like a dog that is being patted.

"I don't know," he answered vaguely, "it sometimes seems to me, we all do what we have got to do, and that's all there is to it."

"I can't see that! There are lots of people who don't do what they ought to do."

"I didn't say, what we ought to do, Jane, I said, what we have got to do."

"Oh!" said Janet in a voice that clearly showed she had not grasped the distinction. "Anyway, I know you'll do what you can to help people. You always do. Humphrey and I both think that."

John now felt inspired by the kindness in her voice to try and give her an account of the previous evening, which had meant so much to him. It was not easy. He began by emphasising the Warden's common sense, but then that sounded so false and dry that he attempted to go on and say something of what was nearer to his heart. He recalled the tender, singing note that had suddenly come into Startop's voice:

"I can't explain what I felt," he said in a serious voice: "it was as though the Christ himself were —" he would have liked to stop, not knowing how to go on — "right inside one!" he forced himself to conclude, and, the moment he had done so, wished he had never tried to speak of it at all. It was strange. All day long he had gone about, feeling as if he had found the Philosopher's Stone, the Secret Elixir, which all the greatest have recognised and revered in one form or another. He had tried, not out of any boastfulness, but from the pure desire for fellowship, to put this feeling into words, and the only result was — this — this falseness! He saw Janet turning her eyes away; but, before she did so, had time to catch a reflection of himself in them, which he did not much relish. What he saw there was a sort of smug, moralising Nonconformist Sunday-school teacher. Could it be that they knew each other too well to talk about these things?

All this passed through his consciousness like a flash; for he never dwelt upon such feelings or sought to put them into words.

"I don't understand that," Janet was saying. She spoke in a hurried, businesslike undertone, like a polite hostess giving directions to a parlourmaid who has had to interrupt her in the middle of a conversation with a guest.

"It was really extraordinary," John added lamely; and for a time there was silence between them.

"How's Humphrey?" he asked at last, though he had had all the news of Humphrey in Janet's letters.

"Oh, he's still hopelessly unsettled," she replied with a troubled look.

"Not found anything, then?"

"N-No. Nothing he seems to think will do. He still does the medical coaching in the afternoons."

"Where is he to-day?"

"He's gone to see that Mr. Dawson."

"Oh, the man you told me about in your letter?"

"Yes."

"You didn't like him, eh?"

"He was horribly rude to me — horribly!"

"What! When he spent the night here?" Janet was looking at the carpet:

“Yes.”

“Too forward?” She gave a short laugh.

“No! Not that way. He’s one of those, one of those offhand men —” She paused, and then, with another blink and bob of the head: “I might have been a hotel proprietress!”

“OH!” said John, frowning slightly; and, after a pause;

“Humphreys - tays out more often!” Janet added, blushing, as though she were guilty of some crime, and at the same time annoyed with herself for doing so. John nodded.

“Is this one of his?” he said, pointing to a book lying on a little table beside him. It was called The Secret of Adonis.

“Yes.” replied Janet.

“What’s it like?”

“It’s better than some of them. S-s-some of them are absolutely horrid!” John picked it up and opened it in the middle:

The conception of orgasm as a ‘death’ [he read] has always been a familiar one with the poets, most of whom delight, with Shelley, in depicting consummation as a kind of euthanasia of the male. In post-Christian times, however, it is only in the obscurer utterances of the mystics that we can discern a far more significant notion — the notion that the fearless descent into the abyssal depths of Matter herself — the complete surrender of the conscious to the hypo-conscious — is an indispensable pre-requisite to deuterogenesis, or what is popularly called ‘spiritual regeneration.’

When he had got so far, he heard a key turning in the front-door, and as he laid the book aside, the room-door flew open and Humphrey stood smiling in the aperture:

“Hulloa, Squire! Well, Janet Eliza!”

John thrilled all over with pleasure, as he looked at his brother. He was a large loosely-built man, with a big round clean-shaven face, which beamed frankness out of every pore. But what immediately struck one was the contrast between his person and his manner. He looked like a good-natured, tennis-playing country doctor; he moved (and he was moving some part of him nearly all the time) like a timid racehorse. All the time he was talking to you, it was as though he were half expecting something to happen, something which he was afraid he would miss, if he attended to you too closely.

Janet laughed, and the two brothers shook hands.

“Well, Old Man, nearly ready for the final plunge, eh?” John smiled. “That’s the stuff!” He sat down, crossed his legs, and began to fire off at John a series of questions concerning his doings and programme. These questions showed that he followed his brother’s plans even into quite small details and was perfectly well acquainted with the general nature of his outlook and interests; but they followed each other so rapidly and gave John such a short time to answer them that he began to feel restless. He could perceive through it all that Humphrey was really anxious to go on and talk about himself. So he took a favourable opportunity to interrupt:

“You’ve not found anything yet, then?” he said.

“N-no”. said Humphrey, with a quick downward movement of his chin and the corners of his mouth — a sign of eager interest: “But I really believe, Old Man, I’m on the track of something at last, that will suit me down to the ground.”

John thought he knew what was coming, but he waited in silence. Humphrey Trinder stood, in years, between Janet and John. He was old enough to have completed his career as a medical student before the War broke out. During the War he had been as unfortunate as his brother was lucky, coming in for a series of uprooting experiences, including a touch of shell-shock, which had seemed in some way to have the effect of detaching him from life. From that time on it was as though there were a kind of thin film, insulating him — his own real self — from everything he said and did. He seemed to hover over his own activities without ever uniting his personal feelings with them. He had found it impossible to settle down to anything. His attempt to set up as a general practitioner a few years after the Armistice had brought him to the verge of a nervous breakdown, whereupon he had chucked up medicine altogether and started looking for ‘something more human’. To the friends who asked him for reasons he would simply reply with a frank, engaging smile: “Sick of guts!”, and that was all they could get out of him. He had not yet found anything else to suit him, and was financially independent enough to be able to take his time.

It had been the main object of Erasmus Trinder’s existence to leave his children free — free both from the world and from each other. He had therefore bequeathed to all three of them the same moderate fixed income (moderate before the War, and meagre after it), and after his death they had decided, partly no doubt because there was no sort of pressure on them to do so, to set up house together. Thus, Janet had bought the little garden-suburb villa in Westleigh — about ten miles North West of the City — and the other two paid her a rent for their share in it.

“I’m thinking”, went on Humphrey, “of turning into a pukkah pyscho-analyst.”

“I should think it would be a very good idea”. said John: “Your medical experience would come in useful, too — give you a good solid foundation. At least I suppose it would. I don’t really know anything about it.”

“No, it’s not so much the pathological side that appeals to me. You know, I had enough of guts. It’s the — the philosophical side: the whole thing.”

“Oh!”, said John: “the philosophical side. What are you going to do about it, then — write books?”

“Oh no! Oh no, Squire! I shall become a pukkah practitioner — but — more for treating people who’re sort of generally fed up — you know, fed up, without actually being loopy over it!”

“How will you treat them?”

“Tell them about themselves.”

“I see”, said John: “What will you tell them?” he asked after a pause.

“Fathead! It all depends what’s wrong. Don’t pretend to be so beastly innocent!”

“Supper’s ready!” called out Janet, who had gone out before this conversation began and laid it in the kitchen.

“By the way”, said Humphrey, as they went out together: “there’s a chap I see sometimes round at this place — yes — by George! I believe you’d take to each other. A bit superfine, perhaps, but no fool — no — not by any means.” He laughed.

“What’s the joke?” asked John.

“That’s just what I couldn’t make out. The very first time we met, he kept on laughing all the time — just as if he had some private joke of his own laid on. No, I suppose there’s not really much in him —” he went on thoughtfully. Then he suddenly laughed again: “Yes. As soon as he found out my Christian name was Humphrey, he started calling me ‘Humphrey Clinker’. Pretty cool at a first meeting, eh?”

“Who’s that?” asked Janet.

“A man I met in town today. Marston, he’s called.”

“It seems to me” said Janet: “most of your friends are pretty cool.”

“I should like to meet him”, said John.

“Yes, you really ought to! I think you’d like each other.” And for a moment he screwed up his eyes and looked at John with a queer thoughtful expression.

The conversation turned upon family and business matters. After supper, the three kept up for more than an hour a lively exchange of reminiscences, and, as they talked, Humphrey was transported into the past. He looked at Janet with altered eyes, and forgot all the differences between them. He recalled vividly the heights of superior wisdom from which she had looked down on him during early childhood. Janet had in fact acted as a kind of liaison officer between the two boys and the powers that be. She had been a friend at court. She it was who had managed it so that he got the little milk-cart on his fifth birthday; and her veto on any prank was disregarded only at one’s peril. Nevertheless she had also been a pranker herself — one of the three — a full, subscription-paying member of the Red Carpet Society. For a little while they all seemed to recover that old delicious feeling that the three of them were in a conspiracy against the rest of the world. They called each other by the old secret names: John was “Liberty”, Janet “Equality”, and Humphrey “Fraternity”. And each word that fell from their lips seemed to be charged with a pregnant meaning accessible only to themselves. Everything that happened, or might happen, in life was an exciting lark — and they alone knew it!

When the subject was exhausted, they sat silent for some time, until John turned to Humphrey and asked him his opinion of the Transport Workers’ strike, which was then in its third week.

“Opinion?” rapped out Humphrey: “Why should I have an opinion?” But John went on to state his own view (with which he knew Humphrey was already more or less familiar) that the men were justified in their demands, that they were not simply out for as much as they could get in the material sense — but had a dim desire, which they hardly understood themselves, for a higher kind of life generally. He asked Humphrey if he did not agree that the conception of a ‘subsistence level’ or a ‘living wage’ was a fundamentally degrading one. Humphrey did; and they continued to discuss the details of the situation, as far as John was familiar with them. But it was soon quite plain that Humphrey’s heart was not in this talk of freight-charges and balance-sheets;

“What is wrong”, he said suddenly, interrupting John in the middle of a sentence, “is ignorance — hopeless, appalling, abysmal ignorance!”

“What do you mean exactly?” asked his brother.

“Ignorance of everything, of themselves, of reality. You read any speech you like — Trade Union Leader, Employer, Member of Parliament — anyone you like. It doesn’t matter. Really read it — stop at the end of each sentence, and ask yourself what the sentence means. It doesn’t mean anything! Nine times out of ten it doesn’t! You find they’re not talking about anything that’s actually happening at all. They’re talking about something else, something in their own heads. Dead ideas. Dead ones!”

“I must think about that.” said John. He often had something of this kind fired at him soon after he got back home; but he was no longer inclined — as at first — simply to laugh at his brother. For, although he could not always follow him closely, he had become aware that Humphrey was not by any means merely rushing from one new idea to another. There was a progression of some sort in his intellectual adventures. Whatever they might mean, each, as it passed, left a real deposit, and this deposit was to some extent incorporated in the next.

But the conversation got no farther. For Janet, who had taken up her book again during John’s remarks on the strike, now shut it abruptly, jumped up, and shooting out a “Good night, dears! I’m going up!”, was out of the room almost before they had time to look round. Humphrey glanced at the door; then he looked significantly at his brother and whistled. He thought she had left them, because his last remark looked like leading up to a conversation upon psychology, about which they had recently had some violent passages. John knew better what was passing in her mind:

“It’s all right!” he said reassuringly.

When she reached her room, Janet sank down into an armchair with a look of despair on her face and sat there quite still for nearly half an hour, while a few tears rolled slowly down her face. She heard the uneven murmur of conversation coming up from below. First Humphrey’s high-pitched voice rose and fell emphatically, then came a brief responsive growl from John, and then Humphrey’s voice again, and so on. All through the last conversation Janet had felt her mind full of things she wanted to say — intelligent contributions to the discussion — things which would have made her definitely a part of it all. She had kept silence, however, owing to the physical effort necessary for overcoming her stammering. Once or twice, during a brief pause, she had actually begun to speak — but, with her, ‘beginning to speak’ often meant a silent exertion of the will for some moments before any outward sign appeared. In each case Humphrey had resumed the conversation before she had succeeded in making either of them realise that she meant to join in. Of course she could have made a gesture with her hand, for them to wait; but this would have overlaid with a fictitious importance the quite ordinary remark she intended to make, besides calling attention to her deformity.

All this had suddenly made the world look quite black and hopeless — not indeed her failure to make herself felt on this particular occasion, but rather the memory which it quickened of a long series of similar failures in the past, beginning with the night at the dance, when her partner had been unable to conceal his impatience, and going on ruthlessly piling up, as year followed year, the stark, desperate conviction of her own social inferiority and isolation. This mood of despair, which always came upon her quite suddenly, had recurred with especial frequency while she was between the ages of nineteen and thirty. Each time it had

grown a little less sharp — and a little more hopeless. Then, in the awful grief which had followed her father's death, she had for a time forgotten all about herself and ceased to notice it. Now, however, it seemed to be coming back, along with other personal troubles and problems, which had been scotched, but not — as she thought at the time — killed by the sad event.

As if these — her own weaknesses — were not enough, another burden had been added to them in the last few months. After the War Janet had decided, at a considerable sacrifice of her own inclinations, to abandon the idea of getting a full-time job as a business or professional woman, in order to provide a proper home for the other two. She had had no intention of degenerating into a mere housekeeper; so she had learnt typewriting, polished up her French, and begun to take in simple typing and translating work. She had always meant to add German, but somehow this did not get on very fast. The income from this work, together with the inheritance from her father and the rent paid by her brothers, allowed her to provide a little daily help in the house and still have something to spare. But just now she was beginning to wonder whether it would be worth while keeping up the arrangement. John would be leaving, when he married, and she was not only not sure whether life alone with herself would really suit Humphrey, but even doubted if she herself could quite stand it. There were definite reasons for this. Old Trinder's aggressive passion for freedom in all directions had burnt deep into all the children a keen distaste for forming moral judgments of other people's actions. Almost from birth they had taken in, as though with every breath, the tacit assumption that all expressions of moral disapproval spring either from hypocrisy or from an offensive desire to 'boss'. If this had not been the case, it is doubtful whether things would have gone on as long as they had. Alone with Humphrey during John's terms, Janet had realised more and more how different his ways and views were coming to be from her own; yet at the same time she had found the utmost difficulty in broaching the subject. Once, when the strain on her feelings had become almost intolerable, she had confronted him in the morning with a flat question as to his whereabouts on the previous night. "It's WRONG!" she had suddenly rapped out, going crimson all over; and he had replied (an old family formula for rebuking interference): "Keep off Tom Tiddler's ground!", adding, however, with an appealing look, "there's a dear!". The appealing look had somehow gone to her heart and, after that, they had dropped the subject. But now she was beginning to feel again that things could not go on like this.

She closed her eyes and tried to imagine just what her father would have felt and said and done about the matter, if he had been alive. But unfortunately she could get very little help here. While something in Erasmus Trinder's blood had prevented him from ever coming to like any of those irregularities which his contemporaries described as 'immoral', he had disliked the attitude of disapproval still more. Thus, though any tendency in the children towards personal laxity had always been checked at once by their father's obvious distress, they had never heard him actually express disapproval of any conduct other than blatant cruelty. Concerning continence, in particular, they had been left severely alone to make what they could of the discrepancy between Erasmus's own habits and the precept and practice of the great Butler. The same 'something' was in Janet's blood. She had no

opinions, but she knew very well what she liked and what she hated. And just now she hated the direction in which Humphrey appeared to be moving.

After a time, however, she grew much calmer. She thought with consolation of her other brother, recollecting that, for some time at any rate, he would still be at home. Also she believed that her father would have liked her to do as she had done in the matter of keeping the house up, and, above all, she told herself that her own private trouble was a matter of no importance. Still breathing somewhat deeply and irregularly, she undressed and got into bed, and picking up a little toy volume of Marcus Aurelius, which someone had given her at Christmas, tried to read one or two pages before putting out the light.

Downstairs John, who had begun by encouraging Humphrey to go on talking, was now finding it difficult to listen. He made two or three attempts to relate what his brother was saying — as far as he understood it — to his own system of experience and desires, but without much success. Even when Humphrey, evidently thinking he had found a point of contact, tried to illuminate some aspect of the Unconscious, in which he was interested, by adding: "Call it Christ, if you like! It doesn't matter," John's sluggish wit failed to rise to any sense of real meaning in his brother's words. Truth to tell, he was sleepy with the day's journey and the novelty of being at home. It all seemed somehow unreal, this jargon of forces and complexes shut up inside people. He supposed Christ might be there too, for all he knew, but what a remote Christ from the One he was familiar with who blossomed into the flowers and sang out of the throats of the birds, who incarnated in beautiful music, or, as the sacred bread and wine, brought balm from without to the hurt spirits of men.

"Well, Good night, Hump., Old Man!" he said at last with a guilty feeling that Humphrey would have liked to go on talking, and dragged himself upstairs to bed. When he got into his room, he took a little crucifix out of his bag and put it on the table beside the photograph of Margaret. Next morning, before coming downstairs, he put the crucifix back into his bag again.

### CHAPTER III

After breakfast Janet shut herself up with the typewriter, and Humphrey went off to Dawson, who was giving him a kind of training-course in psycho-analysis. John spent the morning, unpacking, arranging the books he had brought back with him, and looking at a travel-book about Italy, which he had borrowed from Margaret. They were to go to Italy for their honeymoon.

After lunch he set out to call on the Hudsons in their Hyde Park flat. It was a beautiful day. His chest swelled with pent-up pleasure and excitement, as he contemplated London from the top of a bus. — the people hurrying on the pavement and the clear light shining through the leaves of the Plane-trees. When he got off the bus and began walking, he looked straight into the eyes of all the people he met. "A nice lot on the whole!" he thought, and a smile broke out on his face without his orders, so that a girl, who was passing, took it for herself and turned her head back over her shoulder after she had gone by. But John was not looking. "Yes, a nice lot! Struggling against odds, I expect, most of them — but doing their best." And then he



found himself trying to imagine what the owner of one particular face was actually thinking and feeling. "Silly!" he thought, "not my business at all!"

When he reached the block of flats, he smiled knowingly at the lift man, who knew him by sight, stepped out of the lift, rang the bell, and, while he was waiting, straightened his tie before his dim reflection in the ground-glass panel of the door.

"Good afternoon! Is Miss Margaret at home?"

"Yes, Sir. She's in her room."

"Right! I'll go along."

"Lady Hudson is in the drawing-room, Sir!" said the maid, as he was about to pass an open door.

"Oh well, I'll just look in and see how she is", said John, and turned aside into the room. Lady Hudson was moving about the room, flicking a few special ornaments with a little brush made of feathers.

"Ah, John!" she said, as she saw him, and he went up and shook hands. A short, rather dapper woman, she looked, as usual, a tiny bit weary; but she greeted John kindly enough and asked him how he was getting on. "Margaret is in her room". she said, after they had talked for a few minutes, and threw in a benevolent smile as a kind of afterthought. Off went John to Margaret's room (the Hudsons were rich, and she had a sitting-room of her own), and knocked at the door.

"May I come in?"

"No! You must go on standing outside the door!"

He threw open the door and saw her standing on the opposite side of the room.

"Study of a gentleman returning from college!" she exclaimed mockingly.

"I haven't come to see you!" said John. "I've only come to bring a message!" She laughed at him. He crossed the room and took her into his arms. Both were surprised at the force with which he clung to her. On the way there he had not been thinking much about her, he had been perfectly happy, but not about her, only about life in general. Now, however, it seemed to him as though he must have been in great pain up to the very moment when their lips touched. He felt as though life was being drawn out of him limbs into hers, and that he must perish if he let go. At last she freed herself and stepped back.

"Whew!" she exclaimed, laughing with her eyes and fanning herself as though she had just come through a most terrible ordeal, while she thought to herself: Oh dear! yes, he does want me that way too! How queer everything is! What fun! And I'd forgotten how nice he looks! "Was that your message?" she added.

He tried to think of something to say. But he felt as though all the words he knew were swimming about inside him, like fish in a pool recently disturbed by a diver, so that it was impossible to arrange them and push them out in any order. When he did speak, all he could manage to blurt out was:

"It's all very well!" And he said this with such an absurdly rueful face that Margaret rippled off into laughter again; and yet in the middle of the laugh her eyes rested on his for a fraction of a second and gave him a quiet intimate look, like a little island in the middle of a lake.

"Come and sit down," she said, "and tell me every single thing you have done and said and thought since last time!"

“Whew!” said John, fanning himself, and trying to make the same face as she had done a moment ago. They sat down together hand in hand and began a rather sporadic conversation of mutual enquiries and brief answers. When he was not actually love-making, nor she laughing, their talk often seemed to Margaret herself to become suddenly prosaic and business-like; unless it happened that they were upon some really profound theme, where they were especially in harmony; and then everything was quite different. So now the conversation seemed to her to bounce about almost uneasily, while he asked after various friends, the success of some little activities she had been undertaking, and so forth, and she did the same.

“And how is Humphrey?” she enquired, and, while she said this, her eyes — as was often the case with Margaret — moved to and fro under their long lashes without meeting his, yet at the same time without giving any impression of shiftiness.

“Oh”, said John: “Much the same as ever.” and he gave some account of his brother’s plans.

Soon after this the maid came in with a tea-tray, saying: “Lady Hudson told me to bring it in to you here, Miss Margaret!” John thrilled again at the prospect of tea alone with Margaret in Margaret’s room; he was full of gratitude to Lady Hudson. Even under ordinary circumstances there is something especially cosy and secure about the little meal with which English people usher in the shades of evening; this particular one never left John’s memory as long as he lived.

For now, not from any particular thing she said or did, but simply in the course of the inevitable rhythm of love, he felt a sudden increase of tenderness and delight breaking over him like a warm wave. Margaret moved across the room to take something from a cupboard, and as she did so, her dress swayed slightly, so that a certain fold in it described a little arc in the air. The meaning of the whole world nestled quietly into this arc, and lay there shining back at him with a soft and brilliant light. And a little later on, as he watched her pouring out the tea, he gasped with astonishment and fear at the thought that this infinite being, who emitted sparks of spiritual light whenever she moved, and emptied every room she went out of — that this lovely, lovely creature, with her elaborate private system of thoughts and feelings and physical organs and clothes, should yet be in some special way dedicated to the cherishing of his own scrubbed and trousered little self.

She knew he had been watching her, and when she looked up over the brimming cups, simply smiled at him, this time without moving her eyes about, or making any jest. This restraint, which showed how completely she was in accord with his present mood, seemed to John to be in itself a gesture filled with grace and bounty. And then she began asking him about his work; she drew him on to talk of Startop’s address and of his feelings about it. As the conversation grew less abrupt, he had time to watch the kaleidoscopic shaping motions of her face as she spoke. Margaret Hudson’s chances of becoming a magazine or film beauty were seriously marred by two things — an over-prominent chin and a rather wide mouth. Thus, when she was not talking, she would have to be described as handsome rather than beautiful. But the moment she began to speak, then her whole face lit up with restless beauty. Hitherto invisible lines of force seemed to spring into being from nowhere, playing into her visage from surrounding space, and finally converging

into a kind of struggle for existence round her expressive mouth. To watch Margaret speaking English — so one of her father's friends had once declared — was like watching a brilliant artist creating shape after shape from the smooth clay and as rapidly setting them aside to be ready for the next. The artist was her upper lip; the clay was the stream of sound and meaning that issued from it.

John tried to explain his feeling of relief, the delicious sense of being understood by somebody older and wiser than himself, who yet did not underrate difficulties.

"I know", said the upper lip, while the rest of the face broke into a smile: "one hardly wants any advice about ways of getting over the troubles; the mere fact that someone — has fully stated them seems to be enough, doesn't it?"

Once again John gasped internally, as if he had suddenly dropped over the crest of a very steep wave. Was it really possible that there should be two people in the world, who immediately understood in this way every glimmer of thought, every tremor of feeling that passed right down in the depths of one another's breasts? And even granted that, was it conceivable, outside dreams, that he himself, John Trinder, should have the luck, the LUCK, to be one of the two, and all this should be going now, at this minute, and he not dead or dying? He gazed at Margaret with eyes that seemed to her to grow bigger and bigger, until her own half laughing, half startled ones grew steadier, ceased their roving, and for a few moments returned that gaze in all seriousness.

They sat silent for a little while after this, and then Margaret got up and went to the piano. She began to play a Brahms waltz. He sat back in his chair, and looked all round the room; at the water-colours in their white painted wooden frames, the vases of fresh flowers, the palette and easel (for Margaret did a little 'mucking', as she called it, herself), and the three or four white enamelled shelves with books on them — a good many illustrated works on flowers and birds, some more on the history and criticism of painting, a complete set of Ruskin's works (her twenty-first birthday present), most of the English poets in an odd variety of editions, a good deal of Stevenson, and a jumble of modern plays and novels in English, French, and Italian. Nearly half of one shelf was taken up by a ragged array of maps and Baedekers, for Margaret was very fond of travelling — especially on foot — and often wandered about Italy or the south of France with different friends. John knew the whole scene by heart, and yet every time he came, his eye always swept the room and noted it all afresh; for it always seemed to him to be part of Margaret herself. This time, however, the unpleasant thought suddenly occurred to him that, when they were married, this room would no longer exist; for most of its contents would be transferred to their own new house. He found himself wondering vaguely whether there were not some arrangement by which Margaret could become his wife and live with him, and yet also go on living here like this, in this room. But he quickly stopped this. Not being of a literary habit, he did not know that this feeling is older than the hills, and therefore he did not go on revelling in it, murmuring to himself "Fain would fling the net, and fain have her free" or anything of that sort.

Gradually, now, he began to realise the melody of the waltz which Margaret was playing. It was not that he had only just begun to listen. Rather, he felt as though he had been living inside the melody all the time, but was now coming to himself

there — just as his open eyes, which had been moving about the room the whole afternoon, had only begun to see it a moment ago. The lovely tune, undulating on and on and on, lapped itself round his heart in folds of musical meaning and human tenderness. He sat listening in a kind of trance, making no attempt to find any words to fit the feelings that were surging up in him. Had he done so, they must have been something like this: that everything is absolutely all right, for, at the bottom, all social institutions are based on this same delightful meaning; that this alone makes them even possible; that his own future in this world was infinite, that it contained millions of hitherto unexplored joys, and that he, John Trinder, and ultimately all other people, were really perfectly secure. No real harm could ever come to them; the one or two ugly things he had seen, in Flanders, for instance, were due to a purely temporary and extraordinary derangement of the natural order of affairs; such things were never likely to happen again; and so on, and so on. And still the unending melody murmured on, like the mythical serpent with its tail in its mouth, and on, till the lift and fall of it seemed to become entangled with the rhythm of his breathing, and he almost lost consciousness. He seemed to be sinking, slowly sinking down, into a warm delicious sense of being completely enveloped, enfolded, swaddled in something far greater and better and more loving than himself.

“You can go on like this forever!” sang out Margaret gaily; and in fact she had already gone back to the beginning of the tune several times. But now she polished it off with a couple of improvised chords and jumped up.

“Come along!” she said, taking him by the hand and dragging him reluctantly from his chair. “You must come and see father; he’s sure to be back by now.”

He followed her into the drawing-room, where Sir Otto Hudson was sitting in an armchair by the window, reading the Times. He looked about fifty, was of average height and build, dark-complexioned, clean-shaven, and dressed in a very well-cut morning-coat.

“Hulloa! John!” he said affably, and held out his hand without getting up from his chair. “Haven’t heard you play Brahms for some time, Margaret”. he added, turning to his daughter; and to John: “Have you seen Mary?”

“Yes”, said John: “we had a talk, when I first came in.”

“Well, what have you been doing at Welldon? They’ve turned you out for good now, I suppose”. And Sir Otto went on pleasantly to ask John his opinion about the latest decision of some committee which was sitting in London at the time, enquiring into the creation of a new diocese. Sir Otto always had administrative questions of this kind at his fingers’ ends, whereas John hardly knew the terms of reference, much less the personnel of the conference. John had very quickly found that the right attitude to adopt towards his future father-in-law was one of respectful deference — the natural deference due to superior years and experience. This came quite easily to him. He frequently used the old-fashioned “Sir!” in addressing Sir Otto without feeling any unpleasant sense of constraint. They often talked together at considerable length. Yet, if you had asked John what Sir Otto’s opinions were on any really important subject, he would have been incapable of telling you. Hudson could talk intelligently about almost anything; he would throw out information or suggestions of some sort on any subject that came up in his presence, from a technical point in the history of dogma or scholastic philosophy to

the genus of a wild-flower. He was never dull; but on the other hand John, for one, had never seen his eyes light up with enthusiasm.

As to his daily occupation, here again, if you had asked John about it, you would not have been made very much wiser. "Something in the City" would probably have been his first attempt, and then, if you had pressed him, he might have gone on to explain that, as far as he understood it, the denizens of the City were divisible into two main classes, the commercial proper, and the financial; but that at a certain height in the scale, these two classes merged rather mysteriously into one; Sir Otto, he would explain, was situated somewhere above that point.

As a matter of fact John sometimes felt a little guilty about his ignorance of these matters. In theory, he held it to be particularly important for him, as a future member of the Clergy, to acquire an intelligent grasp of the way in which the world ran itself. So at one time he had made a serious beginning in that direction. Unfortunately, however, his first step had been to try and discover the meaning of the 'Conversion Loan', which at that time kept meeting his eye in the papers. Do what he could, he could not see that it meant anything else but borrowing more money from the same people, in order to repay them what you already owed. And this sounded to him so exactly like one of Mr. Micawber's schemes that he did not dare to say anything about it to anyone who could speak with authority, for fear of showing himself to be a simple-minded fool. Even so, however, he might have pursued his enquiries further, had he not been discovering so many other things just at that time, all of which, unlike finance, interested him on their own account and not from a sense of duty. Among these must be numbered the family arrangements of English wild flowers, Florentine art, and the soul of Margaret Hudson.

To return, however, to her father: his history was rather a curious one, for he had originally begun to make a name for himself as a member of the Parliamentary Society — a radical organisation, which in its early days had numbered a good many brilliant men in its ranks. Thin-lipped young Hudson had gradually specialised in the direction of purely economic research and, after leaving his mark on the rapidly crystallizing doctrines of the society, had lost interest in political theory and drifted out of it into an arena where his gifts could find a more lucrative employment. His first wife (Margaret's mother) whom he had met in the P.S. during those early days when it still trailed about itself a little of the fragrance of Morris and Ruskin, had died some years back. Two years after her death he had taken to himself another, who had nearly doubled his already considerable wealth, and about whom very little was known by most of his friends, except that she was the daughter of an eccentric old gentleman who lived in the country and rarely appeared in public. She and Margaret were very friendly, but not intimate, and when Lady Hudson went to visit her father, she left Margaret behind, though Sir Otto himself frequently accompanied her.

After dining with the Hudsons ("We'll let him off dressing", said Sir Otto: "Eh, Margaret?"), John went home on top of a bus, floating up the Edgware Road, as though it were the Grand Canal. Once he closed his eyes and tried to call up a picture of her face, as it had looked at the moment when she glanced up and smiled at him over the teacups. Strange! he found that he could not get the tiniest glimpse of it; he actually seemed to have forgotten what she looked like.

When he got back, he found Janet sitting alone, and without a book. Humphrey had gone to some meeting or other. John felt very tired and said he would go to bed.

"Had a good time?" asked Janet. She kissed him. Then she caught hold of his arm: "You're quite happy?"

"Quite happy? Why, I should think so! Did you think I was putting it on?"

"That's all right, then!" she said: "G -" she waved her hand: "- go along to bed with you!"

Although he was tired, John was in one of those dreamy, preoccupied moods, when it is difficult to take any active decision, even the decision to undress. Beginning to rearrange some of the books on his shelves, he took out an old Greek History, and before putting it back, began glancing at the pencil-marks he had made in it while he was at school. These were chiefly underlinings, but there were also a few sketches and remarks, mostly of an extremely foolish nature. On one page the name Solon had been underlined. It caught his eye:

Then, when his host asked him who was the happiest man in the world, expecting to hear himself named, Solon first mentioned a worthy but obscure citizen of Athens, who had fallen gloriously in battle, and then two young Argives who had met their death in the performance of an act of filial piety. Croesus was offended at the moment, but learnt by bitter experience to "call no man happy till he is dead."

The words "call no man happy till he is dead" were also underlined, and in the margin that ancient John Trinder, who sometimes seemed to be such a very long way off, if not actually dead and buried, had written in pencil:—"All right, old chap!"

'Yes, that really is absurd, old chap!' thought John, as he undressed: 'I know that's absurd.' And he recalled what someone had said to him about the despair of the Pagan world before the advent of Christianity. 'Yes, that's quite fair!' he thought to himself, as he got into bed and looked for some time at the crucifix on the table; and then he thought a prayer to himself. But afterwards, as he lay on his back with his eyes open, he recollected that the whole point about the 'Christian revelation', as this writer had called it, was precisely the promise of happiness after death rather than before it; so that, far from contradicting Solon's remark, it really coincided with it. This worried him, because a moment ago everything had seemed so clear; and then the Warden's earnest, thought-lined face and his voice continually repeating the word 'disappointment' came into John's mind. But by now he was too warm and sleepy and comfortable to think about anything much. "Anyway", he said to himself, just before he turned over and fell asleep: "it's absurd!"

#### CHAPTER IV

John did not find the time hanging heavy on his hands. Two big events, his marriage and his ordination, were rapidly approaching, both of which demanded all sorts of minute preparations. There were people to be interviewed, things to be bought, and, of course, forms to be filled in. Margaret and he were both anxious to have their

honeymoon before the end of the summer, so they had fixed a date near the end of July; and John was to be ordained Deacon during the following Ember Week. Meanwhile there were house and furniture to be thought of, John's future rector to be seen and talked to, friends and relatives of the Hudsons to present himself to for inspection, and himself to prepare for the coming ordination. He took this last very seriously and was doing all he could to make himself take it more seriously still.

Fortunately his doctrinal obligations presented few difficulties to him. At a comparatively early age — with the sense of having made a great discovery — he had suddenly realised that all expressions of thought, whether verbal or pictorial, possess an artificial permanence, which is not characteristic of the thing expressed. Arguments, therefore, which are based on these expressions, or controversies which rage round them after the lapse of centuries, are likely to be arguments and controversies about something grotesquely remote from the real thought out of which they originated. This discovery, which he seemed to have made entirely by himself, left a tremendous impression on him. It had inoculated him completely against all the qualms of modern theology, so that he found the elaborate re-interpretations of the Creeds and the Thirty-nine Articles, which were presented to him in order to make his path easier, simply a tedious nuisance. If there were any doubts in his mind, it was just this tortuous modern theology which aroused them. But as a matter of fact, when he thought of the final question which he would be asked on the day of his ordination, he really never felt the slightest uneasiness. The Articles did not mean to him what they had meant to those who evolved them; that was impossible. They probably did not mean what they meant to most of his contemporaries; that was unnecessary. Yet when he tried to explain this point of view to Janet, he could see quite clearly from the embarrassed way in which she changed the subject, that, in her view, he was salving his conscience with a piece of transparent Jesuitry.

An instinctive feeling had been growing in John — ever since the time when he made this 'discovery' — that pictures and symbols may be informed with much more life and reality than abstract ideas. A symbol or an act is not misinterpreted and turned into nonsense as easily as a verbal formula — so he felt, though he would have found it hard to put it in so many words. Consequently it seemed obvious to him that the right way of preparing himself for a responsible position in the Church was, not to mug up the Oecumenical Councils, but to saturate himself as wholeheartedly as he could in the ordinary dramatic and ritual forms of the Liturgy. To this end, he went, sometimes alone and sometimes with Margaret or Janet, to the most beautiful services he could find in London (and by 'beautiful' he practically meant 'dramatic'), and attended early communion in his local church as often as it was held. It was unfortunate that this church was of the kind that is described as 'low', but John had long ago discovered that, when he was actually receiving the Eucharist himself, his surroundings and the nature of the ceremonial mattered comparatively little.

Besides attending all these services, he now made a practice of setting aside some short period of the day for the purpose of letting his mind dwell on a particular image, or series of images, such as the Mass itself, or some scene out of one of the Gospels. At such times he did his best to avoid forming any thoughts or

opinions at all, merely making the image itself blossom as vividly as possible in his imagination. And he soon began to enjoy this part of his devotions more and more; for, try as he would, at the services themselves, he found that the repetition of the same groups of words became tedious and even deadening. Thus, whereas the collects and responses — save for a few rare moments of insight — seemed to lose their meaning more and more, till they often had quite a dead sound, the pictures which he repeatedly called up in his private meditation grew more and more alive, seeming at times almost to sparkle with the light of all sorts of possible new meanings, which he could not grasp with his intellect at all, and often linking themselves on to one another in a kind of chain.

Then, besides all these important matters, there were two glorious whole day walks with Margaret: they took an early train about twenty-five miles out and wandered across country to a little station on a different main line. On these occasions Margaret, let out from town for seven or eight hours, seemed to live entirely in her surroundings. First she would point to some delicate combination of colours in the distant sky, then to a bird or a specially graceful group of trees; and now she would be stopping to unearth some tiny wildflower, which she had spotted as she passed, in a way that appeared to John to be miraculous. Town-bred as he was, it was a wonderful experience to live his way into the secrets of Nature through Margaret's eyes; and he would go on firing off questions about birds and flowers, till she sometimes said he was marrying her as a cheap way of learning botany. John also talked a good deal, directly or indirectly, about himself — a thing which Margaret very rarely did. She was somewhat the older of the two. She would encourage him to speak of his ambitions and great spiritual discoveries, putting in a sympathetic word occasionally, to show that she was following. Yet she always conversed in such a way as to keep the matter, as it were, at arm's length. She would lose herself in the Nature that surrounded her, but never in a fit of impassioned recollection of something that had happened to her personally. And this, though she had a longer life behind her than John.

On the second of these two walks he had been trying, in the afternoon, to explain something of his way of preparing himself for ordination, and to find out how far it accorded with her experiences.

"You know", he said, after tea, as they walked along a little footpath to the station: "I really know very little about you — what you really feel, I mean, right down at the bottom."

She laughed, musically as always, and said: "I'm not sure there's very much to know. I've never been 'right down' myself. You see, you have all these exciting ideas occurring to you, but I just keep on absorbing other people's". She looked at him and laughed again: "I really am a very ordinary person, John", she said, "though you're too much of a noodle to see it just now!" He stopped, looked at her with eyes full of love, and then, with a glance to see if anybody was about, snatched her into his arms and kissed her.

John read very little at this time. He was living so much in the future, and was himself seething with so many mixed emotions that he could not find patience to read about other people's. Thus, he would take up a book for ten minutes and then have to lay it aside, simply because his own thoughts came crowding and surging in



so powerfully as to drive out everything else. The book, which he took up, generally turned out to be one of Humphrey's, because these were left lying about. Janet always put hers away, when she had done with them. In this way, John gradually perceived that Humphrey was at present making short sharp sallies into a most formidable array of authors.

Most sympathetic people gradually come to realise the deeper forces of human nature by their experiences of life, and of its reflection in great literature; but Humphrey had begun from the opposite end. First, he drank in all he could about the forces, and then he began to look out for their outward manifestations in life and literature.

Thus, among the books on repressed emotion and morbid psychology, which he brought home from the London Library, more general, more literary, volumes gradually began to appear. And as he was at present in a state of great intellectual excitement, one book usually led to another, before he had got very far in it. Having read very little before, he tried nevertheless to follow up all the quotations and references he came across, with the result that he usually found himself manipulating about fifteen volumes at once, like a juggler keeping up a quantity of different sized balls. At one time John made a list of the books which Humphrey could in some sense be said to be "reading". It included works by or about (and sometimes both) Strindberg, Nietzsche, Blake, Swedenborg, Dostoevsky, Psycho-analysis, Greek Religion, and the Kabbalah, and, on one occasion, John even found his brother reading Shakespeare.

Most of these books John had picked up in some odd moment or other and had a look at. They made very little impression on him, however; for, apart from the state of preoccupation which has already been described, he realised at once that this was not a time at which he could afford to make a serious study of anything new. Humphrey and he did make one or two attempts to talk, but it at once became pathetically obvious that an impassable gulf yawned between the former's eager, thirsty identification of his own inner life with all that he could understand in these books and John's quite external interest in them as possible or impossible ideas. For a similar reason they had now practically given up trying to talk about John's religion. After thinking over Humphrey's outburst on the subject of "Dead ideas — dead ones!" John had indeed seemed at first to see in it something analogous to his own 'discovery', and he had tried to approach Humphrey in this sense; yet they had once more failed to understand one another.

"I don't see myself giving up thinking altogether, Old Man!" Humphrey had said.

"Well, I didn't mean that."

"That's what it comes to, I take it."

"Oh no!" said John in rather an annoyed tone: "Thinking's all right for the practical problems of life, but not with the fundamental things, that's all."

"Yes, but I don't see myself giving up thinking about the fundamental things."

"All right! You'll only come out by the same door wherein you went!"

"But dash it!" said Humphrey: "I like thinking. For its own sake! I've only just started!"

John smiled: "You can prove anything", he said: "or nothing! Look here:" he paused: "Either God is the creator of all things and omnipotent, or He is not. If He is not, he is not God. If He is, He must be the Creator of Evil. But God is unthinkable except as Absolute Goodness. Therefore Absolute Goodness is the originator of Evil; which is absurd."

"Oh, that's all bilge, Old Man!"

"Bilge, is it?" said John indignantly: "It's an antinomy."

"What's that? I thought it was a kind of metal!"

"I said antimony, not antinomy — that is — I mean — I said antinomy, not antimony. Besides, it's antimony. Oh, you're hopeless! Why don't you put in a little Kant among your reading. You say yourself you've only just started. I suppose you've never even heard of the Critique of Pure Reason?"

"No."

"Well, let me tell you, you've got a long way to go!" (John himself had read about twenty pages of this work)

"All right, Squire. Keep calm!"

They gave it up. Humphrey had had no practice in expressing himself, and John found that he too could not lay his finger on the point of difference ("But I ought to be able to put things more clearly"? he thought: "What about my sermons?"). In point of fact Humphrey had not got John's aesthetic instinct, nor did he know anything about Plato. They differed, therefore, at the very outset in their attitude towards sensuous experience; and, as their moral judgments also differed widely, there did not appear to be very much in common between them. Nevertheless they continued to get on very well together. Indeed, the first time they met again after this conversation, they chipped each other about it:

"Cheeroh, Hump.! How's the brain?"

"Top-hole, thanks, Squire. Eyeball functioning O.K.? That's the stuff!"

And the next morning, when John came downstairs looking particularly rosy and babyish and happy, Humphrey, fetching up a remnant of Milton from the memories of his schooldays, announced in solemn tones:

"Enter the Cherub Contemplation!"

Happy as he was, John's life during these weeks was not one smooth daisy-chain of absolutely unalloyed bliss. In the first place, there were all the ordinary pains incident to being in love, pains of which at least a double share falls to the one who is, however slightly, deeper in. Pleasure and pain are altogether so much a matter of more and less rather than of absolute quantities that John sometimes suffered untold things from some careless word of Margaret's — some casual inflection of the voice which suggested to him that perhaps after all she did not love him quite as tenderly as he had supposed the day before yesterday. Once, when she had in his opinion seemed almost indifferent to the momentous fact that he was departing from her for at least forty-eight hours, his sense of proportion was suddenly restored in the Edgware Road by the sight of a pitifully weeping woman. It occurred to him, as he passed her on the top of his bus, that she was probably crying for some terrible reason; perhaps her husband had just kicked her in the breast!

Besides all this, the relations of Margaret with his family often worried him a little. They had only been engaged for a short time; and to say that Margaret and

Janet disliked one another would be absurd; yet, when they were together, neither of them was ever quite at her ease. Margaret became unduly polite and smiling, and Janet too silent; and John, poised between the two, always had a vague, disappointed feeling that something was wrong. For, when he was with either of them alone, he was often reminded of the other, and felt that they really had a great deal in common.

One night Margaret had come over to see them at West Leigh, and the four of them sat talking in the drawing-room, Margaret continually rippling off into her musical laugh. It was a habit she had first begun to acquire at college, and it had grown on her at home, with the enormous amount of entertaining which her parents did. It was a convenient means of concealing her own shyness and at the same time overcoming that of other people. Near the surface, it was yet spontaneous and therefore infectious; so that in the Hudsons' drawing-rooms both in London and Gloucestershire, where all sorts of antipathetic people were constantly meeting one another, it had proved an invaluable ice-breaker. Its orphic magic had been known to turn social chaos into social harmony in the course of a few minutes. Unfortunately it got on Janet's nerves.

Margaret had been accustomed, from an early age, to meet a great many of the literary and artistic lights of the day in her own house. And when people, who are in that position, talk much with those who are not, it is easy for them to be unintentionally very annoying. Just now she was sitting at the piano, where she had been singing to her own accompaniment. Half-turned from the instrument, she kept up, with the slightest suggestion of effort, a vivacious flow of conversation:

"Did you hear Pilowski play?"

"Yes". said Janet, after a pause.

"And what did you think of him?"

"I thought He was very good." Janet did not attempt to say anything about the indescribable thrill which she had felt during his playing of one particular Prelude of Chopin's. She had not the knack of putting such feelings glibly into words, and was inclined to distrust people who had. So she just said: "I thought he was very good." and remained stubbornly silent, without looking back into Margaret's eager, expectant face.

"He had such a marvellous touch with Chopin!" said John, looking at Margaret, and conscious, as usual in company, of having addressed her as though she were merely a polite acquaintance. But his words were really aimed at Janet. After a few seconds' silence — simply in order not to appear morose — the latter contributed:

"It s-s-eems to come so much more easily to the, to Russians than it does to English people.

"As a matter of fact", put in Margaret with nervous quickness (she had suffered during the pauses): "He's not Russian at all, or Polish, or anything properly exotic. He's a Scotchman called MacGluski!" She laughed: "His impresario absolutely refused to shepherd him round with a name like that; so the poor man had to change it!" Her eyes shifted rapidly and enquiringly from one to the other of them; she laughed again, and went on: "He was probably afraid the audience would expect him to come on in a kilt and do comic turns . . . "The gr-r-r-reat MacGlooski at the piano!"

She saw that she had failed to resolve the little tension into a general laugh, as she had intended; not only that, but she now felt that her account of Pilowski had come too much like a correction, and that it gave her an offensive air of being 'in the know'. So she dropped her eyes and went on more quietly, pausing between every sentence, as much as to say: If anyone likes to step in and interrupt, I shall be only too pleased.

"Poor man! . . . He is so very shy . . . Famous occasion when mother introduced him to an old lady as deaf as a post . . . 'This is Mr. Pilowski, a pianist of the Levst school.' . . . 'Yes — yes'" (Margaret imitated the old lady and held up an imaginary ear-trumpet) "'Well, it's a wonderful thing to have all your life in front of you! Were you at a public school or a private school?'" She pretended to shout into the ear-trumpet: "'Mr. Pilowski is a pianist — a pianist of the Levst school!'" And now she was once more the old lady — rather annoyed: "'Yes, I know, my dear; I know. I asked him what school he was at!'"

At this point Humphrey, who had looked up from the book he was reading, burst out laughing, and Margaret, glancing up at him quickly and gratefully, began to laugh herself, adding through it: "Poor man! And he does so hate looking young and foolish!" Her restless eyes again shifted across to Janet, who was smiling, but rather ungraciously.

All three of them had been looking at Margaret, as she finished the anecdote. Laughter loosened the muscles of her face, so that it became even more lively and expressive than usual. To John her whole countenance shone with lovely and radiant courage. Humphrey remembered the beautiful way her upper lip had curved itself round the word 'foolish' and, struck by the lively manner in which she had given the whole anecdote, said to himself: By George, young John knows what's what! I'm not even sure he's good enough for her! But Janet, who had also been watching Margaret's lips, thought: Affected! Fond of the sound of her own voice and used to having a lot of people listening to her and admiring her! And suddenly the vials of wrath, which all the evening had been secretly filling up inside her, were poured forth. She thought she should either have to break out into a tirade or hurry up to bed. A series of brutal and cutting remarks came into her head, remarks implying, for instance, that Margaret was a snob, that she was a pedant ('impresario', indeed!), that she was sitting there half pitying and half laughing at her (Janet) with her awkward speech and manners and indifferent social connections, that she had only picked John because she thought it was high time she had a husband of some sort, and he was the best she could manage, and so forth. The innuendo of these unspoken remarks went on getting more and more outrageous; she simply boiled with internal indignation; and all the while another Janet remained looking on in quite a detached way, and even observed coolly and contemptuously that the first one was a touchy old spinster in a shocking bad temper. She hardly spoke another word till Margaret got up to go.

As a little girl, these furious tempers of hers had given a good deal of trouble, and the advent of years of discretion had at first only altered their outward form, leaving their force and frequency and utter unreasonableness more or less untouched. But during the twelve months succeeding her father's death, the fits had grown rarer and more easily controlled. This was not surprising: they had always

been occasioned by trivial or imaginary affronts, and — well — when you have suffered for a long time from internal haemorrhage, you do not cry next time you cut your finger. Janet found out for herself how one may reach the stage of being glad that anyone should be careless and happy enough to have an offhand manner.

When John came back from seeing Margaret to the bus (she always tried to avoid having the car sent on these occasions, pretending that it was wanted elsewhere), Humphrey had gone up to bed, and Janet was preparing to follow. It was clear, however, that she had waited for his return.

“I’m afraid I wasn’t in a very cheerful mood tonight”. she said in too humble a voice: “You and Margaret’ll just have to forgive me!”

“You were rather quiet!”

“She never came to see me all the term!” Janet felt as though a huge brass door that she had been leaning against with all her might had just pushed itself open for a second and let out one short sharp blast of fire and brimstone. John did not know what to say. He knew that Margaret, though she liked Janet, was rather afraid of her, and therefore hesitated to come more often than necessary. But unfortunately Sir Otto, in his polite way, really did seem to be a bit of a snob, and that was what made John feel awkward. Before he had time to speak, however, Janet with a wry smile had turned sharp on her heel and rushed off to bed. As she undressed, her wrath gradually dissolved away, and she began to feel like a murderess. She recollected Margaret’s shyness and suddenly saw in a new and clear light all her pathetic anxiety to please. Long after she was in bed, two restless, enquiring, startled eyes continued to gaze at her mildly, stabbing her heart with needlessly sharp pangs of remorse.

Next day, therefore, without offering any more dangerously humble apologies, she tried to make it up to John in all sorts of little ways, asking him various questions about Margaret’s tastes and opinions and praising her playing and singing. But though she did her utmost to be kind and sympathetic whenever they met, it was still clear that they were not really at ease. Altogether Janet found life decidedly trying at this time. Even if she had known what was to become of her, she feared all big changes. But she did not know. The future was uncertain; and the only thing that grew more and more certain every day was that, after John’s wedding, she and Humphrey could not go on living alone together.

One day, when John was visiting some friends from Welldon, the thing came to a head. Janet spoke to Humphrey about leaving the hot water tap turned on, but she spoke with a flushed face and a tartness of manner out of all proportion to the offence. He stopped and began to stare at her with a sort of blank expression. Then he said in an offensively calm voice:

“What do you mean?”

She repeated what she had said.

“Yes; but why do you say it like that?” And then out it all came, hitched on somehow or other to the hot water tap; until he realised fully, as he had half realised already, that she considered his mind was turning into a mixture of prurience and superstition. He also realised that she had been glancing at his books more frequently than he had supposed.

"I'd rather have John's blessed "God" than your Unconscious or Libido, or whatever you call it. They are at least honest and don't pretend to be scientific about it. I should just like to have heard father on this blessed 'science' of Psycho-Analysis. Science! A lot of half-baked boys — think they've only got to get a few stupid ideas into their heads and call them 'science', and everybody goes gaping round after them. I don't know what the world's coming to, I simply don't! Science means s-s-s-s . . ." and here Janet, having got through the rest of this long sentence without a stop, for some reason began to stammer again. She went on hissing that 's' till they both began to think she would never be able to leave off. At least, however, when nearly all the breath was out of her body, she caught some of it back again with a great gulp and said quickly: "It means sacrifice — endless sacrifice." And at once, with the loss of all this energy for such a wretchedly unimpressive result, she felt a mood of weary, hopeless misery replacing all her former indignation. Her one desire now was to get away from everybody and hide her head:

"You see", she added quietly, giving Humphrey a wan smile: "we shall have to make some other arrangement."

Humphrey had been standing irresolute all this time, with his mouth half open. It would have been absolutely impossible for him to start a discussion on the nature of 'science' in the abstract, or the virtues and qualifications it demanded. He had always skipped the first few self-satisfied pages of his medical text-books, in which these wonders were extolled. 'Science', complete open-mindedness, as an epistemological ideal, was as much a part of his whole outlook, and therefore as impossible to discuss, as 'honour' is said to be to a public-schoolboy. Sing the praises of honour to a schoolboy so it is said by those who know, and he will simply feel hot and want to get away, though he could no more do anything that he regards as dishonourable than he could murder his mother. So it was with Humphrey now: he was absolutely tongue-tied.

He was also aware that Janet had a distinctly exaggerated idea of his own theory and practice in the matter of sexual licence; but "she's complexed on it!" he said to himself shortly, and decided it was useless to try and arrive at an explanation. Moreover he himself had for some time been feeling irked and unfree. He felt he was being watched, and had grown uneasily aware of having to judge his own actions, not by their intrinsic nature, but in the interpretation which Janet might be expected to put on them. To get a book from the library was equivalent to proclaiming himself a whole-hearted disciple of the author in every detail; to arrive home after midnight was to have spent the evening in doubtful female company: so, at least, he was beginning to feel. And, having insisted, with the highest motives, on absolute freedom to do and think as you choose, it is horribly annoying to find it supposed that you are doing and thinking all day and every day what you really only do or think, well, occasionally.

The end of it was that they decided to separate directly after John's marriage, but in the meantime to keep their decision secret. Both were agreed that everything must be as nice and friendly as possible for John during his last weeks at home.

## CHAPTER V

Humphrey had not forgotten his intention of introducing John to the facetious gentleman who had christened him 'Humphrey Clinker'. One evening, therefore, he took him along to a meeting of the —. It had not really got a name. Simply a few fellows met together once a fortnight or so and "chewed the rag about things in general", as Humphrey said.

The memory plays odd tricks. As they walked through the streets, John began to feel like a little boy again. He seemed to be trotting along beside his big brother — out for a special treat. They were let into a drab house in a street somewhere near Tottenham Court Road, and at once ascended three flights of stairs — the last flight uncarpeted — to a kind of garret at the top. It contained five or six card-tables with orange-coloured table-cloths and some black and white crockery on them, about twenty chairs, and a group of men and women smoking and talking. Humphrey made a bee-line for an empty table and, as soon as they were seated, began to scan the room with fierce darting looks. But Gerald Marston, the man whom John really ought to meet, had not yet arrived. Humphrey, however, saw somebody whom he knew, signalled to him with his eyebrows, and, catching John by the arm, led him over to be introduced.

This was Dawson, who had made such an unfavourable impression on Janet. He was a short thin young man with dark hair and a rather sharp nose. The moment he had shaken hands with John, he dropped the hand and stood waiting with an expressionless face, as much as to say: Well? John remarked that he had already heard of him, to which Dawson replied: "Really?", in a manner which immediately made John feel that he had made a stupid and unnecessary remark. After a pause, therefore, as Humphrey had left them, and Dawson evidently had no intention of saying anything, he tried again, remarking that he was looking forward to hearing Humphrey's friends talk. Dawson gave a short laugh, which might have meant almost anything: for example, that "talking" was indeed about all that they were good for — or, contrariwise, that innocent little John little knew what strong, unvarnished "talk" he was in for — or, possibly, simply that he was a fool for having uttered two absolutely conventional phrases in as many minutes. After this there was another pause, at the end of which Dawson turned and rejoined the group he had been with when they first came up. John stood alone in the middle of the room, till Humphrey came up, took his arm, and led him off to the table.

"Come on, Squire!" he said.

Soon someone banged tentatively on his card-table, and the hum of many conversations, after merging into a faint ripple of laughter at the formality of this proceeding, was followed by silence.

The title of the paper, or address, was "Mind and the New Social Order", and the speaker, a serious-looking, sprucely dressed man of about thirty, began by expressing a fear that many of his hearers might fail, for some time, to see the connection of what he should say with the 'social order'. The connection, however, he added, is real enough, and that is the whole trouble.

At this point John noticed that the door was being very gently opened from without. A rather rectangular face peeped in with a cautious expression and

proceeded to look all round the room, till it caught sight of Humphrey, who had started signalling with his eyebrows as soon as it appeared. With an answering lift of the eyebrows and a charming smile its owner now tiptoed into the room, closed the door very silently behind him, and, hat in hand, tiptoed across to their table, at which he sat down. Conscious of having created a small disturbance and attracted too much attention, the newcomer, after a friendly smile at John, sat dead still with closed eyes and an air of deep absorption.

As the speaker proceeded, John gradually fell into a state of mind, which was fairly common with him. It was a vague absent mood, in which all that was going on round him floated past as though it were a kind of dream. The odd thing was that, on such occasions, while he seemed to pay no attention at all at the time, he would find afterwards that everything, down to the minutest details, had impressed itself on his memory. One who has suddenly been released from acute pain often drops into this pleasant mood for an hour or two, and it has been said that a convalescent recovering from a serious illness may remain in it for days at a time. There are also, however, people — like John — in whom it is induced by other causes as well. On his last afternoon at Welldon the drowsy midsummer afternoon and the spell of an English cricket-match had brought it on so strongly that he could afterwards remember almost every word of the Warden's speech. This time it was due to a variety of things: for instance, his feeling of having been 'brought' by Humphrey — like a little boy — and therefore not being expected to say anything — Dawson's contemptuous treatment — these things had already begun to make him feel like an onlooker. And now the presence of this stranger, who had established a kind of intimacy without being introduced, and remained sitting so near him in silence, increased the feeling.

Gradually he perceived that there was after all a kind of order in the apparent disorder in which the tables were arranged. One, which was a little larger than the rest, formed the centre point in a sort of rough crescent of tables. At this centre table sat Dawson, listening away with a business-like expression on his face, and on his right — in the centre place of all, and clearly a kind of informal president — a gentleman with a fat foreign-looking face, who wore a stand-up collar, a black coat, and a turban. Every now and then, during the address, John caught Dawson's eye, and each time he did so, he smiled vaguely at him without, however, getting any answering smile. He noticed (though he did not know till some time afterwards that he had done so) that throughout the whole evening Dawson's face wore a stern and austere look, which said with almost aggressive plainness: Just now I'm listening — using all my judgment — in case the man has anything useful in him — no time for foolery — Babes!

The speaker began by suggesting that what really brought them all together on these occasions — people (and here he looked round him with a certain pride) of such diverse interests and such very diverse attitudes to life in general — was a common experience. It was the experience of having looked for something in many different places and failed to find it. What they had all looked for in their different ways, many people not in this room were at that moment also looking for. He only hoped that such people would soon find their way here. He was sure their hostess would not object to fetching more cups! This something could, he thought, be best



described as new thoughts. Now new thoughts were not the same as new ideas. New ideas (which were now manufactured by the Daily Press at the rate of two a minute) generally turn out, when examined by an intelligent being and not by a radio-fed automaton, to be old thoughts arranged in a slightly new way. That was all very well, but the trouble was that, all the time, new things kept happening! Since the Industrial Revolution, and still more since the Great War, we were living in an entirely new world (once again he suggested that a vivid sense of this significant truth was one of the things that bound them together — in so far as they were in any way bound), and we were trying to understand and control this world with old thoughts — any amount of new ideas, oh yes, but always (fundamentally) the same old thoughts. What was the ‘expert’, who was nowadays called in to settle every difficulty, but a human machine for blanketing new phenomena, for simply trying to smother them, under old ideas? But they would not be smothered: they would simply break out somewhere else, or later on, and in a more violent form.

Every intelligent person knew that, if things went on as they were going now, a cataclysm was inevitable. Europe was as full of new problems as it was of new nations, but how many people had the faintest idea of how new, in the deepest sense of the word, how terribly new, these problems were? Where were they to look for new thoughts to fit the new phenomena? To the politicians? (There was a polite laugh). To Science then? Every intelligent person knew (the speaker was rather fond of this phrase) that three hundred years ago the world had suddenly begun to pass from a state of ignorance to a state of exact knowledge. That was indisputable; and for that they had to thank — what? The Scientific Method. The progress had been amazing, but was it still going on? Bernard Shaw had said that Christianity would be all right, if it wasn’t for the Christians: he suggested that Science would be all right, if it wasn’t for the scientists.

By this time Humphrey had begun to fidget and scowl.

“We know all that. Why can’t he come to the hosses?” he whispered to Marston, and immediately afterwards the speaker — just as though he had heard — came to the end of his long exordium and began on the main body of his speech.

Science, he continued, consisted of two parts: Investigation and Understanding. That was what the scientists — and those who today relied on the scientific method — sometimes forgot. Or rather they only remembered the first half — Investigation. But investigation without understanding was Analysis without Synthesis; and what was the good of Analysis without Synthesis? It was living on one’s capital. That was what the intellectual world was doing — living on its capital!

It was the search for Understanding, for a new Synthesis, that brought them together. They had looked for it to their elders and betters, and their elders and betters — strangely enough (here the speaker could not resist smirking a little) — had failed them! So they had decided — faute de mieux — to try and develop their own; and he thought he was right in saying that they looked out for, and welcomed with open arms, any assistance of any kind, wherever it could be found. The remainder of his speech consisted of a rather confused series of indications as to the various places where such assistance could be found. It appeared that the most intelligent people were now beginning to realise that the Poets, yes, and even the Mystics — properly understood — were sources, not merely of aesthetic delight, but

of actual knowledge — especially in the all-important realm of psychology. The speaker quoted the Bible, Nietzsche, the Romantic Poets and others, mixing them all up together into a kind of sausage by means of an elaborate series of parenthetical cross-references, such as “as Swedenborg perceived with blinding clarity”, or “Goethe, in fact, knew, with the Author of the Fourth Gospel, that . . .” and so on. After alluding to the Fourth Dimension and the works of a contemporary psycho-analytical novelist called Pocock, the speaker concluded by insisting with real enthusiasm that those who could read the signs of the times could hardly fail to feel a steadily growing sense, among all the most advanced and fearless thinkers — that somewhere or other — more or less accessible — there was a sub-conscious, or super-conscious, source from which really new ideas could and must be drawn. The great artists — yes, and even some of the so-called ‘prophets’ — had no doubt stumbled by accident from time to time on this mysterious realm. It remained for Science — not the Science of the ‘expert’, not the Science of the Journalist and the Man in the Street — but a wise, resurrected science of a few choice and fearless spirits, to locate that source, and to exploit it: to rise from the sub-conscious to the super-conscious, and so — if time allowed — to save the world!

The speaker sat down amid subdued applause and the usual rustling of clothes, clearing of throats, and scraping of chairs. And almost at once a schoolgirl — at least she looked like a schoolgirl — with close-cropped hair and a short green skirt, jumped on to a chair and burst into a torrent of words. It was the first time she had appeared at one of these meetings, and during the last part of the address, she had been bursting with excitement and impatience. Anybody who has ever been obliged to listen in silence to a long, pompous, and quite unnecessary discussion of some problem to which they themselves hold the only key, will know something of what this unfortunate creature had been going through. Now, however, she was thoroughly underway at last, pouring out a kind of manifesto of vague, tremendous phrases:

“It is the same everywhere!” she panted: “The peoples of the world are sick, they look to the right and left for help . . . and find none . . . The old religions wither, yet none arises to take their place . . . Art droops like a cut flower, or flourishes only in hothouses inaccessible to the people . . . Morality decays without the vision that alone can maintain its life . . . We no longer believe in the soul . . . Everywhere people are seeking in the same way . . . It was fate that brought me among you tonight, I am sure it was . . . For there is a new religion — a religion that is also a science and a science that is also a religion . . . James Bouthrop . . . Headquarters, 87, Cranfield Gardens, W.3 . . . Kainopsychism . . . Kainopsychism is the new Synthesis; it embraces all psychology, all art, all spiritual life . . . It is not opposed to Science, it welcomes it. You want new thoughts; Kainopsychism can provide them. You seek broader horizons: Kainopsychism is gazing beyond them already. You lack a strong faith: let Kainopsychism lay its foundations . . . James Bouthrop . . . Headquarters, 87, Cranfield Gardens, W.3.” And she sat down covered with shame. Towards the end of her little speech, as she gradually realised the awful fact that she was on her feet, alone, blurting out all these things to an indulgently smiling audience, she had been through a horribly painful moment — it was the first one in which her own

unquestioning faith in the absolute cosmic importance of Kainopsychism had ever wavered. This girl did not appear at the meetings again.

The dead silence which succeeded her effusion was broken by the person whom John had assumed to be a kind of president. Throughout the whole of the opening address and the young girl's speech this gentleman had been leaning well back in his chair with his hands resting on his lap and his eyes closed. He now opened his eyes and, leaning forward towards the deliverer of the opening address, remarked very slowly:

"But you should not have taken Pocock" (he pronounced it Pokkok) "as one of your exemples. Your idea eez allright, but Pocock eez a charlatan."

"You think so?" replied the speaker, deferential, yet at the same time bristling with subdued independence. But the president was already leaning back once more with half closed eyes. People gradually began to talk to one another in undertones. Marston turned to Humphrey:

"There's no help for it, Clinker", he said solemnly: "We shall have to try Kainopsychism. 'We ain't got no other weapons!' What do you say?" he added, turning to John. John smiled, but said nothing.

"Methinks the lady doth protest too much!" said Marston once more to John "eh?"

"Oh well", said John lamely: "She said what she felt, I suppose."

"Yes, and that's something —" replied Marston — "Isn't it?" And he again looked at John.

"It's a good deal", said John: "certainly."

Humphrey took hold of his brother's hand and shook it: "Well done, Squire!" he said: "Same here! If you think you've found something, tell 'em about it! That's what I say. Any fool can sit round and laugh; but it needs some pluck to get up and make a speech like that!"

Marston joined in: "Yes", he said: "It's a curious thing; but apparently, if you go round with a romantic expression on your face, saying 'I'm looking for something', everyone will love you and listen to you respectfully and give you leading articles to write, and probably you'll end up by being Prime Minister. But if you shout out 'I've found something! Here it is!', they get sort of embarrassed and gradually edge away, till at last you find yourself all alone — 'in the Y.M.C.A., singing just like a lark!' — to rows of empty chairs. Have you noticed that?" he asked John. John nodded vehemently, and looked at Marston with renewed interest. "Is that one of your 'signs of the times', Clinker?" he went on: "Or has it always been like that?"

Humphrey answered quite seriously: "I think it's a sign of the times, Old Man." There was a pause, and then Marston turned to John again:

"I hope your brother warned you what to expect here?" he said with a confidential air.

"No. I hadn't the faintest idea."

"Is it a fearful blow?"

"No!" said John, staring at him with mild surprise: "Why should it be?" This reply seemed to please Marston. He laughed. "Let's all have coffee now!" he said. Another girl had come round with a large coffee-pot, from which she filled the cups

on the table. Everyone began drinking coffee and eating the cakes and biscuits which were handed round.

"Rex looks very Napoleonic tonight, Trinder!" said Marston. Humphrey, who was still for some reason scanning the room with fierce looks, continued to do so, as he replied: "By Gum! He was quite right about Pocock, though!"

"Who's Rex?" asked John.

"Rex Rollo, the man who just ticked off Smith and Pocock in the same breath." replied Marston (Smith was the name of the speaker). "The chap in the turban!"

"Oh, the President!"

"I don't know! Would you call him a president, Clinker?"

"Eh, what's that?" said Humphrey: "I don't know. What's it matter?"

"Is — is he actually asleep?" asked John, who had been looking at Rex again.

Marston laughed out loud: "No!" he cried delightedly: "It's a kind of trance! You see" (he began to speak more rapidly) "he goes off during the speeches and comes to again in the intervals. He's like the man in Leacock — the health-expert — who 'got so that he could open and close his pores at will'". All this was spoken in a low voice — almost a whisper — and punctuated with incipient giggles. The coffee seemed to be operating on Marston like champagne. He grew sillier and sillier — told Humphrey to stop looking round the room like an anxious hen, and drew him into conversation, which was, however, conducted chiefly by himself. He allowed himself the most absurd flights of fancy. He said Rex ought to have a little sliding panel with "IN — OUT" — or better still — "VACANT — ENGAGED" — on it; so that people would know when he had 'gone off' — Dawson could be employed to work this, in a blue commissioner's uniform with brass buttons — there ought to be a rule that everybody who took the floor had to put on Rex's turban and so forth. At the end of it all John heard himself saying with unjustifiable familiarity: "You are an ass!" The remark slipped out unawares; for it was as if the three of them, exchanging these explosive whispers, with their heads bent low over the table, were three schoolboys, got together at the back of the classroom.

"Thanks!" said Marston. But now somebody else was on his feet — evidently a bit of a celebrity, judging by the nods and inviting looks which had been directed towards him before he rose. He had a beard, and immediately started off into an extremely complicated speech, which began by vaguely apologising for everything — the existence of this society, their being met there this evening, and his own words, which were very likely open to misinterpretation by anyone who was not a close student of world-intellectual development. This speaker, who was evidently anxious not to incur the charge of sentimentalism, made great efforts to avoid using such hackneyed terms as 'science' or 'religion'. He said that in their day an 'order of thought' was being tried and found wanting, and the odd thing was that this order of thought had itself been the order of thought, which had tried and found wanting a previous order of thought; and moreover the order of thought which was now beginning to gain fuller recognition appeared in many ways to be extremely like the previous order of thought which had been tried and found wanting by the order of thought which was itself now on its trial. It was extremely like it, yet in fundamental ways it was quite different. The danger was that many people would forget the fundamental difference in the fundamental likeness. He thought the address, to

which they had just listened, gave some reassurance that, in this circle at any rate, that mistake was not being made. He congratulated them. The great thing was to keep one's eyes open and not to be led away by catchwords, and he felt that they, here, were all doing that, or rather not doing that — that is, doing the first and not the second.

He sat down amid subdued applause, and it was only long afterwards that John, whose mind had become a blank during this speech, realised the somewhat trite idea that lay at the back of it. The dreamy, contemplative mood had come on again as soon as the speaker began, and the words had flowed over him in an unbroken stream, upon which it was impossible to exercise his judgment.

"What did he say exactly?" he asked, turning to Marston. But throughout the speech the comic aspect of the bearded celebrity's confusion had gradually been swelling inside Marston, like an egg.

"He said . . ." he began: but the egg's time had come; it had to be laid; and Marston exploded silently into a painful giggle: "He said . . . he said . . . he said . . . oohoo!" (again he could not go on for giggling): "He said . . . he said . . . oohoo! . . . he said . . . he said: 'Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have . . .'" and the remainder of the Duchess's aphorism was lost in breathlessness.

But Humphrey, who had been fidgetting and scowling more than ever during the last speech, now rose suddenly to his feet.

## CHAPTER VI

In front of him on the table lay an open book and two newspapers, with passages marked in pencil. Humphrey said he agreed with what the opening speaker had said about seeking for any kind of assistance wherever it could be found. He thought it might be useful, moreover, if somebody gave a definite, concrete example of the kind of thing one was seeking for assistance against. And this he proposed to do here and now.

"I've brought with me", he went on, "a leading-article from the leading newspaper of the leading nation of the world. It came out a few weeks ago, and with your permission I will read it to you."

He proceeded to do so. It was an article about a minor dispute which had recently been brought before the League of Nations, and in the settlement of which national, racial, religious, and economic factors — together with the 'prestige' of the League itself — were all inextricably involved. The article contained the usual pompous profusion of long abstract words ending in '-ation', '-ism', and '-ology', but perhaps rather more than the usual absence of meaning. The concluding sentences ran something like this:

It is to be hoped, therefore, that the Supreme Council will not overlook the fact that, while there is ample room for idealism and nowhere more so than in the realm of international arbitration, the peculiar combination of circumstances attending the present case calls for a more than wonted

rigidity of attention to political realities. In the meantime we do not despair. There are certain imponderable factors which the pessimists are apt to overlook. Believing, with the warrant not only of history but of science, in the adaptability of the human organism to the most drastically revised circumstances, we cannot but hope that, with sacrifices on all sides, with good will, with a sturdy optimism buttressed by the determination to face unpleasant facts, the League will go forward with renewed strength to fulfil the great tasks that lie before it.

“Ladies and Gentlemen”, said Humphrey with the utmost earnestness, as he finished reading: “I ask you, I ask anyone here, to point to a single piece of information or intelligible advice which that article contains. I ask anyone to point to any single thought even, which it contains!” Here he waved it excitedly in the face of his audience. “I absolutely defy him to do it!” He waited a moment and then, glancing quickly round the room, laid aside the second newspaper and took up the book which lay beneath it. At first he held it unopened in his left hand, while he went on speaking about the article. It was nothing exceptional, he insisted. Not a bit of it! Hundreds of articles like it were churned out every week, as they knew well enough. He sometimes pulled himself up in absolute amazement and asked if the whole world were not suffering from a kind of senile decay of the intellect! They might say that the Press was not really typical of contemporary intellectualism. Very good. He could find hundreds of examples of the same thing elsewhere.

“Here”, he said, tapping it sharply, as he spoke: “is a recent medical book written by a man with a big name — and, what is more to the point, a big practice! Let me read a choice bit!” As he grew more excited, Humphrey spoke faster and more incisively; the words “choice bit” were snapped off between his teeth like a piece of dry toast. He gave the name of the book and the chapter, and then proceeded to read expressively and with dramatic pauses, but without irony:

It is hardly too much to say that the medical world is watching with breathless interest the rival researches of Norton and Leermann into the fascinating problem of the origin of Collapsus Neurotica (“Nervous Breakdown, of course!” explained Humphrey without stopping in his stride). Now early in 1925 Leermann had proved conclusively, or so it appeared, that the ravages of this horrible malady were due to a filter-passing bacillus, which he himself had discovered and named Lermanococcus. Since then the researches of this distinguished German scientist have been exclusively directed towards the discovery of a suitable anti-toxin, and he was already far on the road to success, claiming to be able to save eight out of every ten guinea-pigs infected by himself with the disease, when Norton no less decisively declared, as the result of extensive experiments, conducted over a long period, on rabbits and certain common parasites, that the incidence of Collapsus is due not, as Leermann supposed, to Lermanococcus, but to a filter-passing organism of a different nature, which he himself had succeeded in isolating. Here was a definite dilemma. Fruitful research appeared to be at a standstill. As both organisms are filter-passing, the conflicting claims of the

two genera can only be determined by the most delicate manipulative experiments, and neither discoverer has so far been satisfied of an error. Last year, however, Leermann developed a brilliant theory, which bids fair to reconcile the apparently discrepant phenomena. As a result of careful experiments, in which a series of rabbits were infected by guinea-pigs and, conversely, guinea-pigs by rabbits, he came to the conclusion that, under certain circumstances —

Humphrey paused and, without lowering the book, swept the room from under his bushy, penthouse eyebrows, while he finished the sentence from memory:

—Lermanococcus may actually change into “Norophyllus” (the name of Norton’s micro-organism)!

He paused again, but without smiling, and then went on as before:

This curious metamorphosis (a phenomenon hitherto practically unknown to medical science) he attributes to some unexplained organic difference between the guinea-pig and the rabbit. Though the German doctor’s thesis cannot yet be said to be proved (many more experiments will be necessary before this claim can be made for it), all of us must at least welcome . . .

“Dash it!” he said, breaking off suddenly: “Need I go on?”

Everybody looked at him silently. Something in his manner had prevented them from laughing — even those who understood. They were more interested in what he might be going to say next than in savouring the ridiculous. Humphrey, however, appeared to have very little more to say:

“Well, that’s all!” he finished: “Thank you! That gentleman” (he pointed to the opening speaker) “suggested that intellectualism is dead. I’ve tried to back him up!” And he sat down. Once more there was a discreet murmur of applause, during which Marston turned to Humphrey, to ask him if he had read The Doctor’s Dilemma.

“No!” said Humphrey: “Who’s it by?”

“Bernard Shaw.”

“Is it important?”

“What do you mean? Yes. You ought to read it.” Humphrey got out a little notebook and jotted down: Doctor’s Dilemma B. Shaw.

“But”; said John, who had been thinking over Humphrey’s speech: “Surely that’s just what I was saying to you last Wednesday, and you wouldn’t have it!”

“You said something about giving up thinking.”

“I didn’t!” said John indignantly: “It was you who said I said that!”

“Now! Now!” interrupted Marston: “Brothers! Brothers! He held up a finger. They laughed. “I’m ashamed to say”, he went on hesitatingly: “that I don’t quite see at the moment how the last passage you read bears out your . . .” Humphrey interrupted him excitedly:

“But that’s exactly what I say! People don’t notice it — even intelligent people!” (“Thank you!” murmured Marston)! “We’re absolutely spellbound! It’s only got to be put in a solemn enough way, and we drink in any . . .”

But another speaker had risen to his feet — a tall, business-like young man, who spoke without notes. As he started off, Humphrey leaned over to Marston and finished in a whisper:— “any b - y daydream they like to serve up to us!”

He said they had heard a good deal this evening about ‘mind’, but not much yet about ‘the social order’. Personally, he was rather inclined to distrust the excessive modesty that always spoke of ‘setting its own house in order’ first — it might be simply laziness in disguise! He shared with the opening speaker the disquieting conviction that our rulers were possessed of a mentality entirely out of touch with the realities of the contemporary world. The futile, empty phrases, in terms of which alone politicians and their followers were capable of thinking, insulated them from reality as effectively as Louis XV had been insulated by his mistresses and vices. Of the two kinds of debauchery, he preferred the latter. He thought there was no better example of this than the economic and financial debates in the House. For here was a department in which, not only the unreal thinking itself, but its results, were already apparent.

The speaker then drew a vivid and alarming picture of the economic conditions of the civilised world as a whole. He stressed heavily the fact that the modern world was capable of increasing its production almost immediately to an extent still undreamed of by one in ten thousand people. People had no idea of the lengths to which the invention of labour-saving machinery had now gone. Why had they no idea? Because, under existing circumstances, there was such very small encouragement for the practical application of such inventions. For labour-saving machinery had had to grow up to the stature of an economic reality within this rigid framework of unreal thinking — a thinking which was, by its nature, incapable of grasping new reality! Thus, normal development had been made impossible, and the energy of growth had turned to cancer! That was why the introduction of labour-saving machinery today inevitably resulted, not in leisure, but in unemployment. What was the difference? Unemployment was to leisure very much what the Devil is to God. It was the negative side only. You are no longer compelled to work: a machine does that for you. But neither are you allowed to have the produce of the labour that has thus been ‘saved’! Thus, an automatic telephone exchange was introduced, and hey presto! three or four hundred girls were thrown on the rates — or the streets — without visible means of subsistence! It was “Thank you! Good morning!” and another four hundred paralysed and prevented from either producing or consuming!

In all countries these three self-contradictory phenomena could be found: abundant means of production — unemployed labour — destitute consumers! He cited no less than six commodities — among them cotton, coal, and milk — in which, ‘for economic reasons’ elaborate precautions had been taken to restrict production, in spite of the fact that it meant throwing thousands out of employment: yet they could not go fifty paces from this door without meeting hundreds of poor people who were literally clamouring for more of these very commodities! — more cotton, more coal, more milk!



These were the realities (the speaker grew more indignant) that Bankers and Financiers and University Professors of Economics referred to with awe as ‘the laws of Political Economy’, the ‘Economic Verities’, and so forth!

Here was a world-wide phenomenon; and yet all the politicians and the professional economists could do was to go on twaddling about the necessity of ‘balancing imports by exports’, ‘increasing production’, and so on. Someone might complain — though he naturally hoped no-one here would do so — that he had said nothing yet about money. He had refrained on purpose. He wanted first to put very clearly before their eyes the situation as it was with things — things and people. Money — Finance — was in his view the very point at which this empty, catch-word thinking first entered in and wrapped up men’s minds up in a kind of cotton wool, in such a way that they could no longer see what positively stared them in the face, could no longer hear the noises that roared in their ears. Look at international debts, for instance! Creditor countries would insist on the payment and pass tariff laws for preventing it in the same breath. The one thing they would not do was to turn round and look at their own imbecile behaviour. There were situations brought about by the war-debts that left W. S. Gilbert sitting — and nobody even noticed them!

Here, then, he said was a problem on which they might surely try any new intellectual weapons they believed themselves to have acquired or to be in process of acquiring. There was no need to wait for some hypothetical future, in order to begin tackling it! On the contrary, it was impossible to wait; for unless it were solved somewhere soon, the world was bound to physical destruction. He gave them three propositions: The world was longing to make and could not: result: unemployment, crime, moral degeneracy. The world was longing to buy and could not: result: misery, starvation, physical degeneracy. Yet even under these two awful conditions the civilised world might have struggled on somehow for years. Unfortunately there was a third proposition: The world was longing to sell and could not! That was where they must look for the initial outbreak of disaster. The struggle for export markets was leading straight to War — and what a war the next one would be!

He would end by giving them something to take away with them — a new version, which he had heard, of the epitaph at Thermopylae. Let them apply it to those who fell in the last war — and to those who must fall in the next!

Tell the Professors, you that pass us by,  
They taught Political Economy,  
And here, obedient to its laws, we lie!

“Has that bloke been here before?” Humphrey asked Marston, as he sat down.  
“Not to my knowledge.”

“He seems to have some sense”. said Humphrey: “But Economics are no use to me! Symptoms! Symptoms! All symptoms! Look, there’s Rex going to speak!” Mr. Rollo had moved his chair back from the table and was now rising slowly to his feet with his eyes still half-closed. Standing thus quite still, with one hand resting on the table, he delivered a short speech in slow measured tones and absolutely without emotional appeal.

“You ’ave two theengs”, he began impressively: “You ’ave Judgment on the one side and you ’ave Meaning on the other” (he pronounced it to rime with “bother”). “Now, your judgments will only ’ave meaning, because your individual worts and ideas ’ave meaning. Zat is clear. First, you ’ave the worts and ideas, and then your judgments arrange them — and, then, perhaps rearrange them. Zat is clear. You must theenk of the exemples for yourselves. One wort — Meaning. Many worts — Judgment. Zat is quite clear. Now I shall ask: Where does Judgment come from?” He paused. “It comes from here” (and he pointed to his forehead). “That is very good. That is clear. And then I ask: Where does Meaning come from? Now I shall perhaps frighten you a little. You think the meaning of ‘chair’ comes from this?” (he caught hold of his chair and held it up) “and of ‘cup’ from this?” (he held his cup up). “Zat is not so. If I shall ask: Where does Meaning come from —” He paused. “Meaning comes olways from here!” And Rex pointed straight to the middle of his by no means negligible belly.

Humphrey gripped hold of Marston’s arm: “Blake!” he whispered excitedly: “Head, Heart, and Loins!”

“You may go on making judgments”, continued Rex serenely: “and then further judgments, with your worts and ideas — but that will not give you any new ideas. Never. Oll the time you are making the judgments, the worts and ideas have less and less of meaning. Certain. Zat is because your judgments change your worts and ideas; I shall say, they shave them, they cut them smaller and smaller! But they do not change the thing that your worts and ideas were first made from. Zat is life! And so your judgments are outcut from life. In-su-lated!

“Then you shall ask: But who brought the contents of the worts and ideas out of the life into the worts and ideas? I must say: The inspired man: the Myth: the Releegion: the Paw-et! He brought the worts and ideas out of the life. So! The so-called ‘inspired’ man, the understanding man, (Rollo glanced at the opening speaker) he gave the worts their Meaning. And the investigating man, he makes with these worts and meanings his judgments. Then, if you shall ask: What is Inspiration? What is the Myth? If you shall say: But, Mr. Rollo, where does the Myth come from?” He paused. “I shall say from here! Where does Releegion come from? I shall say, from here! Where does Pawetry come from? Olways I shall say, It comes from here!” And with each revelation Rex pointed calmly, but without undue solemnity, to the same spot as before.

At this point, John once again caught Dawson’s eye; and this time it really said quite clearly: Oh, you feel like sniggering, do you? Yes! You are just about that type! This secret eye-conversation between himself and Dawson proved to be a most odd and uncomfortable experience. Especially as, on this occasion, he had actually felt no inclination to snigger at all.

“And now”, went on Rex: “I shall say another thing. You ’ave on the one side Fear, and on the other side Will. You ask: Why is Fear? Where does Fear come from? And zen perhaps you think to yourselves: When I am affraid, I feel empty in the stoemack; so fear comes from something in the stoemack. Zat is not so. Never. Fear comes olways from here!” (he pointed again to his forehead). “So. And where does Will come from — the Will of the Self that overcomes the Fear of the Other?” He paused once more — for the last time — “That is from here!” And, once more, he

touched the bottom button of his waistcoat. "Fear and Judgment. Will and Meaning. When you are not afraid, you can make the Meaning. When you are afraid, you lose the Meaning you already have. Zat is something to think about carefully; that is something to theenk about for a long time!"

He sat down. There was a general feeling that the meeting was over. Rollo himself, after a brief conversation with Dawson, carried on in an undertone, got up and went away. But by this time, people were already on their feet, talking, and breaking up into new groups. John was silent. He had been taking in a large number of new impressions and now felt tired — besides being a little depressed. When one has lately been living with especial satisfaction in an obsequious world of one's own thoughts and feelings, it is chilling to be planted suddenly into the midst of an eager, and quite alien, intellectual activity. It appears, then, that other people have quite other questions to answer! And, what is worse, they answer one's own questions in a different way — or even deny that they can be answered at all!

But was it quite alien? Almost instinctively — when any new idea was presented to him — John found himself trying to fix its relation to his great 'discovery', and, following from that, its relation (if any) to his more recent experiences in religious meditation. But this evening, if he had heard any new ideas at all, he was in far too confused a state as yet to know what they were.

Humphrey and Marston had started a desultory conversation over the former's phrase, "Intellectualism is dead!". Marston repeated it musingly to himself, as though he were not quite sure whether it meant a great deal or very little. But Humphrey himself disclaimed any special importance for it; he had simply rapped it out without thinking. Marston suggested that it was really a kind of formula, a name for the very slender link which bound together the otherwise diverse attendants at these meetings.

Dawson, finding himself left alone at the centre table, at last sauntered over to them and entered into a conversation with Humphrey, to which Marston listened attentively, though he refrained from joining in. They discussed Rex's speech. Both were clearly convinced that every word the great man spoke was weighed with such care that those who knew how to look — those who 'had experiences of their own' — could find all sorts of meanings that were hidden from simpler souls. The particular problem which was exercising them now was the precise and whole meaning of the phrase "the Will of the Self that overcomes the Fear of the Other".

"I asked him point blank", said Dawson: "if he intended the phrase to cover sex-antagonism. But he only smiled and said the important thing for me was, what the words meant to me, not what they had meant to him!" Humphrey nodded vehemently. The significant point was, he thought, that Rollo had said "the Other" instead of just "others", as one would have expected.

The room was already nearly empty, when the four of them left it together. Humphrey and Dawson, still discussing the last speech, walked on ahead, and John and Marston followed behind.

"What I should like now", said the latter confidentially: "would be to see a good Charlie Chaplin — but I'm afraid it's too late! . . . Hulloo! What's up?"

The pair in front had stopped. Humphrey was standing over a thickset, surly-looking working man, talking to him in an angry, threatening manner and waving

his right fist in the air. It appeared the latter had jostled him unnecessarily and at the same time growled out some obscene, insulting remark. It looked for a time as though, under this tirade, he might turn nasty — and even as though Humphrey rather hoped he would. But eventually he slouched off, grouching and grumbling. Dawson jumped on his bus, and Humphrey turned to the other two, who had just come up, with a gay smile that showed he had forgotten all about the incident already. Marston noticed, however, that a blue vein, which ran down, on the right hand side, from top to bottom of his high forehead, was standing out in an extraordinary manner. It reminded him of lightning.

“Look here!” said Humphrey to John: “What about making this man come over and see us at West Leigh? I think Janet would approve of him anyway, don’t you?”

“That sounds rather alarming!” said Marston.

“I know what” went on Humphrey: “Come tomorrow evening — can you?” He turned to John: “Margaret’s coming — for the night — isn’t she?” John nodded. Humphrey turned to Marston again and raised enquiring eyebrows. Marston laughed:

“It’s quick work!” he said; and then he added cordially: “Yes, of course. I shall be delighted to meet both ‘Margaret’ and ‘Janet’ — though I haven’t the vaguest idea who either of them are! Thank you very much! It’ll be lovely! How do I get there?” They told him.

On the way home, after he had left them, John asked Humphrey if they had any special object in these meetings. After some hesitation, and dropping his voice to a cautious undertone, Humphrey explained that many of them were convinced that Western civilisation as a whole was doomed to perish very shortly in a general cataclysm. He believed, therefore, that Rollo’s object was to form a sort of nucleus which would pass over from the old to the new. They would be the creative aristocracy of the next civilisation, into which they would carry over all that was worth preserving of the present one. He doubted, however, if Rollo had yet found anything like the material he was looking for. There were far too many women. And nearly all of them lacked “self-knowledge”.

This conversation greatly enhanced John’s feeling of depression. The contrast between Humphrey’s outlook on the future and his own jolly domestic plans disturbed him. For a moment he felt rather as though he were standing in the middle of a cold, dark tunnel, and had just heard the screech of an approaching train. Especially did the phrase “all that is worth preserving” stick in his memory. His mind flew to Margaret’s delicate artistry and light humour. Was she ‘worth preserving’? There was certainly something aristocratic about her: but she could hardly be called ‘creative’. He was oppressed, above all, with a growing conviction that, in Humphrey’s view, even spiritual salvation was reserved — not merely for those with exceptional intellectual ability — but, among these, for the few whose means gave them leisure to develop it. Or rather, what really oppressed him was a secret fear that Humphrey might be right.

## CHAPTER VII

The next morning — a cold and windy one — John had arranged to meet Margaret in town for some shopping. He always felt a little surprised when he met her again after an interval: she seemed to be at once so like and so unlike the Margaret he had been thinking about. This morning he positively caught his breath, as he saw her hurrying along towards their rendezvous, at which he had been the first to arrive. The neat, beloved figure appeared to him like a stately sailing-ship threading its way up river between a jostling crowd of barges. The protruding chin might have been the ship's figure-head; and, as their eyes met, it was as though he had hailed and been taken on board.

From this point on John began to feel as if he were awaking out of a mild nightmare. He had come up to town still under the weight of last night's uneasiness. But now one half of the burden was suddenly lifted from him. As they strolled together to the shop, she questioned him casually about the meeting, and he tried to give some account of it. She did not appear to be at all surprised at anything he said, but was rather approving and sympathetic.

"It's always a relief to find people alive to decadence!" she remarked; and, with the affixing of this neat label, 'decadence', to the state of affairs which was so much troubling Humphrey and his friends, and of which he had just given such a hazy and halting account, the other half of John's obscure burden flopped to the ground. He now only felt rather ridiculous for having been so solemn about it. It was clear — as it ought to have been all along — that his bride's net was flung wide enough to include all such things. In fact, Rex Rollo was a point in her circle, not she in his — as it had half seemed last night.

They entered the shop. As the glass doors clicked behind them, the roar of the traffic died out of their ears like a dream, and they advanced along the thick carpet, feeling as if they were walking on tiptoe.

"What a perfectly glorious red!" Margaret exclaimed, looking at a pile of damask which was lying, half-unwound, on the counter; and they plunged straight into a world of colours and shapes — a perfectly real world, in which thoughts — or at any rate words — had no place. Yet out of that very world arose a variety of questions referring back to all sorts of experiences they had had in common, and forward to the life they were soon to live together. John had a vague final fleeting vision of actual life as a kind of solid sphere, into which he and Margaret were gradually digging their way together, while the manifold thoughts of the previous night ran to and fro across its surface like spiders. After that he ceased to have any serious memories of the affair at all, and became wholly lost in wonder at the perfect unity of taste which existed between himself and Margaret; though, for the most part, he himself created this unity on the spot by the simple process of waiting to see what she would choose and then perceiving how right it was, and agreeing.

Margaret herself was in a very jolly mood. She even used the word 'jolly' a good deal. The *matinée* John suggested going to in the afternoon would be 'jolly', she said, and it would be 'jolly' — when they got back to Westleigh — to meet his new friend. Everything seemed smooth and nice, including the shopwalkers, whose mannerisms she sometimes affectionately remarked on, when they were out of

earshot. She seemed able to do this without at all adopting a patronising air, so that John had the delightful feeling of being with her on a secret eminence, from which the world looked like their private entertainment — yet without any of the unpleasant aftertaste of snobbishness. Margaret was feeling, in a word, successful. She was even so far carried away by her mood as to suggest quite seriously that they should buy a magnificent inlaid walnut-wood grand-piano, which would have eaten up about one half of the entire sum they had hitherto allotted to furnishing. “We can’t possibly do that!” replied John, and the calm way in which he said it — like a professor enunciating a familiar natural law — immediately aroused in her an impulse to demur. After a little reflection, however, she repressed the impulse. She repressed it, because it was of course quite obvious that they couldn’t do it — she would have seen that herself the moment they began seriously discussing it — as she very well knew. Indeed she had never really put it forward as a considered suggestion at all. But yet, if she had done so — and John apparently thought she had — he ought to have been willing to discuss it, instead of simply dismissing it in that positive way!

For a time after this Margaret was rather silent. It was a peculiarity of hers that often, alongside of the ordinary familiar world in which she was living — or rather underneath it — there would come into view for a moment another world altogether — a kind of caricature of the normal one. This other world, of whose existence she was hardly aware herself, consisted of all sorts of fancies and pictures, with their accompanying feelings, which seemed to disappear at the same moment that they flashed dimly into life. And when — as often happened — she was speaking smoothly and easily and with humour upon some unimportant matter, and yet at the same time her eyes continued to rove restlessly to and fro, it was because she was vaguely, uneasily conscious of this other world hovering somewhere at the back of her mind, and was half contemptuously dismissing it, half trying to bring it into clearer focus. Just now, besides the familiar sense of being with John — the English boy — her fiancé, there flickered up far away on the horizon of her consciousness two bewildering, contradictory pictures of him, first as a little crowing baby, and then again as a sort of enormous traction-engine, of whose next movements she was mildly apprehensive. She looked at the back of his head for a few moments with a wondering, almost timid expression in her eyes. He really did twinkle to and fro in the most disconcerting manner! She smiled to herself then, and he, turning at the same moment, caught the smile and answered it with a loving look.

Margaret did not altogether understand him, and she knew she did not. But this did not trouble her much, because she was no longer young and foolish enough to imagine that two people ever wholly understand one another. On the one hand she was fairly convinced that workings went on inside that head, which were sometimes of an important and original nature, but on the other she knew it contained a great deal of childishness and vanity. And in the course of their engagement she had gradually formed a private resolution — a resolution which she could never have put into words and would certainly not have admitted if it had been openly imputed to her. This was that, whatever the results of those workings might be, however original and mighty, she was not going to let them override her

own judgment, unless she could completely understand them. This secret resolution she held fast to, in spite of a frank recognition of the manifold insufficiencies of her own understanding. For it was connected in some way with her self-respect.

During lunch, however, and, later, on their way out to Westleigh, where she was to spend the night, Margaret's mind was busy with problems of quite a different nature from all this; though she never once lost her air of spontaneous gaiety or answered John in a preoccupied manner. She was determined, if it were humanly possible, to make this evening more of a success than the last occasion. Not that she had worried greatly over anything that had happened, or felt as pathetic as Janet had imagined during the night. Only, somehow, things had not gone smoothly. Today it must be different. And she tried to think out what mistakes she had made.

Janet opened the door to them when they arrived, and welcomed her with a kiss. The two went upstairs together, and John heard their voices floating down through the closed door of the bedroom — Margaret's clear and somewhat high-pitched, and Janet's sombre and low. Poor Margaret! She had immediately begun to have the sensation of effort. With any other person this might have been put down to the over-conscious way in which she had been preparing herself. But this was quite natural to Margaret, who instinctively regarded a social occasion of any sort, however intimate the friends she was to meet, as a job of work. She asked herself what was wrong. From the very bottom of her frank soul she admired and liked her future sister-in-law; yet, once more, the moment they met, she was powerless to keep this over-polite, almost supercilious twang out of her voice. It was like a kind of possession.

"Did you have a nice day?" Janet was asking.

"Perfectly delightful!" she replied; and at the same time she caught sight of a whole double row of smiling teeth in the looking-glass. And in the course of this lengthy conversation all the ideas she had developed during the afternoon about 'simple spontaneous expressions of genuinely friendly feeling' had crumbled to bits. It had become once more simply a matter of making efforts — and of concealing them!

Janet, on her side, was even more silent than usual. For some days her melancholy spirit had been brooding incessantly over the rift between herself and Humphrey, and sinking deeper and deeper into a fit of lonely gloom. This gloom was something like an adhesive garment worn next to the skin: as long as she could remain, as it were, at rest within it, as long as she could simply go on brooding, it was at any rate bearable; but any activity which involved emerging from it — and more especially speaking, or taking an interest in somebody else's affairs — caused a horrible tearing pain.

The two women came downstairs and entered the sitting-room. John had not hitherto noticed anything amiss with Janet; but, now that Margaret was there, he immediately began to do so. Indeed, when the three of them were together, he always felt in some degree — how should one put it? — like a showman: only with the added anxiety which a showman might be supposed to feel, if he were equally responsible for the behaviour on both sides of the curtain. They spoke of the doings of the day. Humphrey came in with a "Cheerioh, Margaret, how goes it?", and sat down without looking at Janet. Margaret noticed at once that something was amiss

between brother and sister. Shortly after this Gerald Marston arrived. Margaret noticed, as she shook hands with him, that if you sliced away the bottom of his large square face, the rest would look like a little boy's. When they went in to the cold supper, which Janet had prepared for them, he sat next to her; and she found he had a ready and affable flow of small talk. This greatly relieved her. John was sometimes so awkward and dull, when they were not alone; and she was resolved that they absolutely would not be the ordinary bourgeois engaged couple, carrying a moony silence about with them, like a sort of mattress, wherever they went. As the party was too small to break up into separate conversations, the other three were soon drawn in, and a series of lively discussions arose, which lasted throughout the meal. But after it, when the things had been cleared away and they were again sitting in the other room, there gradually developed once more a tendency towards over-lengthy silences. Humphrey — as the medium through which the newcomer had entered the circle — was really responsible for drawing it together. But he was clumsy at this sort of thing. His attempts to start conversational hares were generally so sudden and obvious that they only left matters worse than before. Moreover his game often had a questionable look about it, so that ordinary people were apt to wonder somewhat apprehensively in what sort of a place it might run to earth, if they took up the chase.

It was Gerald himself who finally came to the rescue. He had never been in the house before, and was only just waking up to its atmosphere. Until they were all back in the sitting-room, he had been like a man lying drowsily in bed in the morning — fully conscious, but only of his immediate surroundings. He had felt perfectly at his ease, and unaffectedly absorbed in the minor matters they had discussed at table. Now, however, an extraordinary incident aroused him with a jerk and shook him out of himself and into those surroundings. After some time, as the conversation began to flag, leaving the lengthy pauses, which Margaret so abhorred, he became aware of a curious thumping noise. It was the kind of noise which you are not quite sure whether you have heard or only felt. He thought at first of some engine in the distance, then that perhaps somebody was doing something odd upstairs. At last, when Margaret had just finished playing something, and everybody was sitting round in silence, the noise seemed particularly loud and strong. Gerald, sitting close to Janet on a small sofa, suddenly realised that it was her heart beating. He stole a surreptitious look at her, but there was no outward sign of anything, save that her face was rather flushed.

"Aren't you going to play anything else?" she asked, quite calmly, and without even stammering.

But this incident was for Marston the turning-point of the evening. Instead of the harmonious domestic circle into which he had been comfortably settling down, the four faces around him began to look like expressionless masks, behind which lay — he could not say what — forces! He looked at Margaret and felt that she was deliberately primming her mouth round the words that streamed forth from it; at John, sitting forward a little uneasily in his chair, his eyes passing from Margaret to Janet and from Janet back again to Margaret; and then at Humphrey, leaning back with his legs crossed and occasionally shooting out two or three unimportant



phrases. As he did so, he had a queer sensation — almost as if he were undergoing the ancient punishment of dismemberment by wild horses.

“Oh”, Margaret was saying: “I really think I have been performing long enough, don’t you know!” And there was yet another pause. Gerald looked at Margaret once more; and, as he met her eyes, he became inspired. He managed to start describing some rather childish parlour-game. The thing itself was absurd, but the point was that it contained a dramatic element, which gave scope for the invention of still greater absurdities. Drawn on by Margaret’s easy laugh, he recounted various examples in a fairly amusing manner.

“Couldn’t we play it here, now?” said John boldly, when he had finished. Gerald looked at Humphrey, and Margaret’s eyes rested for a moment on Janet, who encouraged the suggestion but at first declined to join in herself. After it had begun, however, she was prevailed on. The thing worked like magic. It happened that Janet and Humphrey both developed a certain jerky, marionette-like conception of their ‘parts’, which was especially funny in contrast with the smoother realism of Margaret’s and Gerald’s acting. Margaret was particularly strong in cockney presentations of the “oo—er!” variety, while Gerald eventually developed quite a finished parody of the heavy pedagogue. As for John, he had no talent at all. All he could do, poor fellow, was to turn up his coat-collar and put in a blustering “Look here!” between every other two words he spoke.

Gerald’s departure at the end of the evening was quite a little triumph of comedy. Officially the game was over, and he had gone out into the hall to get his hat and coat, leaving the others talking and laughing in the room. He opened the door again.

“Well, good-night all!” he said.

“Good-night!” said Margaret, looking up at him and chuckling reminiscently. Whereupon he froze her with a steady, withering stare:

“Is your name ‘All’?” he asked sharply. There was no answer. “Oh!” (with a long-drawn, significant sneer) “I gather it is not! Then another time, perhaps you will kindly wait till that important word is actually mentioned. We can manage to wait quite easily!” It was perfect. Humphrey rocked with delight. Marston had caught to a hair the tone in which the more unpleasant type of preparatory-schoolmaster is wont to pulverize his youthful charges for the horrible crime of enthusiasm.

At the front door, he invited John to come and see him next week in his Bloomsbury diggings. Then he set off down the road, highly pleased with himself, warm with the unwonted glow of social success — the result of which was that, after a few hundred yards, his heart turned to water even more completely than usual, shocked by the contrast between the dark, empty street and the lighted room and laughing faces and voices that lingered in his imagination.

In the room itself, the others were just parting for the night, rather reluctantly, still inclined — if it had not been so late — to go on squeezing the lemon of fun. At length Janet, having accompanied Margaret up to her bedroom, stood hesitating at the door:

“Are you sure you’ve g - ot everything?”

“Yes, everything. . . Well, good-night!” And the two looked at each other, and involuntarily, as a kind of acknowledgment of the ludicrous element in the evening, smiled. Janet went out.

Margaret, serenely humming a tune to herself, began to arrange the things she had brought with her, and to glance round the room. John had turned out into Humphrey’s to make way for her, and she was in his. She looked at some of the prints on the wall, then out through the window, then at the bed. For a moment she ceased humming. In her heart of hearts she could not quite believe that she was soon going to be married. And, for a fraction of a second, there again flickered, like summer-lightning, far away on the horizon of fancy, that odd half-humorous, half-apprehensive imagination of John as the large, uncomprehended locomotive, whose next movements could not be foretold. Then she walked over to the bookshelves. Her eye caught the row of theological works, and it struck her, though not unpleasantly, that she had never read any of them and probably never would. She picked out one of the school-books, which — like most books that have been much used — had one or two established pages, where it tended to fall open. Her eye at once caught John’s handwriting — or rather an earlier, rounder, more laboured version of it — in the margin. “All right, old chap!” she read; and she looked for the corresponding passage in the text.

Then, when his host asked him who was the happiest man in the world, expecting to hear himself named, Solon first mentioned a worthy but obscure citizen of Athens, who had fallen gloriously in battle, and then two young Argives who had met their death in the performance of an act of filial piety. Croesus was offended at the moment, but learnt by bitter experience to “call no man happy till he is dead.”

Margaret looked back to the handwriting in the margin: “All right, old chap!” She laughed aloud, as she clapped the book to and put it back in its place. What a nice little boy!

## CHAPTER VIII

On the afternoon of the day on which he had arranged to visit Gerald Marston, John had to attend an informal meeting with three men from Welldon, who were at the same stage of their careers as himself. As they all lived near London, they had arranged to assemble once a fortnight for the purpose of spiritually deepening themselves; but the idea had not been an absolute success. Their temperaments and plans were too different. The eldest was a dark, heavy youth, with quite a pretty taste in port, whose one desire was to settle down in a quiet country living, lay down a cellar, and become as middle-aged as he already looked. John liked him best. He was very dull, but there was not a trace of affectation or unnatural strain in him, and he could be really funny, when drunk. He was eventually to do a great deal of good in his parish, where everyone liked him — as is often the case with honest, lazy folk. Of the other two, one was a dark, rather lean and powerful-looking man, who cracked the bones of every male he shook hands with. He was inclined to wallow in

the sense of responsibility and would take his friends aside into corners, to confer with them solemnly and unnecessarily on the health or moral development of other friends. His special enthusiasm was boys' clubs, and he was booked for the East End. John admired his energy and his incapacity to be discouraged by anything, but he never felt quite at ease in his company. The third was even more solemn. He was the assailant who had disturbed the peace on that last afternoon at Welldon. This man, whose name was Carruthers, read a great deal of the shallower kind of modern theological controversy and had a way of characterising any book or pamphlet that pleased him as a 'challenge' to the opposite point of view, or to the Church — or possibly to the world in general. Even in the books and periodicals themselves these high-falutin 'challenges' that were never taken up by anybody used to annoy John or embarrass him. To hear them falling parrot-like from the lips of this humourless booby sometimes made him feel positively guilty. Was he quite honest? he would ask. Was he not deceiving himself in supposing that he could take seriously — as his profession — anything that Carruthers also took seriously?

Altogether John would rather have avoided regular meetings with them at this particular moment in his life. But it was clearly impossible to refuse their definite invitation. Besides he was very wary of a certain destructive arrogance, to which he considered himself far too prone. One was too critical. There was something to learn from everyone, however simple. And lastly — laying aside false modesty — he had after all to consider, not only what he could take from the other three, but what he could give them.

So he had stuck to it. But this afternoon he came away feeling more depressed than ever, and seeming to have dropped back into the uneasy melancholy that had succeeded his conversation with Humphrey after that other meeting — so different in tone! He turned his steps towards Bloomsbury with a distinct lack of enthusiasm, feeling quite in the wrong mood for Marston's flighty temperament and really (when one came to think of it) rather cheap wit. It must also be confessed that he had a secret, dim foreboding. At the bottom of his heart he feared lest somehow, before the evening was out, that same cheap wit might, without malice, and without even knowing it, loose some random shafts — shafts pointed with uncomfortable truth and poisoned with that very same destructive arrogance which he was trying so hard to work out of his own system. He knew how such missiles could hurt. For unfortunately his efforts in this last direction frequently gave him a sense of priggishness and even dishonesty. Even this afternoon he had not been able to suppress an instinctive feeling that, if he had been quite honest, he would simply have called Carruthers a fathead; instead of which he had sternly told himself that he 'loved' him. This was a lie; and the resulting raw place in his conscience was now quivering in anticipation.

Meanwhile the potential marksman, seated in his bed-sitting-room, was disgustedly turning the pages of a monthly periodical, to which he himself was an occasional contributor. He began by skimming through a clever short story with a supernatural twist to it — carefully constructed in such a way that the supernatural twist could, if the reader chose, be untwisted into a recent bio-chemical theory; next, his eye fell on a fifteen-page article concerning two hitherto unpublished letters of Dr. Johnson's, one (three lines long) to his wigmaker, ordering a new wig, and the

other to Boswell, asking him to dine. Turning impatiently from this to the middle of a long review of a new volume of poems, his eye had just caught the phrase:— “— refined pessimism which, however, never obscures a certain wistful sympathy with the manifold sufferings of all living creatures . . .” when his visitor knocked at the door.

Marston threw the magazine on to the bed and jumped up with a sigh of relief at the sight of John’s smooth, serious young face. “It’s very good of you to come!” he said, as they shook hands, and he meant it. After John had looked round the room and admired the view over the chimney-pots, he was ceremoniously conducted to the single armchair, while his host seated himself on the bed. Naturally, the conversation turned first on Humphrey. Gerald described how he had seen him several times at the meetings and had liked his face so much that he had plucked up courage to speak to him. He did not often do that kind of thing, for he loathed rebuffs; but in this case he had taken the risk, and was glad he had. “An enterprising intellect!” he added, and enquired after Humphrey’s experiences in the war. He appeared to be immensely struck by the account which John gave him.

“It sometimes seems almost incredible to me”, he brought out slowly after a time: “that people I am actually meeting and talking to in the ordinary way should really have been through that sort of thing — really!”

“You were too young yourself, I suppose.” said John: “like me.” Marston answered with a vague affirmative — he had been in the army, but had never got out there. John was already beginning to feel agreeably surprised. It appeared to be quite a different Marston from the one he had thought he was beginning to know. The liveliness, the sympathetic air, which had attracted him on the first occasion, were still conspicuous. But — well — it was as though the froth had been blown off! It seemed that Marston’s memory had gone back to the same night:

“Has your brother any idea”, he asked at length: “What they are really after at those meetings?”

“Well”, began John: “He told me that night —”, and here, recollecting his conversation with Humphrey, he instinctively dropped his voice to the same mysterious undertone as he repeated his brother’s words. He even felt a little uncomfortable as he finished; for on second thoughts he was not quite sure if Humphrey had not meant to be confidential. This uneasiness, however, was quickly dispelled by Marston himself, on whom the sinister revelations had an unexpected effect. He burst out laughing.

“How lovely! Did he really tell you Rollo was one of those merchants? Oh well. perhaps he is for that matter . . . Only” (he laughed again) “wherever I go, I seem to hear of people getting ready to found a new civilisation.” The laugh began to turn into a giggle. It seemed for a moment as if the ‘froth’ was coming back. “My dear man, England is absolutely full of them! Let’s see —” (he began ticking them off on his fingers): “There’s the chap who’s getting a medieval handicraft gang ready in Dorsetshire — ready for when the machine-civilisation breaks down; there’s the fellow who’s going to start a new civilisation with a lot of young men in shorts (says we’ve all got to go about in shorts and sleep out); there’s the stunt monasteries; there’s our friend James Bouthrop; there’s the Boy Scouts (I don’t see why we shouldn’t rope them in), the Band of Hope and . . .” He left off. John was laughing —

all the more gaily because he was somewhat relieved to find someone who did not take Humphrey's intense views of the future too seriously. His spirits were rising; and they rose further, when Marston seized the opportunity of this break in the conversation to suggest that they should go out and get something to eat.

They went to a little restaurant in Soho. At the beginning of the meal they discussed a variety of more or less trivial topics, but after a while John picked up the thread by asking Gerald if he knew Dawson at all well. He was anxious to find out his attitude to this curious acquaintance of his brother's. To his further relief, and rather as he had expected, Marston replied promptly that he could not stand such people at any price. They "made him feel an absolute worm" and at the same time filled him with a perverse desire to contradict everything they said.

"Still, he seemed to have a kind of strength about him". John insisted.

"Nonsense, my dear man! It's simply rudeness. I could be 'strong' that way any day of my life. If you never put yourself out for anybody else on any account whatever, of course you look as if you've got a strong will!" John was willing to be persuaded. "In any case, if the next civilisation is to be run by Dawson and Rollo", went on Gerald: "I'm getting out now!" (and he began to tackle a slab of crême caramel).

"Then why do you go on going to these meetings?" asked John suddenly: "You seem to be a pretty regular attendant!" Marston looked at him with a serious, puzzled expression:

"Why?" he repeated. It was a question he evidently found some difficulty in answering. It appeared the people he met there — or most of them — 'had something' which a lot of otherwise excellent people had not got. Or at any rate he felt that they had. It was John's turn to be puzzled.

"But I thought you said that was just rudeness!" he objected.

"N-no —" replied Marston slowly: "I said Dawson was rude." John pressed him to define this 'something' more precisely, and at length, with considerable reluctance and disclaimers of accuracy, he named it 'self-knowledge'. John at once recollected Humphrey's complaint that they lacked this very quality. He was now more bewildered than ever.

"I don't understand all this talk about 'self-knowledge'!" he cried, with an almost testy note in his voice: "What does . . ."

"Spiritual guts!" murmured Marston with a thoughtful smile; and the affectionate quotation of Humphrey's pet phrase somehow snapped John's irritation and drew them closer together.

"Does it mean simply not deceiving yourself — not being a hypocrite?" he asked.

"M - yes."

"Well, it really seems to me like rather a big fuss over rather a small matter!"

"A small matter?"

"I don't mean small in the sense of easy. I mean obvious."

There was a pause. As a matter of fact Gerald had now begun to feel a little dubious. It was clear to him that they could not pursue this line much farther without coming upon intellectual territory where they would be liable to encounter all sorts of moral and even definitely theological monsters. How far did John, as a

prospective parson, share the common parsonical failing of an inability to disentangle the intellectual from the moral and emotional aspects of a question? When you are talking with ordinary people (such as Gerald's rule of thumb), you are at liberty to consider simply the truth; but when you are talking with parsons or relations, you have to think first of their feelings. On the whole, however, everything inclined him to regard John as one of the exceptions; and he determined to act on that assumption — keeping a weather eye open for indications that he might be mistaken.

"Well", he began deliberately: "Take the question of love. I mean love in inverted commas — love between the sexes." John waited. "On the one hand there's the kind of emotion that all the novels and poetry are about. People see everything in each other. They long for chances of displaying some fantastic devotion or self-sacrifice — count the world well lost, and so forth. And on the other hand there's the point of view that a great deal of this — perhaps most of it — is a kind of egotism in disguise."

"Egotism!"

"You know what I mean?"

By this time there was nothing left on the table but the coffee and the remains of a flagon of Chianti. At the table on their right a simple, rather nice-looking young man was gazing earnestly across at his lady pensively munching celery and cheese. Marston's eye kept straying across to this couple, as he talked.

"Ye-es", said John: "I think so. I always think 'love' is a dangerous word" (he was remembering Carruthers). "But surely —" (he hesitated a little) "aren't you assuming rather a low type? Surely the one can turn gradually into the other . . . Plato . . ."

"Yes. That's quite true. The Platonic progress from love of the seen to love of the unseen is a sort of progress in self-knowledge. Gnōthi seauton, in fact! Only" (it was Marston's turn to hesitate) "It's rather dif- I imagine it's rather different as an experience seen from the other end, from what it is as a rosy idea in the future. Besides" (he began to speak more firmly, as his ideas took firmer shape) "I don't simply mean egotistic in the sense of being too physical. It's a good deal subtler than that. It's more a kind of vanity. 'He sees himself in her eyes' and so forth — 'Angling for the first person in the second', as Meredith called it. You needn't take sexual love at all. You can take the love between members of a family. It's the desire not to feel lonely, or small, or unimportant. The one wants to be indispensable to the other!" John pondered for a few moments in silence:

"Now you've put me off the track again!" he said: "I thought you meant something deeper than vanity or hypocrisy" ("I did!" said Gerald to himself). "It simply comes back to where we were at the beginning. If you mean that, it seems to me to be rather obvious; and yet, if you don't mean that, I don't see what you do mean. After all, one needn't take love at all. One can take almost anything — religion, if you like — 'religious emotion', as they call it. It can only be genuine, in so far as it's free from self-interest. But does anyone deny that?"

Gerald began to feel confident that he had judged his man correctly. It was a very good sign that he himself should have taken religion as an example. He looked at him with a certain shy curiosity:

“Go on!” he said.

But for a moment this encouragement rather took the wind out of John’s sails. How should he go on? He sought about in his mind for examples:

“Well, take the father and son in The Way of All Flesh — you know it?” Gerald nodded. “The father thought he was a genuinely good and religious man . . . but he obviously wasn’t; he was simply out for himself. The son did not fancy himself to be religious at all . . . he was a better man than the father (I’m afraid I’m not putting this very well). Would you say it was because the son had ‘self-knowledge’?”

The moment he heard John’s quotation, the last lingering doubts as to the possibility of forbidden, or even uncomfortable, topics took wings from Gerald’s mind. At the same time he lost interest in the academic definition of ‘self-knowledge’.

“Yes, in certain respects.” he replied: “Have you read much Butler?”

“I was brought up on him.” said John.

Scales fell from Marston’s eyes. He had hitherto assumed that John and Humphrey were both — like himself — reared in a pietistic environment: “If it isn’t a rude question”, he enquired slowly, looking down at the knife-rest he was twiddling in his fingers: “How did you come to decide on taking Holy Orders?” John laughed: “Oh, that’s rather a long story!” he said, pleased, as everybody always is, to be asked about his past life. And in response to a little more pressure from Gerald, he tried to sketch briefly how, especially during his time in the army, he had come to feel very painfully the fact that so many people were simply drifting vaguely on, without the faintest notion of why or whither or whence. This was all right as long as things went fairly well; but in a crisis people badly needed some definite metaphysical anchor, to keep their decent instincts and kindly feelings (there were plenty of these to be found everywhere — that was just the tragedy!) from being swept away. So far John was fairly coherent. He found greater difficulty, however, in expressing his next reason — a kind of hatred, which had grown up in him for everything negative, everything merely critical. It was a kind of attitude to life, which was less prevalent in the Church than anywhere else. He could not think of any good examples at the moment. The point was, however, that destructive criticism and wit really drew their strength solely from the thing criticised. This had to be there first; otherwise they could not exist. Candide was only powerful because Christianity was substantial. Gerald was not quite prepared to admit this, but he had enough insight to perceive that the feeling behind it had been an important factor in John’s decision. Lastly John said something of his love of painting and music and, to some extent, of literature. He dwelt with a kind of relief on the way in which these tastes had always been encouraged at home. Thus, at the University, just after the War, when new life had seemed to be stirring in so many different activities, he had found a niche in an intelligent, open-eyed circle of men, which was trying to ‘bridge the gulf between Art and Religion’.

After asking permission, Gerald put some questions to him about his earlier mental development. He was curious to get a glimpse of memories which must be so fascinatingly remote from his own. Inevitably, John found himself trying to explain his great ‘discovery’. With the few people, on whom he had tried it before, he had always failed miserably, and each time the failure had left him with a distressing

feeling of sadness — emptiness. This time, however, things went better. He managed to work out his idea to a degree of precision at which he could say: “It is as though any sentence — no matter what it is — can, strictly speaking, only be true at the very moment it is uttered. For that instant it immediately starts to be partly a lie!” He heard his own words with approval; for they sounded clear. And at the same time he grew aware of a relation of some sort between what he had said and Rex Rollo’s speech at the meeting. What this relation might be, however, he could not determine. Marston had been listening all the time with the utmost interest. He leaned forward eagerly and, as John finished, exclaimed in a significant tone:

“Oh ho! And you say you don’t know what ‘self-knowledge’ is!”

“And it’s not only time.” went on John, hardly hearing him: “I suddenly realised that the same words, yes, even apparently the same idea, can really be an entirely different thing in the minds of two different people. For instance . . . I’ve heard people — older people — generally people who have been brought up in an atmosphere of more or less hypocritical piety — say the most brutal and cynical things . . . or, no, not necessarily brutal and cynical, but just cold, horribly cold! You know what I mean? Speaking in a way that implies that all the agony and horror of the world are obviously purposeless and in vain, and so forth, and all in an airy manner, as though it didn’t matter twopence! I’ve often thought there must be something wrong with me — thought I was a little coward because I took it so much more seriously than they did. And then, p’raps, I’ve just noticed some little thing — I can’t tell you — a faint gleam in their eyes, or a vigorous robust ring in their voices, a fresh firmness in the step (if we were out for a walk); and it’s dawned on me as a kind of revelation that this idea is — and must always remain — something entirely different to them, because they have fought their way through to it by their own spiritual efforts, made sacrifices, abandoned self-deceptions and so on, in order to reach it. And this spiritual activity lives again in them, to some extent, every time they think it. Whereas for me it’s — well, it’s like a piece of ice on my heart and makes me want to go and drown myself!”

“M-m yes.” said Gerald, frowning at the table-cloth. “I think I know the kind of person you mean. Positively revel in it, don’t they?”

“And that feeling”, continued John, still absorbed in his memories: “made me understand what it is that lies at the back of half the weakness and immorality of the age. It’s simply a kind of surrender, a hopeless surrender — to nothingness!”

Gerald frowned a little harder, and said nothing. “Shall we go?” he asked suddenly, looking up. John nodded. Marston called for the bill, and the two sauntered back to Bloomsbury. It was theatre-time. The streets were empty, and the air full of that rather pleasantly dusty smell which takes London on a warm summer evening. As they were crossing Soho Square, they met a most extraordinary object. A creature like a man, except that it was nine feet high, came stalking to meet them with awkward mechanical movements. It was dressed in a long green cloak that reached to the ground and had telephone receivers on its ears and a curious network of electrical wires and boxes, some real and some painted, all over its body, while above its head was stretched a little wireless aerial. Some enterprising beggar, it appeared, having made himself a pair of stilts, had been amusing the theatre



queues as the 'Man from Mars'. They stood watching him for some time, as he stalked away into the distance.

Back in his diggings, Marston set about getting some more coffee, while John began idly examining his books. Marston drew attention to one of his pictures — a Medici print of one of the primitive Florentines:

"That's where my great discover lies!" he said, taking the conversation back to the point it had reached when they left the supper-table.

"How do you mean?" asked John. Marston explained how, in the narrow, almost Calvinistic intellectual atmosphere in which he had been brought up, he had instinctively grown into the assumption (he could not say he had been actually taught so) that the great medieval sculptors and artists, who had produced crudely realistic 'resurrections' and the like, the primitives who had painted — for instance — the Annunciation, with the dove flying across from angel to maid, even the author of the Divine Comedy, had "really believed" in the physical reality of all that they represented. And then, suddenly, on the analogy of certain attempts of his own to write poetry, it had dawned on him that the only possible artistic way of representing mental experience is as an arrangement of physical objects and events. In other words that all these things were physical symbols, of which the only reality was a spiritual one; the existence of such a spiritual reality being proved by the fact that they had substance, not simply as matter, but as Art. It was no more necessary to assume that the painter conceived of a physical dove than it was to assume that he believed doves are made of Chinese White! Gerald laughed:

"Don't start saying 'Does anyone deny that?', like you did at supper!" he said: "I know it's obvious. That's just the extraordinary part about it! Every metaphor in every poem simply howls it at you. But — all the same — I 'discovered' it!" He went on to explain how this same discovery had suddenly opened his eyes to the whole world of the medieval imagination, the great cathedrals, and the strange mood of devotion. It appeared, for instance, that he had developed an extraordinary, almost personal affection for those medieval poets who desired nothing so much as to be completely trampled underfoot, laying their hearts with a marvellous thrill at the feet of impossibly divine and merciless ladies, who rapidly became indistinguishable from the Virgin Mary. He warmed to this subject in a remarkable way, and John listened entranced while he spoke of the 'Rose' tradition — the great warm, mystical Rose, which is both the lady and the lover's own heart, and yet at the same time is Paradise itself — is the beating Heart of the Universe. He read, or made John read to himself, passages of poetry illustrating his theme; and it was quite late by the time he gradually relapsed into silence.

John's respect for his host had increased enormously during this conversation. At the same time he began, for some reason, to pity him. Why, he could not exactly say; but something in the tone of voice, in which Gerald had spoken all this, seemed to demand it. This man may be needing help! he said to himself. After a moment's thought, therefore, he deliberately spoke of his own approaching marriage. Marston's face at once lighted up, and he plied John with friendly questions about 'the lady', who had decidedly taken his fancy the other evening. He asked John how long they had been engaged, and the latter told him and went on, after a pause, to say:

“You — I take it — are not?” He spoke hesitatingly; moreover, while the sentence was a statement, the intonation was that of a question. So that there was, as it were, a question-mark left over. To what did it apply? Gerald, glancing up from his thoughts, caught an inviting look and at once, with very little difficulty, resisted a temptation.

“No!” he said, in a voice much louder than that in which they had been speaking: “I have not yet joined the great majority!” At this moment, for the first time in the evening, he definitely thought of John as a ‘parson’ — even to the extent of mentally reversing his collar. But the tone of voice in which he had spoken had been enough. The snail’s horn sprang back into itself and disappeared. John jumped back rather nervously to the previous subject:

“I should think you must have plenty to write about!” he said: “Perhaps, some day, I could see something?” But Marston, still reading a different meaning into the suggestion, laughed coldly, and deliberately took a prosaic line:

“It’s not a question of finding things to write about, unfortunately! One has to write about what one is told to — practically what one is told to, in fact.” He explained his present way of living. With occasional very slender assistance from his family up in the north he managed to rub along on what he could earn from reviewing and the writing of occasional freelance articles: “The advantage of the reviews is that they are published quickly, and one can sell the books! The disadvantage is that one has to read them — however bad they are! The advantage of the articles is that one is a little — just a little — freer to say what one likes. The disadvantage is that they may not be published; while, if they are, it will be about six months after acceptance, and payment will be anything from one to twelve months after that.” He was purposely dry and business-like; but as he initiated John into the ways of editors in these matters, he gradually lost his coldness. He was especially bitter against a certain liberal monthly with a literary section (the one he had been reading when John arrived), which obviously prided itself on being particularly up-to-date, scientific and broad-minded. Gerald explained how the things which he wrote for this paper, sometimes even over his signature, were altered by the editor in such a way as to give them the peculiarly negative, self-satisfied tone which characterised everything in it. His own use of the word ‘negative’ suddenly threw light for him on what John had been trying to say at dinner about his reasons for taking Orders. And he saw that John himself had also noticed the echo. He did not forget this, but for the moment went on without pausing:— “Its readers regard it as the absolute embodiment of bold originality combined with cautious, non-committal judgment. It’s only when you come to write for it that you discover how, on every single subject it touches, from politics to metaphysics, it confines you to the same small, rigid, closed circle of third-hand ideas. Its policy is to employ a large number of ‘fresh young writers’ — Heaven knows why: for to get into its pages the merest breath or hint of an idea that originated outside that circle is about as easy as breaking into the Bank of England!” Gerald broke off:

“But you don’t want to hear all this!” he said.

“At any rate”, replied John with a smile: “You don’t want to talk about it. So let’s talk about something else!” And he put a question about the circulation of the guilty periodical (which, as a matter of fact, he himself had hitherto regarded with

considerable deference, in spite of its condescending attitude to theology). From the conversation which followed John learnt for the first time that, not only this journal, but all modern periodical literature, is paid for, not by its subscribers, but by its advertisements. The subscriptions of its readers, explained Marston, furnish a trivial portion of its receipts. If it cannot get enough advertisements, it will die, however many people want to read it — unless, of course, it is supported by private donations; as is actually the case, he added, with “some dailies, all weeklies, and all the monthlies, except the coloured ones with girls on ’em!”

At about half-past-twelve John took his leave. He had to walk the last three miles, but this did not trouble him much on a magnificent starlight night. He trudged along with his hands in his pockets and a whirl in his head. Above all, two of the poems which Gerald had made him read kept running in his head. One of them, at any rate, he had seen before in some poetry book or other; but he had somehow passed it by without, as it were, tapping the fullness of feeling with which the words were saturated. It was a medieval carol, and he remembered the whole of it quite easily:

I sing of a Maiden  
That is makeless;  
King of all Kings  
To her son she ches.

He came al so still  
There his mother was,  
As dew in April  
That falleth on the grass.

He came al so still  
To his mother’s bour,  
As dew in April  
That falleth on the flour.

He came al so still  
There his mother lay,  
As dew in April  
That falleth on the spray.

Mother and maiden  
Was never none but she;  
Well may such a lady  
Goddes mother be.

The other was some ballad of the crucifixion. In this case he could only remember five lines:

He laid His head on His right shoulder,

Seeing death it struck him nigh

“I die Mother dear, I die!”

Oh the rose, the lovely rose

And the fennel that grows so green! . . .

John was amazed at the almost physical sense of relief, of a new, cool springing life in his blood, with which his mind passed from

“I die Mother dear, I die!”

to

Oh the rose, the lovely rose

And the fennel that grows so green! . . .

Meanwhile, alone in his room, Marston’s eye fell once more on the offending object. He had said nothing to John of the secret, innermost reason for his bitterness against this wretched journal; indeed he was only just beginning to realise it himself. His relations with it were rather peculiar; for he himself had been one of the ‘fresh young writers’. Easily dazzled, first by the desire of seeing his own winged words in print and then by the air of superior power and wisdom which it gave one, he had instinctively set himself to ape the knowing, cultured air of the writers in it. It was in fact at this very journal that he had first set his youthful literary cap. And his suit had been graciously accepted. Why? Because, said Gerald to himself, a fresh young writer is a being, whose enthusiasm and emotion run naturally into the channel of borrowed ideas. Trinder was perfectly right! The same idea is two entirely different things in different times and places. By Jove, yes! For to him the third-hand ideas are new. He really seems to have just discovered them for himself. He does not write as though he had just discovered them! Not he! Oh no! He will write you as if it were the merest thing in the world. Yesterday he discovered with a beating heart, let us say, what Pascal said about “le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis”. Today he quotes it (or, more probably, quotes half of it) in an article about something else in such a way that you feel it was the barest accident he happened to select this particular piece from a vast intellectual armoury. But all the same — because he is young, and has just discovered them — he will not be able to help pouring his own life into the third-hand ideas. For it is only possible — realised Gerald now with sudden savagery — to write with life about new ideas. Consequently, old men, who, for some inscrutable purposes of their own, wish to maintain the life of old ideas as long as possible, must ‘suck the blood’ (this was the actual phrase that occurred to him) of fresh young writers!

And in this very process (horrible thought!) they gradually turn the f.y.w. into a creature like themselves!

But the worst horror of all was that this journal now formed the principal source of Gerald's income. Like Mars in Homer's fable, he was awakening to find himself held fast in chains where he had first been drawn by infatuation. For now, when he was beginning to acquire a little real wisdom, and with it a little modesty — in short, when he would gladly have written in quite a different style — he was obliged for the sake of his daily bread to go on writing — no matter what or whom it was about — in the slick, patronizing manner he had once admired. If he did not do so, his sentences were actually altered for him.

As usual, when he had just left congenial company, Gerald went to bed in a fit of heavy and hungry melancholy. He dreamed of a remarkable, angular monster; after a time it seemed the monster was himself; and the monster was looking down at a pair of lovers sitting together on a stile. The monster was in a tender and benevolent mood. Such doings were, alas, no longer for overgrown creatures like itself, but it was pleased with the lovers' pleasure, and glad that these things should be so.

Gerald woke up next morning in an unusually fresh and cheerful frame of mind.

Missing chapters IX-XIV

**END OF PART I**