

WHEN MEN TALK TRUTH
AND OTHER STORIES

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By

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PREFACE

ONE of the stories included in this volume is the worst I have ever written. The critics, if they trouble to read them, which I doubt, for I am a critic myself, will not know which it is. They will say that several are so bad that it is impossible to tell.

But you, not being a critic, will know, just as I know.

I have included it, in spite of its manifest faults, because it helps to cover a vast ground of partly-explored phenomena with which, to-day, the world is gradually getting familiar.

All the stories printed here were originally published in *Britannia and Eve*, one of the most enterprising of our monthly magazines.

"I will write you a short story a month," I said to Jesse Heitner, the editor, "but you must order them. I cannot write on spec."

He took the chance.

They seemed to puzzle the staff. After reading the first, they called it "Studies in Psychology, Number 1." For months they included them, in the index, among the "Articles." Perhaps they thought them too unusual to be fiction, too extraordinary to be anything but fact.

Besides, who was I, a mere journalist, someone

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must have asked, that I should be put among the "authors," people who made things up?

"Is your article ready yet?" they used to ask on the telephone.

I did not protest, for months, that I was a fully-fledged author now. . . .

Anyway, they published them.

No-one uttered a word of praise. No-one wrote in, so far as I heard, and said, "Stop that fellow!"

So I went on.

There was one strange reaction. I heard that the story was going round that, "When he was in Palestine, Swaffer saw Jesus!"

Characteristically—it is a way I have—I started the story, "The Mirage Of God," with my favourite "I," and so some people read it as meaning that the "business man" into whose mouth I put the story was the author himself!

Yet, how much of "The Mirage Of God" is true of my own experience? I would not like to say. In it, I have dramatised a good many of my own feelings during my never-to-be-forgotten pilgrimage to Palestine. It was, I believe, an experience not so uncommon as you might think.

I dictated the stories one by one, on the days

PREFACE

they were due at the printer's, and on going through the proofs of this book I did no more than alter a few words.

The ideas nearly all came, automatically it would seem, just before I began to put them into words, beginning and end and middle, all at once.

Now, how much of it all is based on fact?

I have spent a great part of over ten years, now, on what some people call psychical research. In consequence, I can personally vouch for the reality of much of the phenomena described in the stories.

As regards "Dogs Know," which I put first merely because it is a story told by a dog, and love of dogs is a great part of my life, there would seem to be evidence that animals are what is called "psychic." You may not believe it, but that does not worry me.

As for the rappings described in "A Modern Hamlet," well, have you never heard on your wall raps that no water-pipe or gas or trick of the climate could explain? Edgar Wallace once jeered at mine, heard some of his own, and then publicly recanted. "I will never laugh at spirits again," he said.

"The Old Woman Who Knew" is a record, in narrative form, of a good deal of teaching about the life beyond the grave that has poured through

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mediums all over the world. I do not expect you to credit it.

The essential parts of the story told by a judge in "That Ye Be Not Judged" could be duplicated by many experiences vouched for by my friend Dr. Carl Wickland who, in Los Angeles, treats cases of obsession by psychic means. If you are interested, read his book, *Thirty Years Among the Dead*. I could tell of two cases in my own investigations.

Have you ever tried the planchette? Thousands have done so. Many, to say the least, have been puzzled. In "The Planchette Laughs," I merely carry the known into the realms of the speculative.

The Churches talk glibly of "ministering angels," but do not believe them. John Wesley preached about them as a reality. If "The Everlasting Arms" is nonsense, well, let us make an end of Religion.

"The Trumpet Sounds," imaginary though it is, makes liberal use of an experience of my own—the hearing of a genuine supernormal voice during a séance at which Dennis Bradley and I were sitting, "for fun," with a former medium who we knew had descended to habitual fraud. In this case, no-one was so surprised as the "medium" himself!

PREFACE

When you come to "When Men Talk Truth," try and understand that many parsons know, to-day, much more than they dare to preach. I know it because they have told me.

In "Eternal Triangle," I deal with reincarnation, in which I do not believe. It would seem to be an open question. I do not see the logic of the theory, although it is the faith of many intelligent people of my own acquaintance.

Do you believe in inspiration? I write of it in "The Wrong Sort of Story." Alfred Noyes, the poet, does. So does Cosmo Hamilton, the dramatist. So, to a degree, did Hall Caine. I could quote many others. . . .

"The World's Lover Smiles" is about clairvoyance, a very commonly-possessed form of mediumship. You may have seen it. You may possess the gift yourself.

Then, in "Her Last 'Messiah,'" I dramatise something I know to be true—that the end of this life and the beginning of the next are so much a part of each other that, for a time, some people do not know which one they are living.

Now, after reading all this, you know whether to read the stories or not. If I were you, I would now shut the book up—and throw it away.

You see, if you know anything much that you

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shouldn't, you are wiser than this. If you do not, it is "wicked."

If some parsons had their way, this book would be specially dealt with by the Disaffection Bill, if it becomes law. . . . They will not realise that my evidence is largely on their side—and that millions welcome it in place of their theories, assertions and appeals to "Authority."

HANNEN SWAFFER.

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DOGS KNOW

I AM a dog, and my name is Punch. Sometimes people have asked me what sort of a dog I am. I do not know. Nobody seems to know. I am just a dog.

But there are lots of things I can tell you.

Why are men so silly? Why are there so many things they do not understand?

Now, my Mistress says my Master is dead. But He is not dead. I am always telling her so. But she will not understand. She just cries and looks sad.

It all happened in a very funny way.

When I was a small dog, there were several of us, and so all but one were going to be drowned. But as no one had the courage to put us in the water, they chose one of us because he was fatter than the others and kept him, and then left the others lying about in the street outside. We all crawled away, in different directions. I saw one of my brothers picked up.

I crawled about for a little time and then smelled some food. I followed the smell, and then sat on a mat outside a door.

A woman opened it soon after and said, "Oh, what a poor little dog!" and took me inside. I have been there ever since.

I was not really a poor little dog, but I had managed to look like one. I soon learned that, whenever I wanted anything, I had only to look like a poor little dog. Then I got it. I think it is the people who are poor. But they do not know.

In the evening, my Master came home, and I saw Him for the first time.

I do not know what He is, but He is somebody very important.

“You must be tired, dear,” they said to Him, and brought out some slippers, and sat Him in a chair.

Then I crept from under the chair and looked at Him. He looked at me and said, “Hullo, old fellow.” Then I loved Him always.

Ever since, I have always sat near Him when He has been at home. He talks to me and I talk back.

But, although I can understand what He says, it seems too funny to me that He does not know when I reply.

Men people do not know, but, when dogs love them, they do not have to hear the words they say. They can tell it all by what they think. We cannot tell men that, but we know it. We try to tell them, but they are so silly they will not understand.

Nor do they know why they love us so. The real reason is that, as we go by their thoughts, and not by the sounds that come from their mouths, we understand them much better than anybody else. Often they think one thing and say another. We know what they think. So we know. And, when you know, you love Him.

Master is very important. He used to bring home large papers and read them by the fire and worry. Sometimes Mistress would say, "Shall we get through it?" I used to hear words like "crisis" and "business." Month by month Master used to get greyer and seem more tired when He came home, and He used to sit and worry more.

But, all the time, I would be by His chair or even up on His lap. He would sit thinking for hours, merely saying now and then, "Dear doggie."

When Master was not at home, Mistress used to tell people how worried He was about "affairs," and how brave He was, and how the country depended upon Him.

One day I tried to tell her that He was ill. I knew it. It was not the worry outside, but He was all tired inside. But she took no notice. I was quite clear about it. I barked every word

very clearly. But she merely said, "Do be quiet, Punch."

Master got tired and tired. Then, one terrible day, when I tried to get into His bedroom to wake Him up, as usual, they would not let me in.

Then a tall man came, looking very serious, and went inside. For days the door was shut, except that they opened it quietly every now and then, but always kept me out. Every time I tried to tell them that I wanted to go inside, that I would be very quiet, they got angry, and at last I was shut in the kitchen.

People used to call and ask how Master was. Then Mistress began to cry. All the time, I knew that Master was inside the room and that He wanted me. But they would not let me inside.

Then, one night, nobody went to bed. Sometimes they crept in and out of the bedroom, but all the rest of the time they sat crying.

Then Master stood beside me and said, "Hullo, Punch; I'm better now." His face shone. The grey lines had gone. He did not look tired any more.

I barked with delight. He sat down in a chair and I crept up beside Him. It seemed funny, though. There was more room in the chair than usual.

"Tell them it's all right, Punch," He said.

I ran out to Mistress and barked away with delight.

"Come in, Master wants you," I said.

But someone slapped me and said, "Do be quiet, you naughty dog!"

So I went back and talked to Master.

"Tell them it's all right, Punch," He said.

I kept on barking, but every time I barked, I was slapped.

When I looked round again, Master was not there. I did not see Him go. But suddenly He was not there. I looked all around, went in all the rooms. But He was not there.

Well, all this time Mistress was crying. Then people began to call, and say "How dreadful!"

I wondered what was dreadful.

I was so glad, now that I could see Master again and talk to Him, and not be shut out of the room where He was lying. I kept on barking my joy. But they always slapped me.

"Be quiet, Punch," someone said. "Don't you know your Master is dead?"

I did not know what they meant. I only knew that for days I had been talking to my Master again and that He looked quite well and so happy, and was smiling.

Then a lot of flowers were brought. I smelled them, but then they slapped me again, and said, "Punch, keep away from those wreaths."

I did not know why I had to keep away from such lovely flowers. But everything I did was wrong. When I had barked before, people used to say how happy I was. Now, every time I barked, I was slapped. But I went on barking, telling them I was so happy that Master was well again.

Then they came out of Master's bedroom carrying a big box. Four men carried it, and they took it down the stairs. Then I saw that Mistress was dressed in black and that a lot of people had called, all of them in black. Most of the ladies were crying, and the men looked very sad.

Then I saw Master standing beside me.

"Ask them what all this fuss is about, Punch," He said. "Tell them not to cry."

I barked to tell them, and then I was slapped again and pushed on one side.

"Go on, Punch, tell them I am here," said Master. He was smiling, and He looked—oh, so happy!

"Tell them all the pain has gone, and that I am with them still," He said.

I barked it all, word by word. But I was

slapped for every bark I made. So I ran down the stairs.

Outside there was a large crowd, and carriages, and lots of flowers in coaches.

Master came down with me and said, "Come on, Punch! We will go too."

They all got into carriages, and I walked behind. No one noticed me because they were all crying so. But Master walked by me.

"What are they all crying for, Punch?" He said. "You and I are not crying. Tell them not to be so silly."

But it was no good trying to tell anybody. All along the streets, crowds were gathered. And all the people took off their hats.

"What a lot of fools, Punch," said Master. "Don't they know I am here? Why do they suddenly get sorry now? Lots of them disliked me before. Why do they all take off their hats now?"

We walked miles along the streets, and there were crowds all the way. Master laughed all the time and said, "Good old Punch! You and I know. But what a lot of fools the others are!"

All the people saw me, and all of them seemed to wonder what I was doing, walking behind.

“Look at that dog!” they said.

No one seemed to notice Master. It was a funny day.

Then we came to a place where there were some boys wearing white, and they started to sing. We went in a small building, so small that only a few people could get in. The ones who were crying most seemed to get inside. They carried the box in. And a man in white said a lot of words. And the more he said, the more people cried.

“Tell them to stop it,” said Master. “Tell them to stop crying. Tell them it’s all wrong. Tell them I am here with you.”

I barked to tell them. Then they kicked me outside, and I had to hide among all the people.

Master came with me and shouted, “Don’t kick him, you fools. The dog has got more sense than you have. . . . Come on, Punch, let’s get away from them.”

He started walking home, and I went with Him. Then, when I looked round, He had gone. I got in the house and waited. Some time later the people came home, and they beat me and said, “You dreadful dog!”

So I hid under a chair. It was no good telling anybody anything. The world is a silly place.

When Mistress came home, she sat in a chair

and went on crying for hours. I crept up near her, but every time she pushed me away.

“Go away, you dreadful dog!” she said.
“Don’t you know that Master is dead?”

I barked back, asking her what she meant, and then I was thrown out of the room.

They kept me in the kitchen for days after that, and no one spoke to me. But Master used to come and see me.

The maids went on with their work just as though He were not there. No one took any notice. I could not understand it at all.

“Tell them to tell Mistress I am here, Punch,” He said.

But every time I barked they beat me. That has been going on for days and days. It is dreadful. I used to be such a favourite. Everyone used to say, “What a darling dog!”

Master comes to see me often, and I sit on a chair beside Him for hours at a time, just as I did before. Sometimes He talks to me, just as He used to, in what He thinks is dog talk. But nearly always He keeps on saying, “Go on, Punch, tell them I am here. Tell Mistress not to cry. Tell them I shall always be here. Tell Mistress that whenever she wants me I will come in a minute. Tell her I can help her more now—more than I could before I was ill.”

Very often I walk up to her chair and pull her skirt to tell her that Master is standing beside me. But she does not seem to see Him. Sometimes He strokes her hair. But she does not seem to feel. Sometimes He kisses her. But she does not seem to know. She just cries or looks sad.

I do not understand it.

Master and I are perfectly happy when we are alone. I just talk to Him and He talks to me. All that is just the same as before.

But then, after a long time of that, He says, "Go on, Punch! Tell them."

Then I get slapped again.

I feel I have something so very important to tell Mistress, or Master would not keep on telling me to say it. But no one will listen.

They only say I am a silly dog or else a naughty dog.

How can I be a naughty dog when Master is so happy?

I asked another dog about it one day, when someone brought him to tea. All he said was, "Oh, Men fools do not know anything. You and I know. The best thing to do is to keep it to ourselves. Then they give us cake."

But I do not want cake. I want to tell Mistress, so that she can be happy again, as happy as I am.

What is a dog to do?

A MODERN HAMLET

THERE came a rap on the wall, and then another, and then a third. . . .

I went on reading. Then there came another rap. I took a sudden interest.

The wall was just an ordinary one. There was nothing behind it but a passage, on which nothing hung. There were no pipes inside it and no wires. I knew, because we had built the house ourselves.

In spite of all that, I examined the passage and, in the silly way people try to prove or disprove something, made raps myself on the wall with my knuckles.

Then, forgetting it again, I went on reading. Once again there came a rap.

Some time afterwards I went to bed, and then, in the night, woke up and started thinking of the raps.

I had read about raps in some book downstairs, so, because I could not sleep, I went down and found the volume, and went through it. It was one of those many books, which pour out from the printing presses every year, on Spiritualism, a thing I had always laughed at more or less, although every now and then I had read with great interest something to do with the subject.

Then I found in the book that what is called Spiritualism all began with some rapping on a window-pane in America eighty years before, rapping by means of which a murdered pedlar was said to have proved how he died, and where he was buried in the cellar underneath the house.

Now I must tell you that, except for the servants, I was alone in the house. My father had died a year before and, because he had not altered his will since I was a child, I now found myself dependent upon my mother, who, taking advantage of the new law, had married my father's brother.

I had been brought up to considerable wealth, not trained for any profession, and more or less unfitted to leave ' and start in the distressed circumstances following the War.

I did not like the new conditions. My father had idolised me and would have left me with an income of my own, I know, but for the fact that, in the way men do, he had left his will unaltered.

We all expect that everybody is going to die except ourselves. . . .

Well, then, he was taken ill and died one day rather suddenly. The doctor was more or less puzzled by his collapse, but this he explained by

saying that he had been working too hard for years. My mother and I closed his eyes in death and buried him.

“Don’t worry about the will,” she said. “I shall look after you.”

But then there happened a strange thing, which would surprise any son. Rather quickly, she married my uncle, who now, as a consequence, was the master of the house in which I felt more or less an intruder.

They had gone away on a long honeymoon and so I was alone. Every now and then I would resent the new conditions, and then I would remember that women are women, even if they are mothers, and that my mother had as much right to choose her own life as anybody else.

While they were away, I used to mope about the house, reading a great deal, sitting around, going out occasionally for a lonely walk, dreading rather, although I was tired of my isolation, the time of a return which would impose upon me a new restriction.

I did not welcome the sight of someone else sitting in my father’s chair, occupying his place at table, giving orders to servants who had served our family for years.

I know I ought to have gone out and done something for myself, but I did not.

Then this rapping started.

Well, in the book I saw that, by discovering a code, a whole string of messages had been received from something, or somebody, who would seem to have proved to lots of people that he was a man, that he was a pedlar who had been murdered. Anyway, someone had certainly been buried mysteriously in that house, for the bones were discovered many years afterwards.

What was the code, I wondered? I had heard, but dismissed the idea more or less with scorn, that two for "No" and three for "Yes" were rough-and-ready signals. I had heard, too, that people who put their hands on tables got movements which spelled out words. But what was the code?

Well, anyway, I went to sleep again and, in the morning, the matter was once more dismissed from my mind.

Then, in the evening, there came another rap, and then another. Now and then the raps got louder. In spite of myself I began to talk to them.

"Is there anyone there?" I asked.

Three taps came in quick succession, with a solemn sort of pause in between.

"Do you want to speak to me?" I asked.

Once again there came three taps.

“Do I know you?”

Again three taps insisted.

Now what else was I to do? There seemed some sort of intelligence in the signals. They stopped when I asked no further questions.

They answered only when I asked.

Then, almost by chance it would seem, I blundered across a code.

“Will you rap once for *A*?” I said, “two for *B* and so on, right through the alphabet—twenty-six for *Z*?”

I did not expect anything to happen, except that I thought there might be three for “Yes” again, and this I heard.

“Will you spell out your name?” I asked.

Then a long rapping began. I counted the number of the sounds. There came eighteen before the rappings stopped. I moved my fingers quickly on my knee to count as far as eighteen in the alphabet, and found it was *R*.

“Do you mean *R*?” I asked.

Three taps replied.

Then there came an *I* and a *C*, nine and then three, and it went on until, to my surprise, my own name, Richard Thompson, was spelled out.

“Do you mean me?” I asked.

Then, for the first time, there came two raps, apparently a "No."

Then suddenly I remembered that Richard Thompson was also my father's name.

Instantly there poured into my mind a maze of memories of my father, a host of experiences that we had shared. Mixed with them was incredulity and a mocking sense of cynicism. Here was I, a sane man, sitting in a comfortable expensive chair in a lavishly furnished house, almost on the verge of believing that I was talking to a ghost.

I did not believe in ghosts, nor had I any ideas of a fixed kind about people living on or merely dying off. I had been brought up in a church, of course, but only in the ordinary careless kind of way, and I merely knew that, when people died, they sang hymns and prayed and soon forgot them as a rule.

But then, in spite of myself, I asked, "Do you mean you are my father?"

Then, to my amazement, there came on the wall a long series of taps, with intervals in between which spelled out, according to my code, "Hamlet, I am thy father's ghost."

"What nonsense!" I thought.

If this was indeed my father's spirit—and several people had accepted evidence of this

kind, I knew: scientists of all sorts and hard-bitten, materialistic kinds of men—why should my first attempt to speak to a man I mourned be burlesqued by a phrase which, taken from the greatest of Shakespeare's plays, was sometimes used in conversation as a joke?

I remembered that actors, when drawing their salary, said, "The ghost walks," this because of the fact that, of all the great plays they knew, "Hamlet" was the greatest, and a ghost walked in that.

"Will the ghost walk to-night?" was in Hamlet's mind, and sometimes the poor devils of actors had thought the same thing about their salaries.

Then it dawned on me. Hamlet's mother had married her husband's brother! So had my mother. Hamlet had seen his father's ghost upon the battlement, and held converse with him. And here was I, almost on the verge of believing that I was doing the same thing!

Then the rapping began by itself. This time it spelled out dramatic words:

"Hamlet's father was murdered. So was I."

I nearly leapt from my chair.

"What do you mean?" I said.

There came no answer.

I sat there for an hour or more, and every

few minutes I asked the wall questions. But still no answer came. I went out into the night and, though it was raining, walked for miles. And all the time there conflicted in my mind two stories which met every now and then, and then had to part because of the differences.

Hamlet's father had been murdered by his brother, who had then married the widow and succeeded to the throne.

What did that mean to me?

There poured into my mind all the dislikes of the man who had taken my father's place. I remembered that I had never trusted him. No, "trusted" was not quite the word. But he seemed so different from his brother. He used to call on regular occasions, and I knew he had come for money. I did not consciously dislike him, because I had scarcely exchanged with him more than a few passing words, and then at intervals.

That was until the wedding, when, naturally, I resented his presence by my mother's side, every detail of the ceremony.

That was natural prejudice, of course, I argued. No son likes to see anybody step into his father's place. It was a resentment that I had to conquer, if only for my mother's sake.

And all the time, too, I was wondering—

“ Shall I hear any more? Will the wall be silent now, or will it speak again? ”

Next morning I went and sat in the same chair, staring at the wall. I spoke to it. It was silent. I spoke louder. Still no answer came. I shouted. There was not a sound.

Then I walked out alone, my mind a conflict of angry, frightened, reminiscent feelings.

But then, that evening again, about the same time it had occurred before, the rapping began again.

How tedious it was! I was so impatient. How angry I got when I guessed that *W* had to come and I had to wait for twenty-three taps before the letter was confirmed.

Now and then, in my haste, I would guess the end of the word, wrongly. Sometimes, if I guessed right, it would stop and rap “ Yes ” to shorten it. But when, for instance, I had got “ whe ” and I guessed that an *N* was coming, I said “ Yes, when, ” to shorten the agony of waiting—usually the word was not what I guessed—it went on relentlessly spelling not “ when ” but “ where. ”

That night will always be remembered in my life.

I sat in the chair for what seemed hours, listening to rappings that went on. They filled

me with awe. They forced upon me a feeling of calamity, of doubt, of terror. For the rappings told me that my father had been murdered by his brother!

I had, of course, thought about that for hours, forcing myself, however, to conclude that all that had come because of the Hamlet name that had been spelled.

But, in long insistent narrative, there now came from the wall the rapped-out story of how, one night, when my father was lying very ill, his brother, who was sitting in the room with him, had opened the window, that he had left it open for two hours, letting in icy air, and then closed it.

In the morning, all that was known was that my father's condition was so much more serious that, a few hours afterwards, he died.

Now, mind you, I did not believe this. I could not believe it. Besides, here was my father's brother, comfortably married to his sister-in-law, enjoying the sunshine of her favours, well off, most safely circumstanced.

The doctor's certificate was signed and the body was buried, and if it were exhumed, well, there would be nothing to show. Why, I could not even challenge my uncle. I could not say a word.

What was I to do? There could be no murder trial. There could be no punishment. There could be only the breaking up of a home.

Besides, suppose it were not true.

Yet how could I live in that house again? I should betray myself. Not that I believed it. But I should show doubts, and fears, and hostility, and suspicion and, in a few weeks, aggravate a condition which would force me to leave home.

“I must pull myself together,” I said.

Then I remembered all the calamity that followed Hamlet’s discovery, how, overcome by similar doubts and fears, he had staged a play scene in the hope that his uncle would betray himself.

Yes, that was all very well. But the end of “Hamlet” was wholesale death, poison, a duel, just tragedy.

No good had come because Hamlet’s father had walked the battlement. What good could come of this? Why had the “dead” disturbed me so?

Was I always to be the victim, as Hamlet had been, of doubts and fears? Why, to this day, Shakespearean scholars argued as to whether Hamlet were mad or not! Was I to be thought mad? Were the servants to look on me sus-

piciously, as Polonius and the rest had looked on Hamlet? Were there to be nudges around me behind my back for years?

The rappings stopped before I had asked any questions about that.

Yet I went on talking to the wall myself.

“Why did you start all this?” I said. “Why not leave me alone? It isn’t fair.”

It was the next night that I got instructions. Again at the same hour the rappings restarted.

“Make him listen to my raps!” was spelled out, word by word.

“What do you mean?” I said.

“Set him where you sit, and give him the code.”

Here was a play scene, you see, staged not by living actors, but by a ghost! Two men were to be the spectators, two people only, and the only actor was to be a knocking on the wall!

I cannot remember all that happened in the days that followed. Now and then I looked forward to the return of the newly-married pair with eagerness. Sometimes I was afraid even of myself.

I began to feel, just as Hamlet did, more moody and still more wretched.

I found myself walking about, as he did, soliloquising—yes, reciting quotations from his

speeches. . . . "But for the fear of something after death," "the undiscovered country," odd phrases that I recalled. I began to *feel* like Hamlet. I would stare moodily into the fire for hours.

The rapping had stopped by now. I talked to the wall night after night, but never got a sound.

Well, I had had my orders, I supposed, and that was the end of it.

It was with almost brutish eagerness that I kissed my mother when they did return. I welcomed my new father with a hand-shake, the vigour of which must have surprised him.

Well, anyway, the end of all my anxiety had come. It was better to have a violent outburst about it all than that these fears and doubts should stop in my mind.

While we ate, I talked eagerly of passing things that had happened. My excitement was such that I spoke of trifles as though they had been great events.

My mother seemed glad to see me in what she thought was such a good mood. My stepfather was trying to be friendly, I knew.

Then, when my mother had gone up to bed alone, I knew that the great hour had come.

We were at last together, the two of us, in the

room in which had come the great revelation, or where I had been the victim of what I sometimes still thought was imagination, but which I could not test.

Then, gradually, I got the subject round.

It was dark, for we had not lit the lamps, but were sitting merely by a dying fire.

It took me half an hour, perhaps, to prepare the stage. I excused myself to him for believing it, but said that, while he had been away, there had been strange rappings on the wall. Had he ever heard such things?

I did not, of course, accept them, but they were remarkable. They had spelled out a name and told me things.

“How?” he asked.

And then I told him the code.

“Sit in that chair,” I said, and I set him facing the wall in a low armchair in front of me. I could not see his face. I did not want to see his face. I merely sat behind him.

“Ask if there is anyone there,” I said. “If there is, it may answer with three raps. Then ask who it is. One rap is for the letter *A* and so on, as I told you.”

Then, thrill of thrills, the rapping began. I sat in the dark for half an hour perhaps. It may have been more. It may have been less. But

the same pitiless story that I had heard was rapped out, letter by letter and word by word.

This time, though, it did not say "I was murdered," but "You murdered me." It did not say "He opened the window," but "You opened the window."

Not a sound came from the chair in front of me. I wanted to strike a light and push it in my uncle's face and look, but I did not dare.

The rapping went on, accusing, challenging, pitilessly.

Then it stopped.

I waited. Time passed, but how long I cannot say.

I waited. That was all.

Then, suddenly, I shouted.

"What have you to say?" I asked.

There came no answer.

I struck a match and looked.

My uncle was dead!

I shouted for the servants and we called a doctor in.

"He has died of shock," said the doctor. "I treated him for his heart some months ago."

So we buried him—and his secret.

Or did we only bury, in his grave, my budding insanity?

THE OLD WOMAN WHO KNEW

I HAD no notion of going to sleep. Nor do I remember waking. I was in a sort of haze.

And around me was neither distance nor space, for things that seemed far away were also very close at hand.

Was it opium?

I had never taken any, nor, if I remembered, even held any in my hand.

Was it a dream? For everything seemed real although, at the same time, nothing seemed to have definite shape or substance.

Time did not pass. There was none. It seemed like a mixture of all that had been and all that was to come.

I stayed like this for a space I cannot measure. And I merely wondered.

Then I heard a voice.

"You are dead," said Something from Somewhere. A being, or a force, it seemed like, that was present. And yet there was no one there.

"You are dead." How could I be dead if there was behind me no memory of any dying?

Yet, though there was no distance, there seemed an infinity of space, and, though there seemed no time, it was both like a second and an eternity, both at once.

“You are dead.” How could I be dead, for I seemed alive enough?

Then, somehow, I seemed to remember having known, at some time, that one day soon I was to die. Then, gradually, bit by bit and incident by incident, it all came back.

I had lived, I remembered. I did not seem to have married, nor to have many friends.

It gradually came to me that I had lived a number of years having neither been happy nor unhappy—that I had nothing to regret or to admire myself for.

“You are dead.” Yes, I suppose I was.

And then I recalled how I had been taken ill, and that I had lain on a bed for weeks, and then forgotten everything.

Well, if I was dead, what was this place that I was in? It did not look much like Heaven, and it did not seem to be Hell.

Those were the only places that I had ever heard of as being the places you went to when you died. I do not believe it, though, but that was taught me when I had been young.

I remembered that thousands had believed it, and that thousands had not.

Well, here I was—dead.

Nothing seemed to happen much until, suddenly, there flashed in my mind the memory of a

man I had seemed to know years or eternities before. Then I remembered that, years before me, he had died.

I wished I could see him. And, as suddenly as I wished, he was there before me! I did not seem to travel to him. Nor did he seem to come to me.

I wished—and there he was.

He did not say anything. He did not move. No sound came from his mouth, but, without speaking, he seemed to tell me all there was to tell.

Then I realised that he was thinking to me, and, without using my ears, or hearing a sound, I could understand it all quite well as he thought it. Yes, he told me that I was dead, that I must not be disturbed about it, that there was not very much to worry about, and that I was very lucky in the sense I had found somebody who could tell me where I was.

According to him there were thousands of people who remained dead for years, some for centuries, in fact, without knowing they were dead, because, when they were told that they were, they would not believe it.

“They came over here,” he said, “expecting a final heaven and a final hell, and with fixed minds as to what things are like after death.

When they die they absolutely refuse to believe that they are doing anything else but dream. And so they are quite helpless. They wander through space all alone, the victims of their own prejudice.

“Let me take you round,” he went on. “I wish I had known that you were going to die, for then I should have met you, just as though, in some foreign land, I would have done the same had I gone there first and then you had followed. The great advantage of having friends who passed on first is that they wait to meet you when it is your turn to come. They hover round your death-bed, waiting for your earth life to cease, and then, there they are, on the Other Side, one fleeting second away from you, waiting to stretch out a helping hand, waiting to explain.”

Then followed the most amazing experience of the two lives that now I have led. I was taken through vast spaces to what seemed to be places, although we did not travel. They seemed to come to us rather than that we seemed to go to them.

I saw all at once all the places I had ever seen—thousands of them, tier on tier of them, miles and miles of them, although they all seemed to be in the same place.

I went to what seemed to be all countries without travelling. I seemed to survey all races without moving a yard.

The infinite was understandable. Eternity became a second. The whole universe was in one spot.

And then I was judged.

I had always heard, as a boy, that there was a judgment waiting me. But I was judged in the sense that I had to judge myself, for there passed before me, in a ceaseless panorama, all that I had ever done and said before.

And I saw it all in a new way. I had committed several crimes.

"We all do that," I had argued in my former life.

I had spoken flippantly of the Ten Commandments.

"I have broken them all except one," I used to say. That one was the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder," and even of that I used to remark that I had broken it in the sense that, although I had not killed anybody myself, I had paid other people to fight in wars for me.

And, as they had killed in order to save my life or my pocket, I was just as guilty as though I had bought a gun and shot a man in the street.

But somehow, now, lots of the crimes seemed very unimportant.

And yet, on the other hand, all sorts of things I had recorded as negligible, silly little lies, petty little selfishnesses, failures to do something which

I could have done, assumed a new aspect of importance.

And I realised that, by being unkind one day, I had set into operation a series of incidents to which apparently there was no end.

And I felt utterly sad and wretched, not because of a commandment which I had broken but because of a commandment which I had not helped to make.

I was now the centre of a world which I had not improved. I remembered unpopular truths which I had not sought to champion and I saw them now neglected things, of importance to the future of the world.

Then another voice spoke. It was beside me, and yet miles and miles away. It seemed to echo from the very beginning of time, and yet to speak as finality.

"All that is the beginning, my son," it said. "It cannot be wiped out. But the injury can be repaired. That will be your life here."

Then I was taken, although I did not seem to go, above, and through, a series of universes, the last of which was so bright that it blinded my eyes, far from it though I seemed to be.

I saw worlds where people were ever moving upwards. They were working. They were all active; they had all something very definite to do.

Then I knew that it was coming upon me as a sure and certain knowledge that I should earn my way, step by step, station by station, upwards, into a condition which I suppose was what we called "Paradise."

I saw people from all the nations of the earth, separated no longer by colour or by speech, engaged in moving on. Some offered a hand to help. If someone lagged behind, there was a word of cheer.

But, between them, they all moved upwards.

The ones at the bottom seemed eternities away from the ones at the top.

There were no harps. There were no trumpets. There were no wings. And there was no throne. But, right at the end of it, there seemed to be a goodness so infinite that I trembled, I shuddered, and yet I hoped, with awe, at the very thought of it.

Then around me there started argument.

"How can it be proved?" a voice was saying.

And I saw a man with an intellectual brow, with a cultured face, with an aspect that seemed to express all the education of the earth, uttering a protest.

"How can you prove that I have lived before?" he said. "I demand scientific proof of such an amazing statement. I have no know-

ledge of having lived. I am a scientist, and I demand that all statements shall be proved."

"But I remember," said another voice. "I knew you on the earth." The speaker was another man almost of the same type. "Don't you remember?"

"I remember nothing of the sort," said the first voice. "I demand concrete facts, not assertions."

And there was another man who seemed like a minister of some sort. He too was arguing.

"I was one of the righteous," he said; "and, therefore, when I die I am going to heaven. As I am not in heaven I cannot be dead."

And all around me was wrangling and argument.

Although I had not moved, I had come to a place where discussion seemed to have been going on for an eternity.

People were telling other people that they were dead, but the others would not believe.

Then again the scene changed. I was in a place where people were perfectly satisfied, and yet were never content. I saw a miser counting gold, and yet very angry because there was more than he could count.

I saw an orator addressing a large crowd, and yet cross because they applauded him so much.

I saw an artist so efficient with his brush that he finished too quickly all the things he had to paint.

And I saw men eating horribly, greedily and without ceasing, trying to keep pace with all the food that was being brought in, dish after dish, tray after tray, meal after meal. It was a place where all desire seemed to be killed because there was too much.

Then I came to a place of tears, and this seemed to be the worst place of all. For there were people who sought to tell their friends, whom they had left behind, that there was nothing to worry about.

They were happy, but they were unhappy because they could not tell others how happy they were.

They seemed to be mourning for friends who were still on the earth—mourning in the sense that they knew those on earth were mourning.

They could see their relatives and their friends, very near to them in an earth life, weeping sad tears because they had gone; and they themselves were weeping because, although they were with their friends, whom they had left behind, their friends did not know it or would not be told.

In the middle of all this a small grey-haired

woman was talking. Her face was red, her eyes gleamed, her whole being gave out a sense of joyous exultation.

“I have spoken to my son,” she said. “He saw me. He heard my voice. I told him how happy I was. He understands, he knows.”

And then there arose a sound of argument all around.

“Do not be silly,” said another voice. “How can you communicate with the earth world? You first have to prove that there is one.”

“I do not have to prove anything,” said the little woman, beaming with her joy. “I know. As for you, why should I prove anything to one who will not understand?”

“But science says——” began another voice.

“I do not know what science says,” she replied, “and I do not care. When I was on the earth I learned that those who were said to be dead were not dead. I read how Someone had once told His followers: ‘I shall be with you always until the end of the world,’ and I knew that what was true of Him could be true of everybody. I knew that in God’s mighty purpose there was no such thing as death.

“I knew that prayer and knowledge together can conquer everything. And when they told me I was dying, and I saw the weeping all around

me, I said, 'I will come back and tell you.' And I have been back.

"It does not matter what you say about it. It did not matter on the earth what you said. You denied it then. You have forgotten. You deny it now. People like you would always deny.

"You might just as well deny an earthquake, or a thunderclap, or the setting of the sun, or the rising of the moon. A blind man denies the light because he has never seen it. . . ."

And then I remembered . . .

On the earth I had heard arguments just like that one. But they concerned the future. Now they concerned the past.

All that seemed to happen years ago, except that, as there is no time, there are no years.

I used to live in a world where people said that death was the end. Now those same people say that death was the beginning.

And they argue about it, so that there is no ceasing of talk and wrangling. They want everything proved.

Every now and then I see the old woman.

"I have been talking to my son on the earth," she says. "One day he will join me."

And the learned people mock at her and say that she is mad!

“ THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED ”

You will find this statement of mine, after my death, with my private papers, my will, which, although I am a lawyer, I hope you will find in order, and some letters for friends which, I know, you will see reach their destination.

I ought to have told you all this before. I should have disclosed it to the world. I know all that.

But, as you know, I am a man of reserve who never once in his life has been guilty of an indiscretion, and who throughout his career has been cautious.

But when you find this I shall be dead. Only then have I the courage to ask you to make it public.

You will remember how I was appointed a judge, and how the newspapers announced, only a few weeks afterwards, that, owing to ill-health, I had relinquished my appointment. My tenure of office was one of the shortest that was known.

You yourself, as a friend, must have wondered how, although I had resigned on the ground of indisposition, I went on normally with my life.

I was often asked about it. I always evaded the question, turning it away with a smile.

Well, now at last you will know all about it. I want the rest of the world to know.

I had served my party well in the House of Commons for years and then, when a judgeship fell vacant, it was offered to me in the way that, sometimes, judgeships are given to faithful politicians.

I do not defend the practice. Nor do I condemn it. It seems to work as well as any other way.

Indeed, as you know, one of the worst cases of jobbery in our lifetime resulted in the appointment of a man who, in spite of harsh criticism at the time, proved one of the best judges who ever sat on the bench. On the other hand, men chosen only because of their legal distinction have sometimes turned out failures when they ceased to plead before other judges and became themselves judges on the bench.

My life as a lawyer had been entirely confined to civil practice, Chancery disputes, and matters of that sort. I was also an authority on copyright. Now and then I found myself leading in some very important commercial case where vast sums were involved.

I was making, some years, as much as £20,000, when the Lord Chancellor sent for me and offered me a judgeship. Accepting this would

reduce my income to £5,000 a year. On the other hand, it offered me a position of great dignity, a knighthood, which, however, I could have obtained, because of my “political and public services,” by asking for it, and five hours a day five days a week for part of the year on the bench, listening to evidence and guiding a jury.

Well, as I was tired of the House of Commons and I had saved money, I accepted it.

Then, for a few weeks, after going through dignified formulas, and being congratulated in court, I listened to several civil disputes, decided difficult points of law, summed-up to juries and delivered judgment.

Then it came my turn to go on Assize. Decided by rota, all judges do it, as you know, whatever their previous training may have been. Anyway, criminal cases are usually the easiest.

So, for the first time in my life, I found myself in a small city with a long calendar before me.

Now, on the calendar was a murder case, one to which I paid no particular attention because it so happened that I had read the report of the police court case, a short one of a few lines. It seemed obvious to me that the man was guilty.

It was just one of those cases of wife murder, an argument, it would seem, a blow, just one of those ordinary Saturday-night sort of quarrels

by no means unusual in working-class homes where there is drink or where there is grinding poverty.

I scarcely mentioned it to the Grand Jury. They found a true bill and the case was left on the calendar for trial.

Then, for two or three days, I found it my duty to preside over criminal trials of the usual type: thefts of all kinds, a case of arson, a brutal assault, and so on.

Some of the prisoners were defended. Some pleaded guilty. Justice is supposed to have blinded eyes. I must confess that I peeped over the bandages and looked at the prisoners, and was as merciful as I felt I could be in the circumstances.

Then, when all these were disposed of, there only remained the one charge of murder. The accused was a clerk named Alfred Wilkinson. It was to come before the court next morning.

Then it began to worry me. I knew the formula, for I had read and heard about it all my life, how the judge carries in, as unostentatiously as he can, a black cap, laying it beside him, how the chaplain is seated on the bench, waiting to pass a sort of benediction on the court's decision. . . .

Every judge, unless he has been hardened by constant association with criminal courts, and,

even then, unless he has been a Crown prosecutor for years, must approach with some hesitation the hour when, for the first time, he has to condemn some other human being to death.

I left the court, went to my lodgings, had my bachelor dinner by myself, and then . . .

Now, as you know, my butler Ferguson had been with me for many years. He was almost my only servant. He was, in fact, the only one I knew, for the female part of my establishment were, by my desire, kept well below the stairs when I was about.

My relations with Ferguson were those of good master and a faithful servant. We did not talk much but we understood each other, except that it had always seemed to me he was a little bit peculiar. I cannot exactly explain it, but every now and then I would notice in his eyes, which were very bright and luminous, a far-away sort of look. Now and then I would surprise him in abstractions. Sometimes I had to call him twice.

I never reproved him because it did not matter. I am not a fussy man and he served me well.

During dinner that night the dread business of to-morrow was in my mind. I did not like my job.

I almost regretted that I had given up my life of pleading in the court. I did not want to face that prisoner. I did not feel good enough to condemn someone else, or bad enough, perhaps, would better explain it.

I had never seen the man. I only knew his name and occupation, and, very roughly, the circumstances of his crime. I understood that he had refused to be defended, that he would plead guilty. Judges hear things like that.

I decided it would be all over in a few minutes.

But, somehow, I began to think of the three weeks of waiting that man would have to go through when I had sentenced him. I dramatised in my mind the last dread morning.

I felt I ought to know better, for I am a man of the world.

These things had to be. As members of Society, we all conspire to condemn by deputy, even if none of us is the one deputed to represent the rest.

“When I have got used to it, though,” I wondered, “shall I be a better man because of it, or a worse one?” You face things sometimes.

Then, when I had dined, and was sitting by the fire, an extraordinary thing happened.

Ferguson had waited on me, removed the dinner cloth, cleared away the glasses and the

knives, and taken the cheese back to the pantry, when, for no reason I knew, he came back into the room.

Then, as I was sitting by the fire, he said, “Pardon me, sir,” and pulled up another chair. Then sitting in it he faced me!

“What do you want, Ferguson?” I said.

“I don’t know, sir,” he said, dreamingly. “You must forgive me, but I feel I have to sit here. I have something to tell you. Forgive me if I am offending you, but I feel I must sit here.”

And then there came into his face an expression I had not seen before. His polite manner became harshness. His body quivered, became tense, and then quivered again.

Then he began to speak, and it seemed to me that, although it was his voice that was speaking, it was a different voice, a deeper one.

“You have got to listen to me,” said this voice. “Now realise that it is not Ferguson who is speaking. He does not know what he is saying.”

“What on earth do you mean?” I asked, my composure ruffled, my sense of dignity offended. I was not in the habit of having even a lifelong butler sitting down and talking to me like that.

“It is not Ferguson who is speaking,” went

on the voice. "You must understand that. I want to talk to you about that murder trial to-morrow. You are going to sentence to death a man who is not guilty. And you will sentence him to death knowing he is not guilty, and yet you will be unable to do anything. He will plead guilty. You will sentence him to death. And he will be hanged. And yet he is not guilty. And you will know it. Yet you will do nothing."

I did not know what to say. In fact I did not answer. What was there to say except to order out of the room my faithful butler? Besides, I was fascinated, hypnotised almost, by the unusualness of it all.

"It was *I* who killed that man's wife," went on the voice. "Just as I am now speaking through your butler, who is only the instrument of my speech, so, through the man whom you will try to-morrow, I killed his wife. I did it deliberately. And it will not be the last murder I shall commit. I am going on and on, exacting vengeance."

Then, for half an hour, I listened, without interruption, to the most amazing recital in my life experience.

Ferguson's eyes were closed. He moved convulsively every now and then, sitting in the chair, and all the time a voice which was not his,

which did not sound like his, poured into my ears a story of revenge.

I was told that the person speaking to me was William Matthews, that he had been convicted of murder ten years before, convicted of a murder he did not commit, that all the evidence was against him, and that he could not explain it to the satisfaction of the court, but that, although he was innocent, he had been tried, convicted and hanged.

“ Now I am seeking my revenge against Society,” I heard, “ and I shall go on getting it. They thought, when they hanged me, that that was the end of me. The truth is they hurled me, when I was feeling revengeful against all mankind, into a world where I was freer to do harm than if I had been sent out to walk the streets. Now I *hate* all mankind. It hanged me for something I did not do. Society is cruel and terrible. And I am going to be cruel and terrible.”

Then, listening in spite of myself, I heard from my butler's lips a story of how William Matthews, creeping into what he called the aura of Alfred Wilkinson, when he was suffering from the effects of drink, had forced him to pick up a poker and hit his wife on the head.

“ Now you can do nothing,” went on the voice.

“To-morrow morning the man will plead guilty and you will have to sentence him to death. But when he pleads guilty, it will not be Alfred Wilkinson who is speaking, but William Matthews. I shall get near enough to him to control his brain and make him say ‘Guilty,’ although he does not mean it. And then he will be hanged. And then he will come over to my world, hating Society as I do. And then he will do as I am doing.

“Now, realise that you can do nothing. Nobody would believe you. You will not dare to tell anybody. You are now paid to sentence other people to death. You will do it to-morrow morning for the first time. But you will never do it again.”

My butler’s eyes opened as though he had been asleep. He looked around him.

“What on earth have I been doing, sir?” he said. “I am sorry. I must have gone asleep.”

And, apologising still, he walked out of the room, looking ashamed of himself.

Then there followed the worst night of my life. There faced me, suddenly, all the arguments I had heard against capital punishment.

Only that morning, “literature” had been sent me by some so-called humanitarian. The public

do not know, but such people post it continually to anyone prominent in their minds at the time.

I pored over it. I read all the figures collected to prove that capital punishment and murder statistics seem to bear little relation to each other, except that, as capital punishment had declined more and more as a practice, the proportion of criminals to population had declined also.

I discovered, what I should have known before, that when, a century ago, they ceased to hang people for cattle stealing, the number of cattle-stealers committed for trial immediately declined when cattle stealing ceased to be a capital offence; that it was the same, too, in the case of horse-stealing and forgery, house-breaking and burglary, and that, indeed, whereas, in the last three years in which piracy was a capital offence, fifty-two men had been committed to trial for piracy, in the first three years after it ceased to be a capital offence, only two had been sent to trial.

I read how, not many years ago, children were hanged for quite trivial offences, how, “in 1780, the English law recognised over 200 capital crimes, including stealing 5s., associating for a month with gipsies, or for assuming the title of a Greenwich pensioner.”

I read how, in the reign of Henry VIII, 72,000

executions took place. I read how, a century ago, when Sir Samuel Romilly tried to secure the abolition of drawing and quartering, he was denounced by the Law Officers to the Crown "as breaking down one of the bulwarks of the Constitution." They called it "godly butchering" then.

I even came across a paragraph sent me, and cut from a newspaper, telling how, in 1827, the chairman of the annual dinner of the United Masters of Chimney-Sweepers Association declared, "If climbing boys are to be prohibited, the public will never be safe from fire."

Now, I am a fair-minded man. I had never faced all these facts before. I knew that, in the past, people had been hanged when they were innocent, but I regarded it all as incidental.

Was I to believe what I had been told? My butler would not dare to play a trick on me. And yet . . . how silly it all sounded.

All night long my dreams were haunted.

I woke up feeling ill. I drove to the Court. I went into the judge's room and sat alone for a time. The chaplain came in and joked about the weather.

I do not want to write down all the details of what happened afterwards. Nor do I think I could do so. I do not remember much.

I was in a daze, waiting for only a word or two. . . .

I took the dreaded black cap and hid it in my sleeve. I remember the court standing up when I entered. Then I remember seeing a very ordinary-looking man facing me from the dock.

I can still hear, dimly, the clerk reading out the charge and his saying, “Do you plead guilty or not guilty?”

The man seemed to jump. A slight change came over him, like I had seen the previous night coming over my butler, not so violent a one. But the man did seem to change. Or was it my imagination? Or was it just what I had expected, or dreaded, or believed perhaps could not happen? It is hard to put thoughts down.

I waited. It seemed an hour.

“Guilty,” said the man.

Now you know what happens in such a case. The evidence is briefly explained by the prosecution. Then the judge has no alternative. The jury brings in a formal verdict. Then the judge takes up the black cap.

This is exactly what happened.

I knew what I had to do. And yet “Am I doing something wrong?” I asked myself. “Or is it just my duty?”

A judge, I decided, could do nothing except what I was going to do. Fear may have made up my mind.

Anyway, I picked up the black cap. The words I had to say were written out for me because they were new in my experience.

"Soon," I thought, "I shall get used to them. I shall know them off by heart, as do all the court officials and the reporters, yes, and some of the ghoulish crowd."

"The sentence of this court is," I began, "that you be taken from this place to the place from whence you came . . ."

I stopped. I could not read the rest of it.

They always stare at a judge when, for the first time, he pronounces the death sentence. I knew that all eyes were on me.

Then I began again.

". . . And that you be hanged by the neck until you are dead."

And then I heard a voice beside me. It was the voice of a minister of Christ.

"And may the Lord have mercy on your soul," it said.

I do not remember any more.

They say they picked me up and carried me outside. I was ill for days, you remember. Then, shortly afterwards, on the plea of ill-

health, I resigned and retired to a garden I bought, and began to play golf, and to fish in the neighbouring stream.

You may think I was mad. I do not care what you think.

I want you to print this story for the world to read.

I am sorry I had not the courage to do it when I was alive. But perhaps the circumstances of its finding will do more good than if I had told it all at the time.

If I sinned, I shall be suffering already by the time you begin to read these lines.

THE PLANCHETTE LAUGHS

I FELT a bit of a fool. I wanted to buy a planchette.

It was not quite the sort of thing I liked to be seen asking for.

“You can buy one in a toy shop,” I had been told, “or if you go to one of the big stores . . .”

Now, I am not the sort of man who feels comfortable in a toy shop. Nor do big stores do anything more than confuse me. But, anyway, I went into the biggest store I knew, feeling that the bigger it was the less I should be noticed.

Women, of course, are used to finding their way about these great establishments. When, in the lift, they hear, “Gloves, linen, glass,” they get out without the slightest tremor.

But you cannot very well expect a man of my serious mien to face one of the super-chauffeur girls who run the lifts, especially if the lift is crowded, with the request, “Planchettes, please.” Nor did I care to ask the gigantic porter at the door.

Inside, in spite of the confusion, people seemed to know their way. Only a few men wandered about looking stupid.

The girl at the scent counter seemed the most

THE PLANCHETTE LAUGHS

likely one to ask. She was standing alone, and I thought no one else would hear.

"Pardon me," I said, quietly. "But which is the Planchette Department?"

"Try Enquiry," she said.

I thought she winked, except that I knew they do not do things like that in these hives of industry, where, the busier the bees are, the more conventional they become.

I found "Enquiries." I lined in a short queue. Then, when my turn came, as softly as I could, I said, "Where can I buy a planchette?"

"Toys, Fourth," said the woman.

Now, what on earth was I doing with a toy? Yet I had been told it was a game, that you could ask it questions, and it answered, that they used it sometimes at children's parties. Indeed, one woman had told me you sometimes got the most surprising answers.

"Why, we once got a Derby winner!" she said.

I cannot explain my curiosity except that, in the end, anything interests me if I have the time. And for some days a strange sort of urge had made me more and more curious.

Well, the toy woman seemed to know all about it.

"Super or ordinary," she asked.

When I hesitated, she explained that the cheaper

WHEN MEN TALK TRUTH

were half-a-crown, but if you wanted rubber wheels it was three-and-sixpence.

I risked the extra shilling.

She went away and laid down a nicely-packed parcel about a foot long. I looked embarrassed.

In fact I felt as though I had to carry out an been " . . . " "dy bear, unpacked, for all the world stores . . .

Now, I am ntred about it when in the bus. I comfortable in omeone to say, "What on earth is do anything t was an ordinary parcel.

anyway, I wet to get it away from me lest it feeling that the attention, I put it on the rack and noticed. ot out, left it there forgetfully.

Women, of a parcel behind," shouted some- way about the ndow.

in the lift, they eeling very guilty, almost certain get out without th. was inside the paper tied up

But you cannot serious mien to fi home I went straight upstairs girls who run the, away. I did not want to crowded, with the r, questions. Besides, it was so Nor did I care to a. nd I thought that, if once the door. ay with it, that would be the

Inside, in spite of nt. before I had an opportunity to know their way. My wife was away, nursing about looking stupid.

The girl at the scen

So, when the children had gone to bed, and the house was quiet, I took the parcel from its hiding-place, unpacked it and looked at the strange thing.

It was just a polished piece of plain wood, egg-shaped, with two wheels under one end of it and a pencil stuck through the other, so that it formed a sort of moving table.

Inside the cover of the box I read directions which told me that, while some people regarded the planchette as a game, others used it for what they considered to be spirit communion. I was told that, if the fingers rested lightly on the top, it might be found that the planchette would move and write messages by means of the pencil on the paper underneath.

Now, most of you who read this will not, perhaps, understand why I felt such a fool. Perhaps you are used to doing silly things.

But I, a Bachelor of Science and a most regular-minded sort of man, have often, during my long life, stood at a fair and longed to go on the roundabouts and try the thrills of a giant coaster. I have yearned to throw rings and tickle somebody with a feather.

I have for years wanted to be just one of the crowd for once, and have a lark. But, every time I have tried, I have been self-conscious.

You cannot live, I suppose, in a world where everything is done by rule and then, even for a moment, break out into fun.

We all want things both ways.

Well, it was very late one night, nearly midnight in fact, when, feeling a bigger fool than I have ever felt in my life, I put my fingers lightly on the planchette, as the cardboard box instructed me, just to prove that it was a lot of nonsense.

"Yet, if it's a lot of nonsense," I wondered to myself, "why on earth am I doing it?"

Now, only a person of my persistence would have had the experience that I had that night. I was certainly surprised when, after a few minutes, the planchette began to move. Very slowly it started to move round and round, making more or less regular circles. This went on, to my annoyance, for perhaps ten minutes. Gradually the speed increased, until the revolutions became quite violent.

Now, all I was doing was lightly resting my fingers upon a piece of wood.

Frankly, I could not explain it. I had heard it said that there is perhaps electricity in the human body. But that I doubt. I had known scientists to write of mysterious fluids. But I am sufficiently a cold-blooded scientist to know that much so-called science is a lot of asser-

tions always being disproved by experience and test.

Now, why I went on touching what I regarded as a silly toy I cannot tell. Round and round it went, leaving on the paper a thick circle of lead-pencil markings. Minute after minute passed.

Still it continued to revolve, not because of any effort on my part. If I took one hand away it still went on. Even if I lifted that one it still revolved when the other touched it.

After a long time the paper became so covered with markings that I turned it over. And last, although the pencil still moved, it moved in another direction. And, very slowly, it described the shape of an enormous *H*.

I noticed that the clock in front of me pointed to ten minutes past one. I had been sitting there for over an hour while a toy made pencil markings on paper!

Then, when the *H* was formed, the silly thing moved on so that it began to describe a smallish circle.

Now my difficulty begins.

I have told, in ordinary simple words, what happened up till then. But now I begin to realise that even a long vocabulary is too limited for some experiences, that you can describe only definite things to which you are used. But there

are other experiences to explain which you have to repeat phrases that have been used before you often; the more experienced you are in using words, the less can you describe something outside your usual range.

I have told you how there was in front of me, on the paper, an enormous *H*, and then part of what seemed to be a circle.

Then, immediately, all that was blotted from my mind. A strange eerie Something, not a being but a force, seemed to fill the room. I felt almost hypnotised, as it were by nothing.

I saw nothing. I heard nothing. But there seemed to dominate everything I knew a Power so great, so strong, so all-inclusive, that I sat in a daze of wonder that was fear mixed with an all-compelling reverence.

I forgot that, all the time, my fingers touched a toy. I did not know whether it was still moving or not. I seemed part of a universe greater than one I had ever known.

Now, how can I describe the appearance of the Being who then appeared in front of me? He seemed to have neither shape nor size, so far as I could tell. Yet he seemed so big, I wondered why my room could hold him.

Finite words cannot explain the Infinite. To describe great distance we merely put a lot of

noughts at the end of another figure. If we were to put two more noughts, it would merely mean a hundred times more something that before we could not understand.

What followed is almost like that. For, mind you, I heard nothing. That is the most extraordinary part of it. Yet every unspoken word of an unheard conversation is still fixed in my mind.

I merely sat and stared. I did not see my room around me, nor the table by which I sat. The walls seemed to have given way to space. I and the Eternal seemed to be part of each other.

No, I cannot describe the Being. For although he had Shape, it seemed a Sense rather than a Personality. But then, as I understood it, he spoke to me for years and years. And yet he said nothing.

"I am not here," he told me—not in words. It seemed to be in my brain. That, indeed, he explained.

"I am not talking to you," were words that reached my consciousness. And yet they were not words. It was an understanding. "I am reaching your inner self with mine," he said.

I could not look, so all-powerful, in a way I cannot write down, was his presence.

“It is my thought which is here. I have projected it.”

A thousand questions became confused in my mind. The Being sorted out one and then another. The answers reached me as though by magic.

Now, I can best tell this by saying that, although I had lost all sense of time, the Being seemed to be with me for a period that was boundless.

A new library of understands opened itself as I sat. I was in a universe hitherto unknown. Yet I was in my study. And the knowledge of all these countless volumes crowded into my brain, and the vistas of that vast new universe opened themselves before my eyes. I could see the End of All Things—and the Beginning.

While I sat there, I knew that I was in the presence of the First Stranger who had come from a far distant land. It was a place where there was neither Space nor Time, for both had been fathomed.

I knew that he could go back to the Start and that the Future hid nothing. He poured that knowledge into my mind.

He searched out the question, “What are you doing here?” from a myriad of others, which, all confused, made a baby of my stupidity.

Then I knew that he had come as a warning. Far away, so far that our knowledge of astronomy

had never penetrated one-tenth of the distance, there was a Race, of whom he was one, which had evolved so far that they had reached perfection. They were masters of everything.

Yes, they had abolished Death. And having abolished Death, they had abolished Birth. I will not write down more than an idea of the incredible truth that filled my brain. You will not believe this. Why worry you with more than a few words?

Yet . . .

“You are immortal,” I sensed as coming from his mind. “I too am immortal. But I can live in my body for ever. You, after a short time, have to escape from yours. We discovered that the great enemy of Progress was physical death, that at the age when he knew most and was most experienced, a being’s body wore out and so he had to leave it. We discovered how to replenish the body, and so we accumulated experience—progressive, endless.”

I became conscious of Somewhere, a long-distant place where even Sex had disappeared. If there were no Death, and therefore no fresh beings were needed, I learned, Sex, being useless, would in time vanish.

The Being and his fellows had reached a stage beyond mere gratification.

“ Well, the noblest of our earth have advanced beyond that,” I thought in a flash.

That very understanding, that instant of memory, seemed to attune me more for what I was made to realise.

Dreams of Utopia have been written down in our books. Philosophers by the score have imagined a perfect world. But most of them have left out All-Knowledge. The Being in front of me was one of a Race which seemed to have mastered even that.

I realised, in the answers with which he filled my mind, that, literally and not merely as a scientific theory, the universe was all vibrations, that he and the people from whom he came could tune themselves in, to pick up a record of anything that had happened anywhere, that even the Future had a vibration—and even that too could be tuned in.

For what seemed years, I soaked in such a revelation of perfection, a blend of selfless virtue and selfless, yet self-centred, Mastery, that, while I sat there, I seemed to have conquered everything.

It was at the end that Fear controlled me. He had not come to teach me anything. The Being was there for a purpose more vital than that.

"It is all a universe of Thought," he told and made me know.

He was Thought, and so was I. And so was everybody and everything.

Yet where he belonged, the more developed they became, the more sensitive they grew. That was the new curse.

So, from far away from them, in our world, the place they inhabited had picked up the vibrations of our earth. They had contacted with us.

That was how he had got through to me. He was the first one to penetrate the ether.

They had destroyed Space by mastering it.

But, from where we were, there had invaded their sphere, just as he had invaded mine, our vibrations of anger and cruelty and fear.

Now they were the masters of all the universe they knew, but we had become, without knowing it, a part of that universe.

"I have come to warn you," he said. "You are stopping us. Your tears retard our progress. Your wars disturb. The hunger you allow millions to suffer amid plenty reacts on us. Your inequalities might become ours. Your cruelties are felt now, even where we are. I have been sent to tell you. We could . . ."

And, mind you, not because of words used,

but only in feelings which I sensed, I knew that he could wipe us out.

Yet, with so much Knowledge, there had come, too, a great deal of pity.

There came into my mind a picture of Man destroying, in the jungle, fierce animals because they were cruel, and another picture of Ugliness being swept away by us to give place to a broad thoroughfare and dwellings with light and air.

I shuddered in a great terror, for I knew that, with just one word, if it could be a word, or one motion, if that could explain it, certainly with a great force, what we call the Earth could be made to disappear.

I saw in a second, not only all my own faults, but all the faults of all Mankind, the tyranny and the agony, and the ignorance and the blundering.

I felt as though I were the world's worst sinner, which I was not, facing for judgment a God in whom I had never believed.

All that came over me—and it made me abysmal in my agony of realisation.

Then, as quickly as the Being had appeared to fill my life, there was no one there, and nothing.

I looked down. My fingers were resting on a piece of wood.

I had forgotten it. It moved slowly under my hands.

Then I remembered that it had written a big *H*, and then begun to describe a small circle. I saw that it had still moved while the Being was with me. It seemed a million years since I had seen the planchette.

Yes, it had moved on a little. The small half-formed circle had become an *A*. And then it had drawn a second *H* and another *A*.

“Ha ha!” it had written.

I looked at the clock. It still pointed to ten minutes past one.

I broke the planchette up. I put it on the fire. Why do grandchildren play with toys?

THE MIRAGE OF GOD

I SAW him first in the Chapel of the Ascension, on the Mount of Olives. I was alone. He was going round with a small party.

I noticed that when the guide accompanying him and his small group of tourists pointed to a rock, his face expressed cynicism, even contempt. That was why I noticed him.

“That mark is the footprint of Christ,” said the guide.

One or two of the party sniggered. Some of them looked almost with awe. But he openly sneered.

I thought I did no more than just notice it. His opinion, more or less, was mine. I may have shown it.

I had come from Cairo, where, in one of the big mosques, a Christian guide had pointed out to me a piece of black rock on which a very large footprint could be seen.

“They say that is the footprint of Mahomet,” he said. “Of course we know that it is not. In Jerusalem there is the footprint of Christ. And we know that is genuine. But this is not.”

This Christian guide was almost contemptuous when he saw Moslem women rubbing their children's faces against the Mahomet foot.

I had gone to Jerusalem on business. But being there, I went to see the sights. You do. . . . Besides, you may never be there again.

That night, in the King David Hotel, the man came up to me.

"I saw you smiling to-day when I sneered," he said. "This place is a joke. I've been laughing for two days now."

Then he told me quite a lot about himself. He objected because there was no jazz band in the town. . . . Jerusalem wanted a night club. . . . There was nothing to do after dark. . . . His name was Mitchell. . . . He was on the board of several companies. . . . He wanted a holiday and his mother had suggested Palestine. . . .

"She's a bit religious," he said. "I didn't mind where I went. But I'm getting fed up with this place."

We talked about Jerusalem for an hour. We had seen a good many of the same things, yes, and with the same eyes.

When you stand on the wall of the City of Jerusalem, and they point out three different Gardens of Gethsemane, each revered by a different Church, and when, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, you see three different religions quarrelling as to which has certain rights over

the Tomb of Christ, you are apt to become cynical.

If you go as a member of an orthodox Church, people belonging to your own sect show you around, and you are guided aright in the strict way of Convention. But when you go, as I went, with the eyes of a man of the world, and you hear them all quarrelling, and you see them all selling you something, you get cynical.

Well, Mitchell suggested that I should join him next day. And so, in the morning, we went together out to Bethlehem.

It was hard to realise that, only a few years before, pilgrims had gone along that road on foot, guarded by Turkish soldiers to keep the robbers away, almost funny to remember that there were then few places for them to sleep.

Now, motor-cars dash everywhere and there are motor omnibuses and it was all as safe as walking along the Strand.

I was to see a lot of Mitchell, and to hear a lot. All the way he talked to me of his businesses and the dividends paid that year. He blamed the rates of exchange. He found fault with tariffs. Half the governments of the world were wrong. He did not trade with the countries run by the others.

“Why are you going to Bethlehem to-day?”

I said. I thought he might be more profitably employed trying to sell something. It was a growing country. Indeed, it had had a surplus Budget that year. There was no unemployment.

You might laugh at the Jews. You did. But they seemed to be doing something.

"Surely there is something you can sell them?" I said, laughing.

"The truth is, I am on a holiday," he replied. "And why not Bethlehem? At least we have heard of it."

And he grinned.

Then I want to tell in the words he used what happened some days later.

On our way to Bethlehem we looked down on the Valley of the Shepherds. It was bathed in the golden glow of a wondrous evening.

It looked just as it might have looked on the day when, centuries ago, they told us, some shepherds looked up and saw a star.

I did not believe it. But millions of people did. And it was at least interesting to look down on a valley to which, every Christmas Eve, the eyes of all Christendom turn, and to think of the hymn which I remembered singing at school, "While Shepherds Watched."

Any place associated with history or legend or

romance is of interest. I take them as they come . . .

Then, as we turned a corner of the road, I noticed that he started. I may have started too. I do not know. But we talked of it later.

He seemed silent for a time. Then he soon began talking business again, cursing politicians, finding fault with the obstinacy of working men, blaming trade unions, discussing things, just as, all over the world, business men do most days, in clubs and restaurants, and when they meet on trains.

He laughed again in the Church of the Holy Nativity. In one part of it Catholics were holding a service. In another part there were the Greeks or the Russians.

And downstairs, where the guide told us Christ was born, we laughed when we saw the silver star which marked the place. I had heard how two different churches had quarrelled about that star, how someone had stolen a silver nail and how, for weeks, two great Churches argued as to which had the right to buy a new one—and how, one morning, both went in disgusted to find that, overnight, the Sultan had sent a soldier to knock one in, to stop the quarrelling.

Two nuns were kneeling as we looked on,

counting beads. A Greek priest with a long black beard was going round, bowing, and kneeling every now and then.

We looked curiously and we went upstairs again.

There, outside, shopkeepers chased us. We were almost the only people there that day. And so our party of two was enticed inside by the keepers of all the shops that were open.

They sold Stars of Bethlehem made of mother-of-pearl. They sold inkstands made from stones found in the Dead Sea. They sold pictures of the Virgin.

"Things are very bad this year," said one. "All our prices are reduced. Now is the time to buy."

And then he brought out a book bound in olive-wood.

"You can have this for five shillings," he said. "It cost more than that. It is a red-lettered Testament."

"What's that?" asked Mitchell.

"The words of Christ are all in red," said the man. He was a Jew.

"It'll do to give away when we get home," said Mitchell.

And he bought one.

"I've never read the New Testament," he

said. "It ought to be cheap at five shillings, especially if bought in Bethlehem!"

I was looking up the narrow lane just then. I wondered if he saw me start. And then I noticed that something strange came into his eyes. We did not speak though.

He paid the few shillings that he owed, and we drove back to Jerusalem. Mitchell was quieter on the way back. I noticed, in the next few days, these periods of quietness became more frequent. He seemed to change. We drove, day after day, to various parts of Palestine.

"After all, there is nothing else to do," he said, almost apologising.

So we went out one day to the Jordan, and ate our lunch on the bare tables of an outdoor restaurant.

And afterwards, when we stood on the spot where the Greeks said Christ was baptised, although the Catholics said it was somewhere else, he threw some water over my face.

"I don't know whether you've been christened before," he said; "but I've baptised you, anyway."

He was laughing. But then I noticed that he seemed to start again . . . and for a long time he was quiet.

We drove afterwards to the Dead Sea, across

THE MIRAGE OF GOD

the salty plain in which there are hills with strange shapes, all covered with a salty crust. We stood on the beach facing the mountain from which Moses is said to have looked on the Promised Land.

“This sea is full of phosphates,” he said. “Some lucky guy got the concession. I should have liked it. I’m told they’re coining money.”

Then he went on with a long story of how he had dealt in phosphates once, discussed the value of mineral manure to agriculture, and added, “Well, these Jewish guys at least can teach us something about farming.”

For we had been to one of the settlements where, after sleeping on the bare soil for months, Jewish colonists had built shacks, and then farm-houses, and applied to the soil the latest scientific methods of agriculture, revolutionised the land, in fact.

“Moses spoke about a land flowing with milk and honey,” said Mitchell. “It may be milk and money before these Jews are through.”

That night, after dinner, as we sat in the King David Hotel, Mitchell opened up the subject of Bethlehem again.

“I wonder if you tell the truth,” he said to me, bluntly.

WHEN MEN TALK TRUTH

“I do sometimes, like everybody else,” I replied. “But I’m in business, you know.”

“Well, I want to tell you something I have not dared to say before,” he said. “When we were going into Bethlehem the other day, I swear that I saw going round the corner Someone in a white robe. I only saw His back. But when we caught Him up, He wasn’t there. Did you see that?”

“To tell you the truth,” I said, “I did. And I noticed that you started. And I wondered if you saw me looking as though I wondered about something.”

“Then,” I went on, “I saw it again in Bethlehem, outside that shop. I saw Someone in a white robe walking along. And when I looked again there was nothing to see.”

“Yes, it was when I was joking about that red-lettered Testament,” he said. “And, do you know, I saw It again to-day. It was walking along the road, coming back from Jericho.”

“Yes, I saw a white robe again, just near the cross-roads,” I said. “And then, when I looked again, once more there was nothing to see.”

For a long time he was silent. Then he went on.

“I have been thinking,” he said. “You know, this place grows on you. I started laughing when first I came. And every now and then

I laughed. They seem to believe such silly things. And they all seem to believe different things.

“When we went to the Dome of the Rock, there were Jews outside praying at a wall. I laughed that people should pray at a wall.

“Then, inside, I saw Moslems showing us what they said was a Rock which was one of the foundations of their faith. Yet it was a rock that the Jews also regarded as sacred, and for another reason.

“They thought something different about the same rock, and they quarrelled about it. The Jews said it was the site of King David’s Temple. And the Moslems said it was something else. And yet, somehow, I did not laugh to-day. . . . This place grows on you.”

It was my turn for frankness.

“I don’t know whether it is the scenery,” I said, “or whether it is all these stories they tell you. You don’t believe them. And yet so many of them seem that there is a basis somewhere for what they say.

“Now, I do not believe that Christ ever lived. I have been shown where they say He was born. And I have been shown where they say He was buried. I have been to various places connected with His alleged life. And I have laughed when some particular religion tried to sell me something

in a place where that particular religion had built some particular kind of church. I always paid the few pence because it seemed worth it, and I felt sorry for them. But I laughed when I did it."

Then I went on to qualify this. I said that it was not in the churches that I found anything except a fine stained-glass window, perhaps, or a beautiful bit of mosaic work in the ceiling, or something fascinating about the lights.

"It is outside, in the roads," I said, "that you seem to recapture something. It is something holy . . ."

And I reminded him of the sheep we had seen mixed up with goats, and the olive trees that we had passed, and how, gradually, to me these bits of scenery and the living things that followed part of them, all seemed to tell of a Truth, hard to fasten down, difficult to formulate, yet . . .

"I must get away from here," said Mitchell. "It seems to worry me. I was sure that I believed nothing when I came. Now I do not know what I believe. And I do not like being worried by things like that. I like to know.

"And I have been reading that New Testament. You know, a lot of it seems true now. I do not know what parts are true and what parts are not true. But there are bits of it I

like. They would not go well with my business, though. . . . I want to get away."

It was two days afterwards, down near the Sea of Galilee, that there happened something without which I should not have told this story. For, up till then, I was—well, it was nothing.

We had driven down through Nazareth. We had been to Jacob's Well, where they said Christ met the Woman of Samaria.

Then we had gone on through Cana, and looked down on the valley leading down to the Sea of Galilee.

The guide pointed out Mount Hattin. It was not a mount really, but quite a tiny hill.

"That is where Christ preached the Sermon on the Mount," he said.

I expected a laugh to come from Mitchell. He had nearly always laughed when the guides had pointed somewhere and recalled a Biblical incident. But this time he did not laugh.

"I was reading about that last night," he said. "I had never read it before. I had heard of it, of course. They always spoke of it as some silly thing that was impossible. But last night I read that Christ, seeing the multitudes, went up into a mountain. Then it says, 'And when He was set'—and I wondered what 'set' meant. But then He said to His disciples, 'Blessed are the

poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

"I do not remember the rest of it except that He blessed those who mourned, and the meek, and those that were merciful, and the pure in heart and the peacemakers. Now this is all very difficult. And it sounds so silly. And yet I've been thinking that, after all, it is more sensible than anything I've ever done."

We had stopped the car. We looked out for a long time on a placid Eastern scene. No one passed. We were all alone. And then something happened which I would not tell, except that that night, Mitchell and I, in Tiberius, where we stopped, talked again. . . .

The Valley went. The expanse of gentle scenery was no longer there. It was just like a mirage. . . .

The scene was peopled with beings who seemed to belong to another age. And everywhere I looked, there arose houses, dignified in architecture, and with many trees around them. I seemed to be able to see for hundreds of miles. And all around me there was a golden city.

It shone with a splendid brightness. From somewhere in the sky I heard a Voice. No, it was not a Voice.

It said to me . . . no, it did not say anything.

But the meaning of whole volumes of words became part of my brain.

I was looking out on the world of the Future, looking into centuries yet to be born. I do not know how long we watched.

Then, suddenly, the scene became a valley again, and the small hill was there once more, all alone in the silent peacefulness.

“Do you know . . . ?” said Mitchell that night. “I saw what you saw. And I heard what you heard. Only it did not seem to be sound, but just knowledge.”

“Yes,” I said. “Knowledge. That was it. . . .”

And I knew that what had happened was that someone had built a perfect world, in which the pure in heart were exalted, and the merciful were blessed, and the peacemakers were indeed the children of God, and all those that mourned were comforted. It was the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

“I know what is going to happen,” I said. “Something told me while I looked. One day, when the world has got worse than it is, if ever it could get worse, someone is going to buy one of those red-lettered Testaments we bought and read it for the first time. He will not be a great

man. He will merely be a man who does what he knows is right when he reads it.

“But he will not only read the words as we have read them. He will make them come true. He will not worry his head about where Christ was born. He will know that what He taught was more important than that. He will know there is Truth in everything that is good. And then the Kingdom of Heaven will begin upon this earth.”

“Yes, that is what I seemed to know,” said Mitchell. “God help me to remember it . . . I wish I were that now.”

When next we met it was in the Embassy Club in London. A syncopated band was playing, and people danced.

“Hullo, old man,” he said. “How are you?”

“Very well,” I replied, as one does. “How are things with you?”

“I’ve had a splendid year,” he replied. “I’m back in phosphates now. There’s big money in it.”

We did not mention the Sermon on the Mount.

THE EVERLASTING ARMS

SHE knelt down and faced her problem—a child.

There were many such problems in London—children with unknown fathers, children with missing fathers, children with drunken fathers, children with dead fathers.

Always, at the time, it was a problem for the mother, and for years after, and then, later, a problem for the child.

All around were houses, thousands of them, large mansions, crowded tenements, rows and rows of houses, miles and miles of streets.

And in every street there was a problem like hers.

Children came—thousands and thousands of them. The world had no room for them. No one cared. No one seemed to want to help.

The picture of the child seated in a field of buttercups, with its arms stretched out to the blue heavens, looked just a lie—the adoration of children a myth, a fable.

At least that was what the unwilling mother thought.

It was all very well for those with money to hand them over to nurses. It was easy for those living in nice suburban villas to wash them in the

morning, and send them off to school, and smile when they returned.

But here, in a cot beside her, was a calamity.

“What do mothers do with all these children?” she wondered.

There were workhouses, now politely called “institutions.” There were adoption homes and societies. But oh, how she dreaded the formality of all that, and the questioning!

Motherhood once was sacred, a thing which poets had exalted, and about which the novelists had written down thousands and thousands of words.

Now they wrote statistics instead.

And the Machine Age grew nearer and nearer, an age in which children more and more would become unwelcome.

She thought of the Labour Exchange queues and the streams of workless.

And then she did what thousands of other women have done before in extremity. She prayed. . . .

Clergymen did not want her kind, she had thought, passing a church door. She was only another of those “problems,” alas, now too many for solution even by the men of God!

She had kept the first commandment, “Increase and multiply and replenish the earth.” But the

increasing seemed multiplied too much, and the replenishment had become overstocked.

She felt a criminal. Women would pull their skirts on one side as they passed, if they only knew. A policeman might have something to say.

The landlady, herself a victim of economic necessity, threatened to turn mother and child into the street.

If there were no baby there might, by some lucky chance, be work. But there could not be both.

And so she prayed. . . .

She had heard of "ministering angels" and she had read, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the earth." And there was the phrase "The everlasting arms" that came to her mind.

Were they just beautiful phrases, rhythmic words, all built on a delusion? Or was there something behind it all?

And so she prayed. . . .

Then there came what seemed to be a way out. She would lose her child and leave it to the "everlasting arms." She would entrust it to the "ministering angels."

She had knelt down despairingly. She arose determinedly.

She clutched her child. She went to the door. She walked out into the night.

Outside, a thick fog had fallen. It blotted out all London. Strange shapes went by which none could recognise.

Now and then a light just managed to peer through the all-concealing fog. When she had walked a few yards and turned a corner or two, her whereabouts were hidden even from herself.

Have you ever been out in one of those fogs which, once a year perhaps, envelop London? They seem to blanket even the sound of traffic. You see a railing now and then, or the shape of a door. But otherwise you might be sightless as you blunder on. It all seems like some dark, dank underworld. The tooting of horns and the ringing of bells make raucous the night. But otherwise it is just blackness. . . .

On and on she walked, it seemed for miles. Now she turned to the right, and then, far on, she turned left again. Sense of direction had long ago gone.

Clutching her child, she walked for miles.

Would something touch her then?

She found that there was a friendliness sur-

rounding her. Once, when she nearly fell, it caught her up. It seemed to be guiding, where. . . .

She walked right on. She went by houses that she could not see. She blundered, now and then, through traffic dimly feeling its way. It all moved so slowly. But, apart from the hooting and the bells, London was silent and still.

And all the time, inside her being, there was echoing a prayer. She did not want to see her child again. Nor did she want to know what had become of it.

She merely asked that it should find a home where it would be safe.

And on and on she walked, hoping that the fog would blot out all her knowledge of that night and its persistent pilgrimage. Even the fog seemed an answer to her prayer. It promised oblivion—a new beginning.

Then something seemed to stop her, and a voice whispered. "Here," it said.

She felt her way to a door—and on the step she laid the child. She kissed it once and said "Good-bye" and left it on the step. Then, with tear-stained cheeks, she blundered on again—alone.

Then for another hour she walked. "I have left my past behind," she said. "I can start afresh."

But, determined that her old life should be so far behind that she and it would be for all time separate, she still walked on, to lose in the fog

all knowledge of where, on a doorstep, in the night, her child waited for someone to foster it.

And as she walked, blundering on, she still prayed. "Mother of God," she said, "look after my child. Give it the best home that any child can find. Find for it a perfect mother. Ensure its future. And bathe us both in your love."

And still on into the night she wandered. . . .

Then, after what seemed hours, she asked her way.

She sought her own address, where, with a new courage, a new independence and a new hope, she could face life afresh.

The fog began to lift. As quickly as it had come it disappeared.

London was not a place of mystery then, but the old London with its thousand dramas and its myriad of comedies and its pushful, restless life—its lights and shadows, its gaieties and its gloom.

She saw the corner of her own street, and then the house in which she lodged. With streaming eyes she reached the door.

And there, on the step—miracle of miracles!—was her child.

With an ecstasy of wonder she knelt and gathered it to her breast. The "ministering

angels" had been at work. The "everlasting arms" had sheltered her and her baby.

It was her job, this child, she knew now. It was a problem that she alone could solve. It was not a waif for someone else to nurture, but the flesh of her own flesh and the blood of her own blood, for her to care for and to love. It was a responsibility that she could not shirk.

And as she opened the door, with her burden stirring in her arms, she seemed to hear inside her, "Lo, I am with you always." . . . Then she knew that the "ends of the earth" were something that not even the fog could wipe out, but that love pervaded everything and was the universal law.

It was the same problem that she faced—the problem which had taken her out into the night.

But *she* was different. She knew that she was not alone—that around her, in her trials, were everlasting arms that had neither shape nor substance, but which encircled all human miseries and encompassed all human fears.

She had led herself into temptation—and been delivered from evil.

And the fog that had enveloped London had gone, too, from her mind. She could see a future that patience could endure.

The child smiled in her arms. . . .

THE TRUMPET SOUNDS

JOHN went merely to please Mary. Her chief joy seemed to be in making him go to places in which he felt out of sympathy, carting him to concerts that bored him, and generally in taking pleasure in all the things he hated.

"Let's go to a seance," she said one day. "I have bought two tickets."

He protested. That was too much. He had got used to Scriabin by drawing invisible flaps over his ears. He could endure even the more advanced forms of modern ballet by shutting his eyes. He had learned a few conventional things to say at picture shows. But a seance was a bit too much.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid," she said. "The man's a horrible fraud. It isn't real."

"Then why do you want to go?" he asked.

"I thought it would be such fun," she said. "It only costs a guinea each."

It was no good protesting. Mary, in the end, usually got her own way.

It was to a place in Bloomsbury that she took him—an ordinary dim-looking flat of the kind you find around there. He loathed the place. They rang the bell, and were admitted.

Now there was no doubt that the people there

were really ordinary sort of folk. But one develops, in strange circumstances, a way of peering into people, searching them out, analysing their insides as it were.

If they had been seen all together in an omnibus, they would no doubt have looked just like another bus-load, and escaped more than a casual glance. But, since they were where they were, he found himself trying to get behind their minds.

A sweet-faced woman of middle age interested him chiefly. She was just one of those ordinary simple people who accept without question ordinary standards of life and conduct, just greyish-haired and sweet-faced.

"I must not give my name," she said, when he spoke to her. "But how are you? You see, giving names destroys the evidence."

She talked on, with a strange mixture of candour and discretion that he found curiously intriguing. She was telling him things without telling him anything.

Yes, she had lost somebody. She evaded saying who it was, or what relationship she bore to him, or her. She had been searching around for months, trying to establish his or her survival. She went on talking to him for perhaps ten minutes.

At the end of it, he realised that under cross-examination he could not have told anything about her. She had been, in spite of her talkativeness, evasive. Everything she said seemed to come from around the corner.

Still, he got the impression that this "sitting," as she called it, was merely one of a long series.

The medium, it seemed, was late. He was told not to worry, that many mediums were like that.

"They are temperamental, you know," said somebody. Then he heard somebody else whisper something about a drink.

"Yes," murmured the little woman to whom he was talking. . . . "You know, that is one of the snags. They start drinking. Then it destroys the power . . ."

He merely stared. . . .

A tall man of the Army major type called him into a corner while they were waiting, and confessed that he thought it was "a lot of bunk."

"My wife believes in it," he said. "She carts me around these places. It has been going on for two years now. Still, it amuses her. And it's cheaper than bridge, the way she plays it."

There were ten people in the room by now. And, under the microscope beneath which he

mentally placed them, they all looked over-excited. There were two or three sensation-seekers, he could tell, the kind who watch tennis only when it is in the centre court, or chase an actress when her name is billed big—people to whom Nijinsky or Krishnavara are both the same; if the papers talk loudly about them.

He felt disgusted as he stood waiting for what he considered “the nonsense” to begin.

“If people really have souls,” he thought, “how can their souls endure the bodies they have to live in?”

He asked the little woman to whom he had been talking.

“If there is an after life,” he said, “how can it take any interest at all in all this—people paying a guinea each . . . the credulous mixed up with the cynical . . . sensation-mongers paying a fee?”

“You don’t understand,” she answered. “My friend loved me very much.”

He knew that the phrase “my friend” was a way of disguising even the friend’s sex.

“My friend would come back through anything to talk to me, if it were possible.”

Outside, one of the gloomiest parts of London lived on its grubby and sordid life. The houses were grey and grim. Paper-shops and grocers

were eating their way into century-old squares. Regency mansions were going, one by one. And, in their place, a newer, uglier London was being built. He had always hated Bloomsbury. But this night, while he waited, it seemed even more sordid and more grey.

Mary appeared to be enjoying herself. She was going about from group to group, chatting and picking up bits.

"There is a man over there who knew Kitchenier," she whispered to him once. "*He comes back and writes through him.* He says there is going to be another war. We shall be wiped out this time. *He is warning him.* D'you see that fat woman? *She is a reincarnation of Cleopatra.* She has met Antony, too." And she laughed.

As they were talking, a woman came across, looked at him very earnestly and said, "Do you know you are a medium?"

"Good God, no!" he replied.

"You have great power," she said. "I must tell you. I do not know what you know of your case. People are often told, by mediums, on things like that. Sometimes it starts them off it's wrong. Make no mistake. You are a true medium. Have you never been told 'Thee?'"

And, she laughed in her face. He told her that he

knew nothing about the "occult" and cared nothing, that he was there that night merely because he had brought a friend.

"You have a great gift," she said. "Make no mistake about to-night. The medium, I think, is a fraud. Whether he ever was a medium or not I do not know. His case is one of the many baffling things we encounter. It may be all fraud. It may be a mixture of fraud and genuine power. My knowledge does not depend on him. You will see, to-night, at least the formula. Sit yourself. Sit with some friends at home. Do not waste your powers. They are God-given."

She said all this very earnestly. While she was talking the medium came in. He looked as though he had been drinking for years. He was ill-shaven, and in clothes that did not fit. They were all introduced without any names being mentioned.

"I have brought a new friend," said somebody.

That was the extent of the introduction.

"Let's go into the other room," said one of the party.

They did. There he saw, arranged in a circle, ten chairs.

“Have you warmed the trumpet?” someone asked.

“I’ll put it in hot water,” was the reply.

And he saw carried out of the room a cone-shaped metal thing, about two feet long.

“Sit down,” said someone.

And they were put around, on chairs, a man and a woman alternately.

The woman who had told him he was a medium sat down in the chair next to his.

Afterwards, he found it impossible to go into all the details of what followed. At the time it seemed to last several hours.

They started to sing. The lights had been put out, of course—“The power is stronger in the dark,” they said—and the door was locked. He found himself staring at the floor, where he could see the end of the trumpet, which was phosphorescent with white paint.

They started with the Lord’s Prayer, which always annoyed him, even in church. He could not understand people asking God to give them daily bread, which they ought to earn, or praying not to be led into temptation, apparently thinking God would deliberately lead them into evil.

“Go on singing,” said the medium. “It helps the power.”

They went through a long repertoire of songs

and hymns, chosen apparently because they were popular and known to the sitters.

He had, of course, never been to a seance before. He never knew, until then, that people could have such dreadful voices; that, without music, they could get so far out of tune.

The woman next to him whispered, now and then.

"Sometimes it goes on like this for an hour," she said. "They have to gather up power. Sometimes nothing happens."

Once she whispered very earnestly.

"*You are covered with a blue light,*" she said.

People had been seeing "lights," they said, every now and then. He did not see anything.

"Oh, yes, over there," said somebody, as though it were true. He did not believe it.

Again the woman told him he was surrounded by a light.

"It is pouring out from you," she said. "It is power. Oh, *do sit* and develop it."

He did not answer. He was too bored to say anything. If the ceiling had fallen in, at least they could all have gone home. That was how he felt about it all.

Then, suddenly, the trumpet rose from the floor and sort of felt its way all round the circle.

“Good evening, Friend,” said somebody. Several repeated the greeting. “Good evening, Friend,” they said.

“*It touched me,*” said another.

“Good evening, Friend.”

The trumpet seemed to know its way, apparently, for, one after another, the sitters were touched. He wanted to strike a light and expose the medium, who, he was certain, was standing up, walking around, holding the trumpet, guiding its tappings on people’s knees. It came nearer to him.

Then it stopped right in front of his face. He was fascinated, dazed almost. . . .

Have you ever been stared at, in abysmal darkness, by a lit-up something that seemed to be peering right in your face? He wanted to knock it away from him.

But, of course, they were holding hands. He had been warned of the “danger.”

“It might kill the medium,” he had been told. “You must not touch the trumpet.”

Then he heard a sound. The trumpet was speaking to him. . . .

“John,” it said, “John.”

Now, his name was John. Only Mary knew that. And she was on the other side of the circle!

“John,” it repeated three or four times. “It’s your father, Anthony. Anthony Manson.”

Now, how did it know his name? Was it hallucination? If it were fraud, how could anyone have guessed? Few people knew him. He had made no mark in the world, yet he seemed to sense his father’s presence. His memory of him seemed more definite than it had been for years. For a moment he felt that he was actually there, in the room!

Then the trumpet went back to its place on the floor. And, in the darkness, he sat there, wondering. . . .

“*I believe it is your power,*” said the woman next to him.

“What do you mean?” he replied, as softly as he could, but being merely polite.

“Your powers are functioning to-night,” she said. “I told you that you possessed them. I am clairvoyant. It is not the medium. *It is you.* Power is streaming from you. You are covered with it.”

“Don’t be silly,” he replied.

Then, suddenly, the trumpet went up in the air again and stopped high above the circle. There came from it a loud voice.

“*Warn him,*” it said, in a deep tone. “Warn

him. He mustn't monkey about with things like this. He will have to pay. *Warn him.*"

He heard, then, a sort of gasp. It seemed to come from where the medium had been sitting when they took their seats. There came a choking sort of sound, and a kind of gurgle. Two or three of the women shrieked.

"*Turn up the lights,*" said someone.

"No, it's dangerous," came a warning.

"Turn up the damned lights," shouted a voice which he knew to be that of the major-fellow he had spoken to. "Open the damned door."

By this time they were all standing up.

Someone struck a lighter. Someone else went towards a knob on the wall and pressed it down. Electric light flooded the room.

All the members of the circle were standing up except one. That was the medium. He was hanging over the side of his chair.

"Get some water," said somebody.

"You shouldn't have turned the light up," he heard.

"The power has all rushed back to him and made him ill." That was the little woman speaking.

"Don't talk damned nonsense," said the major. "He's a damned fraud anyway."

John felt the medium's pulse. He could detect no heart-throb.

"He is dead," he said.

And, grabbing Mary, he ran out of the flat.

None of them knew who he was.

He led a quiet life. He did not like getting mixed up with scandals and inquests. So they just ran. . . .

Mary sometimes says she would like to "go to another." John tells her not to be a fool. . . . And, yet, sometimes he wonders . . . How did the trumpet know his name?

WHEN MEN TALK TRUTH

THE prison's high walls stood in front of him, high, forbidding. In front of them, trees were planted here and there. But nothing could lessen the grimness of those walls. Even the sunshine seemed to make them stand out in added terror.

The minister had walked that way, twice daily at least, for months now. His own dwelling was not far away, outside the walls.

In them he went every morning and after lunch, visiting prisoners, seeing them in the solitude of their cells, lecturing them sometimes in the prison chapel, and preaching on Sundays at a special service for those who were neither Anglicans nor members of the Romish faith. Almost every day during his walk he wondered, "Why on earth did I start as a prison chaplain?"

Few occupations could be more haunting in their memories. The Governor and the warders took it all as a matter of business. It was their job to punish. They were a rigid part of a machine brutalising in the monotony of its daily revolutions from daylight to dark; afterwards came the long, long silences of the night.

But the chaplain's job was to comfort, not to punish.

And how could that be done? Faith might remove mountains, but not, as in St. Peter's days, make the door of a cell something through which a man could pass to freedom.

There was No. 48, for instance, in for a long stretch. He had committed a crime, and he did not mind suffering. But there was his wife outside . . . and the family of small kids.

"Why should they have to pay?" That was a question that the chaplain knew he could not answer.

But that was not the only one of the kind. There were dozens of those.

The Law took the culprit. But it was his family who paid the price.

During that walk, nearly every day, the chaplain puzzled out how he could answer these posers. He had to speak of a merciful God. Yet, all around him, when he spoke in chapel, were grey-clothed and greyer-faced-looking men to whom came no mercy and no sign of it. The Law was relentless and the ways of Justice were cruel.

"I must go out and save the world."

The phrase, his own once, came back to his memory. It dated from his first week of conviction that he was destined to become a minister of God. The words had inspired his long dreary

study of books on theology. He could see an end then, the winning of innumerable souls. Then the War had come, and the holocaust, and then his ordination. . . .

Then, for some reason he could not remember now, so dead he felt sometimes, had come the decision to become a prison chaplain. Soon, the iron had entered into him. The rust had come. Damped by tears shed by his inner being, the rust was always spreading, eating further into the iron that stabbed his soul. . . .

He rang the bell. The first gate opened. And then, in the book, he signed his name. "The Reverend Thomas Jimson," he wrote. He saw that a dozen people had been inside since when, in the morning, he had called—officers going on duty, a visitor or two, no doubt. Some of them had signed themselves out again. Always when, twice a day, he wrote his name, he noticed that.

"Ins" and "Outs"—but there were those who stayed for years. They did not sign that book. . . .

Yes, but all that had happened before seemed easy now. A man was to die in the morning. And he was paying him his farewell visit . . . no, not the farewell visit, for the last one, of course,

was to be paid in the morning, when, walking beside him, he would recite, "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

And he wondered how he would say it . . . and whether his words would fail . . . and whether he would go on reading the words, or fall down into the pit with the other being.

Chaplains had got used even to this sort of thing, perhaps, he thought. Some had even tried to comfort a man who had just been flogged. It was all in the game.

You got paid for it. But executions were new to him. They did not belong to his faith as a rule.

He wondered what he would say, in the morning, when he returned to his family, what they would ask at breakfast, and how he would reply.

Prisons have many secrets. But families ask. . . .

Well, he was inside the second gate by now. Then he went in, through where the prisoners entered before their long incarceration, on one side the baths, and on the other the doctor's office, where, one by one, convicts were examined before they were taken, in their prison suits, to begin their long solitude.

A score of prisoners stood in a corridor with their faces to the wall, as always they stood when waiting. They looked furtively round now and then, just as, when he passed, he had always seen them look, fearing a warder's rebuke, but looking.

They were all alike from the back. The numbers, their only distinguishing mark, were all in the same place. And he wondered, when he passed them, whether it seemed to them merely a moment or a year. . . .

On each side were cells, and in three galleries above hundreds of other cells. Each had a number. And, in the evening, each contained a man. No, he was not a man. He too was a number.

You saw them peering out sometimes . . . just eyes. . . . All else was the door. And it was so quiet you wanted to shout . . . and so solitary that you seemed to be surrounded by all the spirits of the dead . . . and it was all so grim.

"Our Father, which art in Heaven," he had led them into repeating, scores of times, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done."

He always wondered what it meant to them.

And then he spoke to them of the love of God, and wondered why no one ever shouted out and laughed at him. He often rebelled inside his mind. Perhaps they, too, rebelled . . . inside. . . .

“ I, too, am part of the machine,” he thought. “ I am paid, like all the others, to punish. And yet I am punished myself.”

Yet what was there to do? If he left, someone else would come along and behave, perhaps, with less pity. And outside, if he left, there would always be a memory of these dreadful months. He could never escape.

“ You want to see Tompkins, sir? ”

It was the chief warder who spoke to him. And, seeing his nod, the officer took him along to three cells made into two. They were the same outside as were the others. There were three doors. But he knew that you only went into one, that behind the others was the execution shed.

There was nothing to show . . . but all the prison knew. . . .

All the prisoners, as they filed past, always looked at those doors. . . .

Inside you heard nothing. You just waited.

“ Back again,” said the Man inside.

That was often the sort of greeting he got from prisoners. He was used to it. Men soon realised that few of their requests could be complied with, that messages that reached the outside world were very rare, that a chaplain could do very little.

"They only come along and pray," was the sort of thing he knew the men said when he had gone.

Yes, he was back again.

"Well, I shall not see much more of you," said the Man. "Just once more after this, and that's the end of it."

The chaplain found himself fumbling for something to say. There was no formula for a scene like this. They had not taught him this at college. No annual conference ever discussed it. It was not written in a book. Not even the Bible store sold advice for such an emergency.

"I am glad you came," said the Man. "I want to talk to you."

Still the chaplain made no answer, but sat waiting.

Then he heard what he had often heard before, the Story of a Life. Men talked, often, of temptation and slipping into things, of a drunken father, or life in the slums. More or less mechanically he could conjure up some reply to all that. The other man could not argue overmuch, anyway. Even in the cell alone he usually said "Sir." So that was easy.

But this Man was different. And, anyway, in the morning he had to die. Men are brave in their last terror.

“ I killed him because I hated him,” said the Man. “ I would kill him to-morrow if he were alive now and I were free. And I would kill him next week if we were both outside. And I would go on killing him.

“ You see, they brought me up to kill. I was a butcher by trade and I killed animals all day. I grew to like it. I was proud of my skill with a poleaxe or a knife.

“ Then there was a war, if you remember. Most people have forgotten now. All through those four years I killed. They hired me to kill. And I killed without complaining. They taught me how to kill with a bayonet. They taught me how to kill with a rifle. They taught me how to kill with a Mills bomb.

“ And I killed them all right. I killed all the men I did not know, decent sorts of blokes, I expect, with wives and families, and no grudge against me that I'd ever heard. And they told me it was fine.

“ And now I've killed one swine because I hated him. Can't you have one private killing on your own? When they pay you to do it, they say it's fine. When you cannot help doing it, they hang you. You don't know how I hated that swine. Now, what would you do if you hated somebody? ”

"I should pray," replied the chaplain suddenly. It was his first remark. It came easy. He had often told them that.

"They expect us to do that in chapel here," replied the Man. "What good does it do in gaol? Does it open the prison doors? Can we ever see the love of God here after we have prayed for it? We just wait a week and then pray next Sunday. Can I ask you a question, Guv'nor?"

"Yes," said the chaplain. "That is why I am here."

"What is going to happen to me to-morrow when they pull the drop and the rope tightens and it breaks my neck? I've been wondering about it quite a lot the last few weeks. Can you tell me? Now don't pull the sort of stuff you do in church. *What is going to happen to me to-morrow?* I'm not afraid, you know, but I'd like to know.

"Do I lie in a grave until a trumpet blows? Some of you say that. I'm not jeering. I just want to know. Do I go to Hell? What is Hell, unless it's here? What exactly does happen? You've studied it all your life. You pretend to know."

The chaplain looked at the walls. He looked at the small window, then he looked in the Man's eyes.

"I am going to be quite frank with you, my friend," he said, slowly, and with a strange nervousness. "You see, I have never been in a position like this before. I have never spoken to a man in the prime of health who knew he was to die the next day—a man who challenged me for the truth. You see, I do not believe what I am paid to preach."

"Gorn," said the Man. "You don't believe it?"

"No, I don't believe it," replied the chaplain. "You see, many parsons have worries like I have. They are taught things when they are young, but then they learn more and they grow wiser. They see the world in lives, not in books. Yet sometimes they're afraid they're growing less wise. For, you see, they cannot shake the faith of others. They cannot upset the people who like ideas they are used to, even if they are wrong. They cannot take away one thing unless they have something to put there instead."

And then the Man who was to die heard from the lips of a chaplain something that few men hear. A frank confession of abysmal failure of faith poured into his ears. He heard of long, long doubts and worryings, of years of strivings after Truth, and then the realisation that there was a greater truth than the one dreamed of before.

“You see, you do not really die at all,” said the chaplain. “Do you know, I *see* people sometimes? People who are dead, I mean. It’s only a flash, sometimes . . . but I see them. I’ve never told anyone before. Our church condemns it. Yet now I know that the words I shall say to-morrow, when I walk beside you from here into there”—and he nodded to the place behind the inner door—“are words that do not mean anything. And yet I have to say them. We have not learned any new ones yet.

“Lots of us parsons believe as I do, or know as I do, rather. And yet we keep our tongues quiet and we say nothing. I shall walk to-morrow morning from here into there, recite words beside you. But you won’t die.

“You will be the same when the trap has fallen as you were standing on it. People you know will meet you. And you will have a chance to make up for all that you have done. Really you are not being punished, if you only knew. You would suffer much more if you stayed here. There you can earn progress by work. If you turn your face towards the light and climb upwards, you will be helped.

“I will pray for you. I promise. It will help. I do not believe what is in the Book. I’ve brought it—here it is—so that I could read

to you. But I won't read it. But I am going to tell you the truth."

And, for an hour, the two men talked. And then the two men prayed. . . .

Then, at last, and with a new light in his eyes, the Man stood up. . . .

"Do you mean to say you've known all that for years and you haven't told anybody before?" said the Man.

"Yes," replied the chaplain.

"Why, you're worse than I am," went on the Man. "Do you know what I would do if I had done what you have done, just kept my mouth shut?"

"No," said the chaplain.

"Why," said the Man, "*I'd go and hang myself. Why, Guv'nor, when you've gone, I'm going to pray for you.*"

ETERNAL TRIANGLE

"I have no beginning," said the wheel, "and no end. I go round and round. Yet, even when I stop, I still have no beginning and no end."

The woman looked down on the eyes staring at her from the bed. They had been watching her for weeks. And she had been watching them. Every now and then the doctor came. He had given up hope long since.

"It may last for a month," he said, "or it may be a year. All you can do is to watch."

And so the days passed, and the weeks. And, all the time, the eyes stared at her.

She hated him. She hated the blackness of his hair, the thinness of his face. And he knew it. She hated that crimson scar upon his cheek. She loathed him, and he loathed her. And yet, his tongue paralysed, he could not speak it. And, his arm paralysed, he could not write it down. He was merely lying there, week after week, silent, always staring.

He hated her, and she knew it.

"There may be a sudden change," the woman had been told. "All you can do, then, is to give him a dose from this bottle."

She had often looked at it, wondering when the change would come.

“Six drops when necessary,” she read—and a warning about the danger of taking more.

When two people are forced together through long periods of silence, the boredom is so terrible that it almost shouts out at one. Her only relief was the telephone bell. Every few hours it rang, and she went downstairs to answer it. And, every time she returned, the eyes looked at her accusingly. They knew . . . they could follow her downstairs, she knew, peer into her face when she spoke, see, by her expression, what the answer was.

Through all the years that have known human experience there has been the old, old triangle—two women and a man, or two men and a woman. Long before the Cave Age it began. Never, finally, until we master Destiny shall we square the circle so that men and women can meet without jealousy. The triangle’s points reach as far as all human knowledge. It contains a thousand tragedies, complexities that appal, possibilities that frighten. Jealousy was the serpent in the Garden.

The husband was dying. And the woman was waiting in the room. And the lover was waiting somewhere else.

“How long?” would come the question on the telephone, day after day.

"It cannot be long now," the answer would be, always.

Then came insistence, and the question again—"How long?"

The doctor could not tell. The woman did not know. The man in the bed merely waited and stared, and condemned with his speechless looks.

That went on through the spring and the summer. The leaves fell from the trees. And still there came no change.

Then, one day, as usual, the telephone rang again. The woman started to answer it. And there came from the bed a sudden groan. She turned to see that a spasm was twitching her husband's face. Again the telephone bell rang. She looked at the bottle by the bedside and paused. Still the bell rang. . . .

She moved towards the bottle. And then saw, again, the accusing eyes. Again the bell rang downstairs.

She went to the bottle and picked it up, while the eyes stared at her. And then she put the bottle down again and went to the telephone.

Still the eyes were staring when she returned. And then at last, after months it seemed, the husband spoke.

"I *know*," he said. "I *know*." Then, from

the agony of death, came the whispered words "*I will return.*" It was a threat, and a menace that frightened her.

She rushed to the door and left the house. And that night she and her lover left England.

It was early next summer that the child came. The nurse put it in its mother's arms.

"Take it away," she said.

She wondered why that was. After the agony of birth, she had always heard, a mother seeks to nestle her child in her arms. The nurse looked at her curiously.

"Take it away," she said. They were almost the last words she spoke, for she was to know only a few hours of motherhood. When the father came in, tense, anxious still, after his long wait in the room downstairs, it was not only to greet a son, but to bid a wife good-bye.

"A boy," they had told him, and, proud to claim his son, he had run upstairs.

Then, as he stood by the bed, he wondered. . . . The bundle in the nurse's arms seemed no part of him. It squawked and fussed, bleatingly, but it was not that. . . .

This business of birth was a messy, ugly thing. . . . But that he had always felt.

Often, as others had done, he had asked, with

Milton, why God had not invented "some other way to procreate mankind." Still, Shakespeare had been born that way, and St. Francis . . . yes, and the Saviour of Men. . . .

But, as he stood, he knew he hated his son. What was there to hate? The bundle of baby clothes was harmless enough. That, bar the squawking, quite usual, he supposed, was just a bundle and a red face, red like the faces of all other new-born babes.

He saw the nurse watching him. He went from the room. His wife had left it before him, but for another world.

It was a strange childhood, the son's. There grew, with the years, a tenseness, a strain, that made the household nervy, jumpy, dark with an uneasiness that affected everyone.

In his earliest years the child was kept apart by the nurse who tended him. The father, when he looked at it did so with a frown, and then, as the months passed, with a scowl.

There seemed a Mood everywhere, an unfriendliness. Servants left. First the child cried in its father's presence; then it scowled or looked away. Then came a bitterness and blows. Everything the child did was wrong. What in another boy might have passed for minor

errors were regarded as serious misdemeanours.

A maid, now and then, would excuse the child, only to be discharged.

And as the years went by the father became sulkier. His petulance crept from his life at home to his contacts outside. Moroseness cast a gloom, first upon his manner and then upon his soul.

And the Mood blackened the outlook of all who lived in the house.

It was a governess who, brought in when the boy was old enough, found herself sheltering from something she could not fathom—a Hatred for which there seemed no meaning.

“It’s unnatural,” she would say . . . and ponder upon it all, keeping her charge apart. “The boy’s all right with me. . . . Who is he like?”

The father and the son bore no trace of resemblance. Nor could she see in the dead mother’s portrait any likeness to the child. . . .

The boy, indeed, seemed like a caged beast, shut into a ceaseless restlessness, hating even those who fed him, watching, not fearing a blow so much as waiting to attack.

With her he was quiet enough, and intelligent. If his father even passed outside the door in which she taught him little sums and then, with the

years, passed on to history, he would start. And, sometimes, in his eyes, she saw a glare at the barest mention of "Father."

She grew to love the lad in spite of his moods. They lived almost apart. She comforted him when, as often happened, he was found at fault.

"I don't seem to belong," he said once, when he was twelve. "I like you. But what am I doing here?"

That was a mood in which he would seek for a clue to his strange restlessness.

There was another mood. It would come across him suddenly, now and then, and she would see him wondering, puzzling out something in his brain.

Once she challenged him, taking advantage of their sympathy, their isolation in a large house in which, when child and father met, there was at least an irritation, harsh words sometimes, but in which, when the two were alone, there was not something akin to peace, but at least a condition which was tolerable.

"I am always wondering," he said. "Do you know, I seem to have known father *before*?"

She looked at him curiously. His seriousness impressed, in spite of words which, to her, had no meaning.

"Before?" she asked. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know," he said. "Perhaps it is a dream that I remember. . . . Perhaps it is mad of me. . . . Sometimes I feel a little odd. . . . But I seem to have known him in another place. Sometimes I feel older than I am, grown-up, experienced. . . . And he comes into a life I do not understand.

"It is our wills that clash, you know. I must thwart him. I do it, at times, just to make him angry. Yet he is my father. It is not because he is my father that it happens, but somehow in spite of it."

Then, when he was fourteen or so, they missed him. In the night he had gone, just vanished into the air. The strain had broken his nerve, and he had disappeared. The father heard nothing, nor was given a reason.

"I had to go," the boy said, to the governess, in a note. "I hate him so. I cannot stand it. If I had stayed, and grown up, I should have killed him one day."

She did not know that, in his room, the father had paced the floor half the night through, hating his son . . . just hating . . . and just wondering why. . . .

He read the letter again. "Dear Father," it

said, "I am sorry and I am coming home. Let us make a start again.

"You are my father, after all, and I want to remember that. I have worn out my hate for you—yes, it was hatred, and you should know—and I want to make amends.

"You used to hate me too. That must end. I am determined that it shall."

Again and again he read it to himself.

What was the likeness he was trying to recall? It dated back years in his mind, so far back that, indefinable, it eluded memory.

To-day, perhaps, he would know.

What would his son be like, after nearly twenty years? He had seemed a little swine when he was young. Would it be all right now? Would those strange antagonisms of the years that had gone be intensified—or would it all be over now?

Still wondering, the father waited. . . .

At last downstairs there was a ring, and then a footstep on the stairs. And then the door opened.

"*I have come back,*" said a voice.

And through the door came a man, raven-haired and tall—and with a crimson scar upon one of his pale, thin cheeks. . . .

"My God, it's *you!*" said the man who had

waited. . . . And he collapsed in a chair, and sat staring. . . .

“What on earth’s the matter?” said the young man.

There was no answer from the chair.

He picked up one of the wrists that were hanging down.

“Good God!” he said. “He’s dead.”

And he stood there staring.

“I wonder why I always hated him?” he asked himself.

And, instead of calling anyone, he looked around the room, as though seeking for a clue. But there was no clue. He looked down on the lifeless figure in the chair.

“I wonder why I always hated him?” he said.

“I have no beginning,” said Life. “I am like a wheel. I have no beginning and no end. I go round and round. Yet, even when I stop, I still have no end and no beginning.”

THE WRONG SORT OF STORY

THIS is the story of a film. No, you have not seen it. Now I expect you never will. . . . It begins with the great search for a New Idea. Perhaps you recall the circumstance. That after years of boom, when money was made by the million right through the industry, and they had spent it like drunken cowboys, the Big Slump came, and the banks stepped in. An iron control of spending replaced the throw-it-around method of the older days. They began to produce pictures by a method based on Cost. Then, not long after, receipts fell off all over the world.

There were countless cinemas everywhere. But where were the pictures?

The public, children in the early days of talkies, became critical, then cynical. Every now and then, in a cinema, you would hear go up laughter that was ironic. . . .

The talkies waited for the Great New Idea. They scoured the world.

Now, on the day that my story starts, Temple Perkins was seated in his room in a New York hotel with his head on his hands. From outside came the hum of traffic. It thumped inside his brain. . . .

You who read books and see plays, and look on at a tense film drama, never see the long hours of agony which usually preface the birth of the idea behind it all.

You may think of expression as a vital, compelling thing. Believe me, either it is all dull mechanics, like most of the rest of things, or else it is born in pain, just as is a child.

It was Temple's third week in New York. They had brought him from England and promised him not only money, but, what had been scarcely ever known before, control over his work. They said that they would use his story. The movies, desperate, had come even to that depth of humbleness.

To search for something new, they had scoured Europe for dramatists. All those at home had been used up long before. So they had been brought from Prague and Leningrad, from the Balkans and from the boulevards. Temple Perkins was merely one of them. His comedy, *The Woman You Jilted*, had run a year in London. And so Hollywood had promised him the earth. . . .

"You just write," they said. "We'll give you five thousand dollars a week. Write a story with something new in it. Then come over to the Coast and see it made."

So, paid something like £140 a day, Temple Perkins had been sitting at a desk for days. They brought up his meals. He just sat there, trying in vain to think. He conjured up a Richest Girl in the World and wondered what original thing he could make her do. He worried his brain about a King Who Threw Away a Throne, seeking where on earth Heroic Abnegation could go and live. He sought to rejuvenate Faust in the clothes of Savile Row, but could only imagine him as an old man with a painted face.

“Keep it clean,” Cy Milliner had told him, “or make it very, very dirty. But—*make it new*. We want, not merely a new angle, but a new plot. They say there are only nine in the world and that all the story writers have been living on those for centuries. You find the tenth.”

Cy, as master producer, had told that to all his imported authors. There was a Czech he had put in a bungalow on Long Island. There was a Greek playwright way up the Hudson. For miles around, and all within easy reach, he had dramatists from Spain and Holland and Germany. There were novelists, too, from half the countries of Europe—all paid to evolve a new picture idea.

Temple Perkins nearly decided, once, that it wouldn't be a bad wheeze to write a story about all those authors. . . .

Every few hours or so his telephone bell went. It was always Cy Milliner.

Had the great idea been born? Hadn't he thought of something? No, he hadn't. A big cast was waiting, he was always reminded.

For hour after hour he sat staring at nothing, waiting. And every few hours the telephone bell rang, insistently.

It was at three in the morning that Perkins, after a restless sleep, woke up suddenly. Had you seen, you would have looked on a face that was illumined, transfigured. You would have seen him dash out of bed, rush to his desk, and with hasty fingers, well exercised in the old days, when he was a news reporter, punch away at his typewriter, getting something down.

"Click, click" went the typewriter. It clicked on for an hour. Foolscap after foolscap sheet, covered with typing, was thrown on the floor.

Then Perkins got on the telephone. It was a bear-headed producer who, sore and sleepy, answered at the other end. He had only just gone to bed after one of his parties. He hated being called.

"What do you say?" he asked. "You've got it. Got what? Oh, an idea! Well, you've been long enough about it. It will keep till to-morrow now, I suppose."

"No, you must come round now," said Perkins. "I can't tell you why. You've got to come."

When, in an hour or so, Cy Milliner arrived, nervy and restless, and bored with lack of sleep, he listened to a strange story.

"I got the idea in a dream," said Perkins. "It's been given me."

"What do you mean—given you?" asked the producer.

"I don't know," said Perkins, trying to explain. "I merely know that, while I slept, I saw acted in front of me a great story. And it's got to be filmed as I saw it. That's an order."

"An order?" echoed Cy. "What on earth d'you mean? I reckon the Old Man takes orders from nobody."

Perkins looked as though he were trying to find words.

"It's hard to explain," he said. "I merely know that this story has to be used exactly as I saw it acted, or else I shall forget it. That's why I typed it all out, in case I forgot. It's on that table."

The producer went across, picked up the manuscript and, in spite of his tiredness, read.

"I see you've got the title too," he remarked.

"Yes," replied Perkins. "Right at the end

I heard a voice that said, 'The Man Comes Back,' 'The Man Comes Back.' Call it that."

Impatiently the producer read the script right through. Then he began to argue.

"There's a splendid germ of an idea here," he said.

"No, germ of an idea won't do," replied Perkins. "It's got to be used exactly like that. I told you."

"Of course I am all in favour of religion just now," said the producer. "They say we're in for a revival of religion soon. Although I don't believe it, I would like the talkies to be first . . . our company, of course. . . ."

"The gangster boom is all over. They are sick, too, of all those frills. Musicals are through. We've taken the lid off graft for long enough. Now all the parsons are after us, saying that we've muck-raked for too long. Well, an idea based on these lines ought to put us a bit more right with the Church."

"I told you the story had to be used as I got it, or it won't be a story any longer," insisted Perkins.

"We'll soon see about that," replied the producer. "Now you've used up, of course, an old idea. Jesus has come back before in a good many books. Hall Caine used it, if I

remember. Channing Pollock got the idea too. It's been common to fiction for many years now."

"It isn't merely that," said Perkins. "As I got the story, my Man Who Came Back attracted no attention of any kind. He was just good, and nobody made a fuss about that. Nobody would, you see. That is the point. As I see it, the lesson of it is that, if Christ did return, nobody would notice anything much at all.

"When I saw the story acted in front of me, I realised that, the next time, He wouldn't be a Jew. He might even be a Zulu or an Eskimo this time, or someone even farther away from the usual haunts of white people. As I saw it, He would merely lead an ordinary simple life of virtue. He would merely teach that love was right and that cruelty was wrong and that we should be kind.

"No one would make a fuss of Him. They would merely say, 'Oh, another of these preachers.' If He were in England and He cured people of illness, by laying on His hands—and, as I got it, many people do that—He would be victimised by the Medical Council, who would say He wasn't qualified. If, in His presence, something we call supernatural happened, He would merely be arrested for fortune-telling or something and

be fined ten shillings, and, as there would only be about six lines in the newspapers about it, no one would make a fuss of that.

“He would have a few lowly followers, of course, but they would be so lowly, living in some back street or other, that no one would pay the slightest attention. That is the story. The Man lives a simple life of goodness, ‘doing unto others,’ you know, and nobody takes any notice of Him.”

“We can’t make a film of that,” said the producer. “It’s too ordinary. Now, you let your Man denounce gangsters. Let Him get in to some gunman’s stronghold and brave their automatics with a flash from Heaven. Let Him indict the graft at City Hall and stop a great civic procession merely with His eyes. We’ll take Him to Hollywood and make Him shame us all in the middle of shooting a big picture. He must lash all the sins of society. We could even, if we made Him live in a country where we don’t sell pictures, let Him challenge the king on his throne.”

“No, I can’t write that story,” said Perkins. “You see, the lesson of my idea—no, it is the lesson of the idea that was given me—is that there is no need for that sort of thing, that all you have to do is just to be good. My film

story is to teach that all the clever things, and all the big heroisms, and all the great dramatic challenges, have been done and said, and written and thought, for centuries and centuries, and that all you have to do is not to write them or say them or think them, but just to go and live them in your own life. My Man is just a small man in a back street. I saw His face. It was just the good kind face of a good kind man. He loved animals and birds and children. And the children loved Him.

“I seemed to feel, as I saw Him, that I had seen Him in a thousand faces of ordinary good men and women, that the goodness was here already, that all the rest of us had to do was to be like that too. I seemed to feel that He was like an old grandmother of mine. She wasn't noticed much, but she was always kind to people. And there was an old doctor I remember whose patients always worshipped him.

“I seemed to see Him in a nurse I once knew. She died of cancer. . . .”

“Yes, but there's no action in all that,” protested Cy Milliner. “We want big drama, crowds, processions, the Appeal Unto Cæsar, and all that sort of thing.”

Temple Perkins pleaded with his eyes.

“I must insist on my story as it is,” he said.

"Something will happen to it otherwise, I know. The Voice told me that."

"Don't be a fool," replied Cy. "I'll tell you what I will do. I'll get three or four scenario writers on the job to-morrow. They can each do a different script based on my general idea and then you can approve, and we'll start shooting. Why, that plot's worth a million dollars. I'll call the Old Man up."

Before a couple of minutes had passed, he was shouting in the telephone, which a dull-brained wit at the other end, pulled out of bed, was trying in vain to understand.

"Perkins has got a great idea here," Cy shouted into the receiver. "We've got to get busy in the morning. 'What is the idea?' Wait a minute while I ask Perkins." There was a look of straining recollection on his face. "Perkins, what were we talking about?"

"I, I don't remember," replied Perkins. "It's funny, but I've forgotten. Wait a minute, I'll get the script. . . . Where did you put it?"

"On the table, you fool," said Cy Milliner.

"It isn't here!" shouted Perkins.

"Well, it must have blown on the floor."

"How could it have blown on the floor? The windows and the door are shut."

“Well, it’s somewhere about. I had it in my hand a moment ago.”

No, the manuscript was not there! It had been on the table a minute before, and then it wasn’t there any longer.

Both Perkins and Milliner had completely forgotten what they had been talking about. . .

THE WORLD'S LOVER SMILES

THE Blue Pig was full. It always was on Thursday nights. If you came late there was no table free. Unless you knew the head waiter you could not find a seat, except near the door.

On Thursday nights all Hollywood's stars seemed to gather in the Blue Pig. Cafés and restaurants all had their few months of boom. Now it was the Blue Pig's turn.

Baby Tweeneyes was at one table with her set, and with a blasé-looking waitress tending her. Strangers got excited in the Blue Pig. The waitresses were used to it.

Some former waitresses had become film stars. Other waitresses had chanced their luck in the big studios, and then decided that waiting at table at night was much easier than waiting about all day for a job that never came.

Bessie Longlong, the world-famous vamp, was there too, with a bunch of boys. Karlsky, who was a ghoul famed for his make-ups, had his tame-looking wife with him for a change.

If you had looked all round and counted up the salaries it would have sounded like a million dollars.

The conversation sounded like nothing. Only those who have talked with film stars know how

abysmal is their ignorance of everything except the new picture somebody is making, whether or no somebody else's contract is to be renewed, or why the star had cut out 300 feet of some unknown girl who had suddenly been found good or bad, which was often the same thing in Hollywood.

Yes, when you listened, you knew that "pictures" were not an Art, but a Business, something in which there was money to be made, something that cost somebody else a lot of money, something that might make some for you.

Only those who have heard such talk have any idea of the sordidness of it all.

You go to Hollywood expecting Romance and Colour. The reality hits you like a blow.

Still, while they were practical enough in all their talk, the film stars that night were, as usual, posing. They had no private lives. Always they behaved as though the camera were recording what they did, and how they looked, and what they said, and the clothes they wore. Besides, the gossip writers were around as usual. And what they wrote in some obscure paper in Los Angeles sometimes became a cable sent right round the world.

Beattie Lovely had a spare table that night, one still unoccupied.

No, Beattie Lovely was not really her name. They do not have names like that on the Ohio farmland from which she came. They happen somewhere in the train, during the four-days journey to the Coast.

You think you are going to be a star, and so you write down a lot of names. Then you imagine them in electric lights outside a theatre and decide which will look the most attractive.

The Beattie was really true. The Lovely was true in so far as it described somebody. For Beattie's looks justified the name even if she were not born with it. But then, in Hollywood, loveliness was cheap. Every girl who sold cigars, who was a chambermaid, or who worked in a dry-goods store was beautiful. For they had all come to the Coast to be stars, and, when they had failed, they had driven out from most of the jobs the local homeliness.

That was why no one noticed Beattie Lovely in her waitress's dress. In London, all eyes would have been on her had she been a waitress in a Corner House. In Southern California she was merely one of many glorious-looking failures.

Still, she never knew. . . . Some director might come in and discover that she was a type. . . . Some producer might hear her voice and

say, "That'll record well. . . ." Anything might happen.

That was why, month after month, and year after year, beautiful girls went on, hoping, growing plainer every day.

Then Wendell Holmes came in. Not even then was there much excitement.

He was the World's Lover of the hour. His name, which he had read somewhere in a book, was better known to millions than the author from whom he had borrowed it, "to make it famous," as he said.

Women of several countries nearly swooned, sometimes, when they thought of him. They gasped when his name was shown before a picture started, or they saw his photograph on a wall.

To them, he was Love, a magical being from another world.

"Why isn't he married?" they said, not knowing that his wife was still in the Brooklyn tenement from which he had gone West in search of the fortune which, ultimately, he had found.

He left his car outside the Blue Pig, parking it among a hundred others. He checked his hat.

Then he found Beattie's empty table, and sat down, alone.

He sat there, going over the menu, glancing

up from it every now and then to see how many people were looking, whether his arrival caused more attention than usual. Film stars check their popularity that way. When the morning's newspapers come, they rush through them to find their own names. And when they are not there, they remark, regardless of the falls of Cabinets and the collapse of currencies, "There's nothing in the papers to-day."

You cannot blame them. They are their own currency and their own country, yes, even their own world.

Wendell Holmes looked up, and saw beside him—merely a waitress.

Yet she seemed to be shivering. Her hands appeared to be trembling. She was holding one hand above her eyes.

Still, he was used to that. Maiden innocence often gazed at him hysterically. Any flapper might do it, any hour.

Even when the girl said, "I want to talk to you," and went on, "I must talk to you," it did not surprise him. It was strange that a waitress was doing it, he thought, for they were a blasé lot, as a rule, in Hollywood. But perhaps this was a new one.

"Yes?" he said, encouragingly, seeing that this particular waitress did not look so stupid as

most of them. For beauty is usually a very stupid thing.

“Can I see you after?” said the girl.

“Certainly not,” he replied.

His life was largely spent in resisting females, administering rebuffs, courteously as a rule. But this one was a waitress, and she ought to know her place.

“I must see you,” urged the girl. “I have something to tell you.”

“If you say anything like that again,” he replied, “I shall speak to the manager.”

And he ordered his food.

The girl brought course after course until his supper was finished. He noticed that she kept on staring at him—no, not exactly at him, but near him—and seemed in a condition of distressed nerves and fearfulness.

At first he was a little curious, and then annoyed. Once again he spoke to her and said, “You must not worry me.”

Still, even then, when, after a few brief conversations with people at the surrounding tables, he took his leave, he was surprised to find that the girl, still dressed as a waitress, ran down the path outside the café after him. She followed him to his car, and put her hand on his arm when he opened the door.

"I am sorry," she said. "But I must tell you. You must not go on the lot to-morrow."

"What the devil are you talking about?" he said. "If you don't go away, I . . ."

"Don't go on the lot to-morrow," she broke in. "It's a warning. I must tell you. I have known it ever since you came into the room to-night."

"What on earth are you talking about?" he said.

"Don't you understand that I have a warning for you?" she answered. "Don't go on the lot to-morrow. I cannot tell you why. It does not matter to me. But it is very important to you."

"Look here, girlie," said the film star, turning right round, "I'll give you a break. What racket are you in?"

"I am not in any racket," said the girl.

"You're trying to set up as one of these seers, aren't you?" he asked. "Hollywood's full of them. There are fakes of all kinds all over the place. They write to me, they send me circulars. Are you trying to break into that game?"

"I don't know anything about that," said the girl. "I merely know that you must not go on the lot to-morrow."

“I tell you what I’ll do,” replied the film star. “If you’re trying to butt into that clairvoyant racket I’ll give you a break. After all, the publicity won’t do me any harm.”

Yes, if it would do her any good, he would announce that, having been warned by a seer in whom he had every confidence, he had abandoned his picture for one day.

“After all, the story ’ll go all over the world,” he said. “You’ll be set up in business, and I shall get the publicity. You can’t tell what good publicity is. But I do know that we cannot live without it. And nobody’s pulled that one on ’em yet.”

And he got into the car. Before he knew, the girl was in beside him. She went on speaking earnestly, still warning him.

“I shall never forgive myself unless you understand,” she said.

“Well, come for a ride and tell me about it,” said the World’s Lover.

And in the car she talked. She kept on all the way to Berkley Hills, up the drive to his doorstep, inside on the mat, right into his drawing-room. There he sat her down and listened.

It was a strange story she told him. It was one at which, every now and then, he laughed.

He would hear patiently for a while, and then, suddenly, every now and then, a cynical grin would spread across his face.

"I have always 'seen' things," the girl told him. "You won't understand. But I have always 'seen' things. When I was a small child, there was a boy who used to come and play with me.

"He would call for me sometimes in the morning and I would go with him in the garden and play for hours. He told me his name was Charley. When he went away, he always used to say, 'I'll call for you again soon.'

"Then he would come around again, and we would go out in the garden. I was very small when it started.

"Looking back, I remember it seeming strange that, whereas I grew bigger, he did not seem to grow. I would go away and tell my mother about it. She would say, 'Oh, yes,' or something like that, and go on with her work.

"Then, one day, when I went in from the garden, and told her something that Charley had said, she suddenly burst out with 'You little fool, don't tell me such lies! If you ever mention Charley again I'll slap you!'"

She had seen Charley afterwards, the girl went on, but she had always kept it a secret to

herself. Then she began to realise that Charley was not an ordinary being like the other people she knew. One day he told her, "I am dead, you know. I have been dead for years."

He did not seem dead. But she believed him. And then, on through all the years, every now and then, she had either "seen" Charley or other people of whom, apparently, the others around her were completely unaware.

A very broad grin came across Wendell Holmes's face when she got to this.

"Why do you tell me such nonsense as that?" he said.

"That was how my mother talked," replied the girl. "But all I know is that I see these people. Sometimes they tell me things. And I wanted to tell you to-night that, the moment you came into the restaurant, I saw beside you a woman."

The girl described her face and her clothes and a brooch that she was wearing, one set with garnets and of a strange design.

"Why, that sounds like my mother," said Holmes.

"She *said* she was your mother," went on the girl. "And she told me to warn you not to go on the lot to-morrow."

"What a lot of nonsense!" said the film star.

"It is not nonsense. I knew you would not believe me. But, even then, I knew that I had to tell you about it. I could not let your mother down. She stood beside you all the time and kept on saying, 'Tell him, tell him.'"

"If you had been one of these fake clairvoyants," said the film star, "I would have helped you. But I don't believe in the sort of nonsense you talk. I will have nothing to do with it. Besides, I wouldn't mind a joke. But, if it is true, I've got to see it through. . . ."

The girl pleaded, and they argued. Then, disconsolately, after an hour of urging, she went away, a chauffeur driving her in his master's car.

They told in big headlines how, when Wendell Holmes was in the middle of one of his passionate love scenes next day, a wall collapsed and crushed him.

The news was flashed to every country in the world. It went on the front pages of newspapers in every capital.

They described, in lurid detail, how he fell, and the agony of his suffering, and how it took him nearly an hour to die.

But what they did not understand were the words he kept saying.

“That girl was right,” they heard, in a continued whisper. “Tell her I am sorry. . . .”

The girl had other things to worry her. Dismissed for leaving her job at a busy hour, she was by that time looking for work, one of hundreds of the unemployed beauties who, in Hollywood and Los Angeles, meant nothing and were nobodies.

“Still, I did my duty,” she thought, walking from restaurant to restaurant, and from store to store. . . .

Now and then, near her, she saw the World’s Lover—smiling.

“It was better this way,” he said.

And she went on, searching for work. . . .

HER LAST "MESSIAH"

It was a long walk up the Exhibition Road. But she managed it. It was a strain. But many things had been a strain the last few weeks.

Besides, at the end of her walk there was the twice-yearly sacrament which had become a part of her life.

For thirty-five years she had belonged to the Royal Choral Society and twice a year, at Christmas and at Easter, she had sung in "The Messiah," just one of the vast chorus, hundreds of them.

And every time she wondered whether she would ever sing again.

Have you ever watched that great chorus in the Albert Hall? They come in gradually, in white—the women—and sit down in fan-shaped rows of seats. Behind them the men come in.

And in the middle, and in front, the orchestra sit, tuning their instruments, fussing about. It is not so serious a thing with the orchestra. They have their other nights of ecstasy, their Beethovens. . . . To some, Handel is only one of those upstarts. But to many of the choir he means not only the glory of singing, but the glory of Heaven. His is the simplicity of common folk, just ordinary beings like you and me.

Few things have so woven themselves into

English life as the work of the German Handel, who, coming from a native land that did not think much of him, settled in England and wrote oratorios which as the years pass become more and more a part of our country's musical life.

Whenever, in the Albert Hall, I face that choir, I know that in its total membership of 800—500 women and 300 men—there are 800 different romances, dramas and minor tragedies.

Some of them are young people. But the oldest have sung for as long as forty years.

Margaret's whole life seemed wrapped up in this. The Streatham home, from which she came, was merely a background. There she encountered, daily, the troubles of family, house-keeping, children. . . . It was here, in the Albert Hall, where she drew inspiration.

It seemed funny to her to dress up in "Hiawatha," as sometimes she and the others did. That seemed a childish idea. But obediently, as one of a thousand performers, Margaret had browned her face and become a Red Indian, and jumped about the arena, while Coleridge Taylor's music was played, laughing a little at the fattish men who still wore glasses while pretending they were Indian braves.

That, she thought, was an idiosyncrasy.

But then, every Monday night, for six months

of the year, she went along to choir practice, where "Elijah," and Verdi's "Requiem," and the "Mass of Life" of Delius all gave new refreshment to her soul.

She endured a lot in Streatham because of that—yes, even the criticism of the neighbours, who, on Sunday night, heard her singing in the front room. They called it squawking. But then they did not know. . . .

And at Christmas time there were carols, too, in the Albert Hall. And, twice a year, the greatest of all things, "The Messiah," came round again.

Sometimes a face was missing. There were often new faces. They were a family. And yet many had their little vanities and their pride of place. And what a pride it was to scores and scores of them—emerging from the suburbs, now and then, all through the winter months, and facing all those boxes and stalls, and the vast amphitheatre, looking at the red curtains in the boxes and the wedgwood-blue decorations in front of them, and singing, with a loud full-throatedness, "Glory to God in the highest" and "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men."

Would she die before her voice became too weak? Would she, one day, have to sit in the auditorium instead, as some of the old choristers

did, with their scores on their knees, singing quietly to themselves?

"Why do they want the score?" she often wondered, watching them with a friendly pity. They all knew every word of it.

Now, this was to be the last time. Something had told her. She seemed to know. . . .

A pain came in her heart suddenly, a few weeks before. And if she got to the Albert Hall this time—well, she would never do it again.

"Don't go, Mother," her children had said. "You are not well enough."

But she had to go. . . .

"Why worry about that fool concert?" her husband had sneered, tired of all the rehearsals, and all the monthly pilgrimages to concerts, and the fuss about the white dress which had to be cleaned so often.

She had not liked her white dress for years. They had got smarter recently, most of the rest of them. Some, too, had a silk scarf of the palest blue, and there were golden scarves that she envied.

There had been the fuss of ironing, and mending, that old dress—yes, and twice she had taken the silk to pieces, and "made it all over again," with a shorter skirt once, and then with a piece added on again, as the fashions changed.

She often wondered if other choristers noticed that the silk was getting thin. *She* knew. And God knew. But she did not imagine that God cared much. Still, the eyes of choristers penetrate and criticise. And that tallish woman from Holland Park often had a new frock. . . .

It had never been so long a walk up the Exhibition Road. Everyone in South Kensington knows how far it is, especially in the rain. You have to keep on and on, climbing.

She wondered why she had gone back indoors again when she left.

"What do you want?" they had said.

She did not know. She looked a little yearningly, and came away again.

"I shall be home at seven," she said. And then she wondered.

"Oh, what a pity the Doctor's not conducting to-day!"

That was the first thing she heard, inside the hall where, in a cloakroom, the women discarded their coats and took their music out.

He had speeded them up, this young man, and taught them new ways of singing the old, old melodies. They all felt younger when, with his baton swaying, he blent them all into variations of light and shade in singing, new contrasts of which they had never dreamed.

They all remembered the eventful day that started all that, when the Revolutionary came along and knocked out all the Victorianism, and made them, for a little, almost laugh in their joy over the violence of the sound. That was the first time he had introduced it. What a row there had been!

They all felt rather ashamed of themselves, so new was it, although most of them had enjoyed it so. How the suburbs had whispered, for nights afterwards!

“Insult to Handel,” some had said.

She had herself wondered what the German would have thought.

This was the sixtieth time she had sat there, waiting for Handel’s overture. Sixty times.

There was the day, she remembered, when Albert had just gone overseas and, when the drum was beaten, she fancied she could hear the guns in France. God, somehow, seemed very near that afternoon, in spite of her fears for her eldest son. . . .

“Peace on earth,” she had sung with the rest that afternoon, “goodwill towards men.”

No, it had not seemed a mockery, even with those guns firing, hundreds of them, all louder than that drum. She felt, as she sang that

afternoon, that, *one day*, the Prince of Peace would keep His glorious promise.

There was that year, too, when Jim had lost his job and all seemed desolate, and her fare to South Kensington seemed so much, few though its pennies were.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people," the tenor had begun. And she found solace in the clear notes—yes, and a blessing in the words.

Her mind shot back many years, that day—to years of trial and stress, yes, and to times of hope and of happiness. She surveyed the long avenue of Experience which she had travelled since, as a frail young thing, she first had sat, watching the tuning-up, looking on as, one by one, the other choristers had come in.

And she thanked God for the mercy He had shown and for the goodness there was, and the balm she had found.

There was a new soprano this year. Once she had dreamed that, by a miracle, some day she might sit there in the front, with the tenor on her right and the conductor on her left, and with the contralto and the bass on the other side of him. But that joy was only for the great ones.

No, it was not a joy as hers was. They drew

a fee and, for all she knew, took it all professionally. Hers was the gladness of a faith. Only the amateurs knew those joys—the privilege of Service.

How many sopranos had she known who had sat in front of her singing, after the Pastoral Symphony, that haunting sweetness? “There were shepherds abiding in the field,” it began.

Always, at that part, she had shut her eyes and seen, as only you can when you shut out earth vision, the starlit heavens over Bethlehem, and the small group of peasants guarding their sheep, and the biggest Star of all shining high above.

“And lo! the Angel of the Lord came upon them,” it went on, “and the glory of the Lord shone round about them.”

How often she had imagined that glory—yes, and felt it radiantly bathing her soul! How often had she gone home a new woman, not “called to repentance,” as she had heard the revivalists say, but stimulated, freshened!

Only a great Truth could have inspired music like that, she felt. That German had seen far, suffered deeply—and, because of his suffering, the Truth had come to him.

“I was nearly late to-day,” she heard, somewhere at the back.

"No, Teddy's better," came from a woman on her right.

They were filling up and chatting, in their accustomed way.

"The hall's not so full this year."

"No, lots of people are away, and it's such a fine afternoon."

"No, as I said to her . . ."

And so on, with the trivialities of small-talk.

Her pain seemed a little more trying. . . . Well, they wouldn't be long. Then she could sing. . . .

The arena was filling up . . . ah, there was the leader. They always gave him subdued hand-claps—and the violinists always tapped their bows upon their instruments.

Now, in came the quartette of soloists—the tenor leading the soprano and the bass holding the contralto's hand. Then they were all bowing.

Then—the conductor. Not much applause for him this time. He was one of those old ones, deputising. Audiences were more particular nowadays. Where was the Doctor? Oh, still ill, of course. So it was going to be dull.

The overture began and, soon, the overture was over. And then there was to come the

tenor with his recitative and then the air, with the long up-and-down bit about how "Every valley shall be exalted." The tenor ran up and down, trilling. . . .

The pain was getting worse. It was dull, but like a numbed toothache in her side. "The rough places plain." It was still the tenor. . . .

Ah, now. They all rose. Hundreds of them all stood up. No one beckoned. They all knew, of old, just the right second when, as one person, they were all due to stand up to sing. A sign from the conductor. . . .

And then she was singing. "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed," she sang. Yes, there were others joining in, singing too. But it seemed like her first solo.

The glory of the Lord revealed itself in every note, she felt. And the pain had gone. She had forgotten it. The glory of the music engulfed her and made her whole. She was lost in the majesty of it all. Vast worlds of beauty opened themselves. Endless vistas of blueness spread out in front of her.

"And all flesh shall see it together. . . . For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. . . ."

With the assurance that she felt, men have

braved death in battle. With the reality of the knowledge that filled her mind, men have conquered continents.

It was not Streatham she lived in now, she felt, but Paradise. She was no mere obscure suburban woman, but a flame of beauty, a spear of righteousness.

She knew now what the angels knew—the glory of revelation. She was a poetess and an artist and a prophet. Silver and blue and gold surrounded her. The glory of the Lord was not a revelation that was to come in some far-off distant age. It overwhelmed her, possessed her being.

"Hath spoken it." The echoes of the last chords died away. And, with all the rest of them, she sat down.

"Where am I?" she asked. A woman was leaning over, in white. She recognised one of the choir she had known dimly, but not by name, for years. A St. John's Ambulance woman was standing near by. And that man seemed to be a doctor.

It looked like the artists' room. She had peeped in several times when she had got there early. Only the famous people used it. What was she doing there?

“You fainted,” they said. “You will right soon.”

She did not seem to think that was true!

“How far have they got?” she

“Open the door.”

When they obeyed, she heard the choir singing.

“All we like sheep,” they chanted in a mild unison.

So she had missed “He shall feed His flock. How she had longed, once again, to hear the contralto singing what, to her, was the purest of all melodies, the most beautiful of all words: “He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom . . . and gently lead those that are with young.”

“Leave me alone,” she said. “I want close my eyes.”

She did not hear much then, except when the chorus sang. Then the sound came through the door.

Would she ever sing with that mighty choir again? Was this really the last time?

Well, worries seemed very far away. . . . This, tired though she felt, was a day of days.

Ah, they were starting again! She could see them, in her mind, standing up to sing “The Hallelujah Chorus”—and she could see, too, the

bravence standing up for that, as they always did, know, many years ago, a King had stood when conque heard it.

It rose and got upon her feet and struggled felt, the door. Now they were starting.

sublift up your heads, O ye gates," they began. of crept along the passage-way leading to where

S orchestra played. . . . "And be ye lift up, gloeverlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall artine in."

swHundreds of them were singing. Hundreds nere losing themselves in worship and adoration.

One leaned against a partition and, soon too, lost herself with them.

"Who is the King of Glory?" they asked to a majesty of sound, full-throated and magical. All Creation seemed to be asking. And she, too, asked with the others.

"Who is the King of Glory?" she sang. Her face was white. But there came into her eyes a gleam. And there came to her voice a fervour.

She looked up. And, as the triumphant answer came, "The Lord strong and mighty," she saw another choir. It seemed far off and yet it seemed it was a part of the great sound she heard.

There were myriads of faces, all glad in the

Triumph. Their faces were bright. Their eyes shone. There were young. There were old. And yet all were young.

The air was full of them and yet they stretched into an infinity. Rows and rows were arrayed in an endlessness beyond her powers of thought.

And she and the choir of which she was a part and the other great choir, sweeter, larger, louder than the one near her, blent in an act of worship.

The music rose and fell. The chorus burst out into mighty crescendos. Sound towered up. It became great waves, seas of sound, oceans of harmony. It became continents, worlds, a universe.

And she, too, seemed to be rising. . . .

It was Earth and it was Heaven. It was the sun and the moon and the magic of Morning and the height of Noon—yes, and the wonder of Night.

“Who is the King of Glory?” The earth choir sang it and she with them. And the chorus of Heaven, unseen to all but she, sang with the choir of earth.

“The Lord of Hosts,” they sang. “He is the King of Glory.”

Never was there such sound as this! What was pain? There was none! What was trouble? Never was such a thing!

Still louder grew the anthem. Mightier were the chords. "He is the King of Glory. . . . He is the King of Glory."

The suburbs and the spheres met in the majesty of it all.

"He is the King of Glory."

She was looking down now, still singing. Beneath her was the great Albert Hall, the people all standing up, the circular walls vibrant with harmony. Around her were the faces of people she once knew in that choir, lost to her memory for years, still singing as they had sung years before, but more joyously and with a greater sweetness. . . .

And behind the orchestra, just in the passageway, she could see herself. She was just a limp, huddled-up body, lying on the ground.

No, that was not she. She was still singing . . . singing . . . singing. And she knew, now, that it was not the last time that, in "The Messiah," she would sing.

Life was an endless Hallelujah. . . .

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