"Pip"

Books by
IAN HAY

Pip
The Right Stuff
A Man's Man
A Safety Match
Happy-Go-Lucky
A Knight on Wheels
Scally
The First Hundred Thousand

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By Ian Hay

PIP: A ROMANCE OF YOUTH.

GETTING TOGETHER.

THE FIRST HUNDRED THOUSAND.

SCALLY: THE STORY OF A PERFECT GENTLEMAN.

With Frontispiece.

A KNIGHT ON WHEELS.

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY. Illustrated by Charles E. Brock.

A SAFETY MATCH. With frontispiece.

A MAN'S MAN. With frontispiece.

THE RIGHT STUFF. With frontispiece.

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"PIP"

A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

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"PIP"

BOOK ONE

"FIRST, THE INFANT ..."

"PIP"

CHAPTER I

THE PHILANTHROPISTS

IT was to Pipette that the idea originally occurred, but it was upon Pip that parental retribution subsequently fell, Pipette being merely dismissed with a caution. This clemency was due chiefly to the intercession of Cook, who stated, in the rôle of principal witness, that the "poor lamb" (Pipette) "could never have thought of such a thing by herself." This in spite of the poor lamb's indignant protests to the contrary. In this matter, as in many others, Cook showed both personal bias and want of judgment; for Pipette was as sharp as a needle, while Pip, though a willing accomplice and a philosophical scapegoat, was lacking in constructive ability and organising power.

But we have somehow begun at the end of the story, so must make a fresh start.

The Consulting Room, which was strictly out of bounds (and consequently a favourite resort of the children when the big, silent man, who kissed them twice a day, was out), contained many absorbingly interesting and mysterious objects, whose uses Pip and Pipette were dying to know. For instance, there was the Oven Door. It was set in the wall near the fireplace, miles up,—quite five feet,—and was exactly like the oven in the kitchen, except that it was green instead of black. Also, it had a beautiful gold handle. It was not hot, though, for one day Pip climbed on a chair to feel; neither did it open, for he was unable to turn the handle.

They had asked Mr. Evans about it, and he had informed them that it was a place to put bad little boys and girls in. But that was on a day when Mr. Evans was cross, having just had words with Cook about the disgraceful delay between the fish and joint at last night's dinner. Pipette, therefore, outwardly incredulous but inwardly quaking, appealed to Cook, and asked confidentially if the strange thing were not an oven; whereupon Cook embraced her and presented her with an apple, and wondered what the little precious would get into her poor head next, adding as an afterthought that Mr. Evans ought to be ashamed of himself. Pipette was so pleased with the apple and the task of conveying Cook's message

to Mr. Evans's pantry—this was the name of the place where he lived; there was a delightful thing there called the Filter, with a little tap that you could turn on if no one was looking—that she quite forgot to ask what the Oven Door really was; so the mystery remained unsolved for many a day.

There were other wonderful things lying about. Books in plenty (but then books are dull things if you don't happen to be able to read), and two or three curious little articles like wooden trumpets, called "stuffyscopes." It was impossible to play tunes on these, though, and they puzzled the children sorely, until one joyful day when Pipette was taken with a cold on her chest, and Father—the name of the big, silent man who kissed them twice a day—took her into the Consulting Room and used one of those very instruments "to listen to my tummy wiv," as she afterwards explained to the envious Pip, who had not been permitted to be present.

"Did it hurt much?" inquired Pip.

"Not *bewwy* much," replied Pipette, unwilling to throw away a good chance of posing as a martyr. "He putted one end against his ear and the other against my pinny, and said, 'Hold your breff,' and I holded it. Pip, I've thought of a lovely game! Let's see who can hold our breff longest."

This suggestion was adopted, and the new game kept them occupied for quite ten minutes. After that Pipette surrendered unconditionally. To hold your tongue is bad enough, but to hold your breath as well, in competition with a small, silent boy with a solemn face, serious eyes, and lungs apparently of gutta-percha, who seems to suffer no inconvenience from feats of endurance that would exhaust a Red Indian, is more than a mere daughter of Eve can compass.

They were in the Consulting Room at the time, Father having gone out, as he always did between eleven and one; and the various unexplained mysteries of that delightful apartment, which were becoming a serious strain upon Pipette's feminine curiosity, once more lay before them. For the hundredth time they made the tour of the room, gazing, fingering, and wondering.

They merely sighed as they passed the Oven Door. That mysterious portal was past all comprehension. They had made one last effort to obtain first-hand information on the subject only last night, with highly unsatisfactory results. They were always taken to the dining-room at half-past seven to say good-night to Father, who to his numerous other eccentricities added that of eating his dinner at an hour when properly constituted people were going to bed. (Pip's

rather hazy scheme of theology, imbibed in scraps from Cook and others, included a private heaven of his own construction, in which at bedtime little boys, instead of being hustled upstairs by an under-housemaid, sat down to a heavy dinner of several courses.) On this occasion the pair had entered the dining-room bound by the most deadly oaths known to childhood to break down their shyness, and ask once and for all what lay behind the Oven Door. But alas! desire outran performance, and both—all three, in fact—made a sorry mess of things. The big man, almost as shy of them as they were of him, asked Pip, heavily but kindly, how he had spent the afternoon; not because he wished to know, but because the question afforded a conversational opening. Pip replied politely that he had been down the street posting a letter with "one of the girls." He used the expression in all good faith: his firm friend the milkman cried it down the area every afternoon in some such form as, "Anything fresh to-day, girls?" or, "Well, girls, what news?" The big man, however, frowned, and said, "Come, come, sir, no kitchen manners here, if you please," and turned to Pipette, who, with a boldness surprising to herself, was endeavouring to climb on to his knee.

Having reached that eminence, Pipette, assuming a certain coaxing expression which she had found absolutely infallible with Cook, and not without a certain effect on Mr. Evans himself, said rather tremulously—

"Please, Father, is that oven door in the Kersultin' Room *reelly* a oven, or is it just—just to put bad little boys and girls in, like what Mr. Evans says?"

Mr. Evans, who up to this point had been standing in the background, listening to the conversation with an indulgent smile, suddenly remembered that it was time to bring the fish up.

Her father glanced down upon Pipette curiously. He looked tired and worried, as West-End physicians with enormous practices not infrequently do.

"What do you mean by 'oven door'? And what's all this nonsense about *Mr.* Evans?"

Pipette began to quail. This big man was cross about something, just like Mr. Evans when he had "indergestion." Her lip began to tremble.

"I didn't fink it would make you angry," she said rather piteously. "It was just that big oven door in the Kersultin' Room. Me and Pip wanted to know so much, and there wasn't nobody to ask, exceptin' Mr.——"

Here Father, much to Pipette's surprise and embarrassment, suddenly hugged her to his breast, murmuring the while to himself. Then he kissed her twice,—as a rule she kissed him once,—shook hands solemnly with Pip, and despatched them to bed.

The children had no nurse. The last holder of that position had left soon after their mother's death, and Cook had begged so hard to be allowed to take care of the "little dears" herself, that Father, who was too deeply sunk in the apathy of grief to desire to haggle over questions of domestic management, listlessly agreed. Since then Pip and Pipette had been washed, dressed, fed, and bedded by a syndicate composed of Cook and her myrmidons, who brought them up according to their own notions of respectability. Emily, the kitchen-maid, for instance, made no objection to Pip stirring his tea with the handle of his knife; but what shocked her ideas of etiquette and deportment was the fact that he insisted on doing so with his left hand. Somehow Pip's left hand was always getting him into trouble. It was so officious; it was constantly usurping the duties and privileges of its fellow, such as cleaning his teeth, shaking hands, and blowing his nose,—literal acts of *gaucherie* that distressed Emily's genteel soul considerably.

After the children had gone Father sat staring at his untasted dinner. Occasionally his gaze travelled to the opposite end of the table, where some one used to sit,—some one who had been taken from him by an inscrutable Providence five years before. Had she lived, Pip would not have referred to the kitchen-maid as "one of the girls," nor would Pipette be calling the butler "Mr. Evans." All these years he had been trying to hide his desolation by burying himself in his work, with the result that he now found himself busy,—overworked, in fact,—rich, and famous, a man at the head of his profession. *Cui bono?* His children, whom he had promised his dying Dorothea to love and cherish, were learning to venerate the butler and to converse in the jargon of the scullery!

So the Oven Door had to remain an unsolved mystery, and Pip and Pipette were compelled to comfort themselves with the Talking-Hole. This was a most absorbing affair, and, thank goodness! it was no mystery.

The Talking-Hole was carefully plugged with a whistle; and whenever a visitor came to see Father,—they came in shoals between one o'clock and three,—Mr. Evans would uncork a similar hole in the wall of the hall, and after blowing up it vigorously, would murmur the name of the visitor; and his words,

owing to the fact that the Talking-Hole in the hall was in some mysterious way connected with the Talking-Hole in the Consulting Room, were conveyed to Father's ear. The conversation as a rule was of a formal and fragmentary nature, limited on Mr. Evans's part to the announcement of the visitor's name and some such remark as "Special appointment," or "No appointment," and occasionally, "Urgent case,"—always concluding with "Very good, sir." After that Mr. Evans would conduct the visitor up the three carpeted stairs which led to the Consulting Room.

Pip and Pipette loved the Talking-Hole. It was almost their only toy, and it was the more precious to them because they could not use it except when Father was out and Mr. Evans taking his afternoon siesta. Their one child-friend, Tattie Fowler, who was occasionally brought to spend the afternoon with them when her nurse had made arrangements to spend it elsewhere, was always regaled with a full-dress performance whenever she came.

The method of procedure was invariably the same. The children knew every move by heart. The moment that Mr. Evans, having closed the front door on Father, had closed his bedroom door upon himself, Pip would stalk with much majesty into the Consulting Room, shutting the door carefully behind him.

After an interval of about one second, Tattie, endeavouring faithfully to imitate Mr. Evans's stately tread,—have you ever seen a kitten trying to walk like an elephant, reader?—would approach the Talking-Hole in the hall, uncork the tube, and despatch an excited hurricane on its way to the Consulting Room. The following dialogue would then ensue:—

A gruff voice down the tube. Well?

Tattie [*reading from an imaginary card*]. Mr. Henry Hatkins, sir! (This, by the way, happened to be the name of Tattie's nurse's "young man.")

The Voice. Any appointment?

Tattie. None, sir.

The Voice. What's the matter wiv him?

Tattie. Infruenza, *he* thinks, sir.

The Voice. Send him up.

Tattie. Very good, sir.

Then Tattie would cork up the tube and conduct Pipette, who had been sitting patiently in the Waiting Room, up the three stairs to the Consulting Room. Here she abruptly dropped the rôle of Mr. Evans, and announced firmly—

"Now, Pip, it's my turn to be Father!"

(Tattie had no father of her own, and imagined that the term merely implied a large, silent man who lived in a room full of fascinating playthings, opening Oven Doors and blowing down Talking-Holes.)

After that Pip would be the patient, Pipette Mr. Evans, and Tattie Father, and the performance was repeated *in extenso*. Pipette, as the youngest, succeeded to the proud position of "Father" last of all.

Each of them played the leading part in different fashion. Pip, enjoying every moment of his impersonation, always sat solemnly in the big swivel-chair at the table until the whistle blew, when he would lounge across to the Talking-Hole and conduct the conversation as deliberately as possible. Pipette, on the other hand, possessed none of this artistic restraint, and was always standing on a chair, with her small ear ecstatically pressed against the mouth of the tube, by the time that Pip, in the character of Mr. Evans, was ready to converse with her. Consequently his withering blast, when it arrived, impinged straight upon Pipette's eardrum, frequently knocking her off her chair and invariably dulling her hearing for the afternoon.

Considerable freedom, too, was permitted in the interpretation of the part of Mr. Evans, especially in describing the patients' symptoms. In this respect the children were compelled to draw chiefly upon their own somewhat slight experience; for Mr. Evans, though he invariably gave the patients' names, was not as a rule entrusted with their complaints as well. Consequently the maladies which were shrieked up the tube so gleefully were those indigenous to small children, cooks and the like. When introduced by Pipette, the patient was usually suffering from "palpurtations, that bad!" (an echo of Cook); Tattie, whose pretty and interesting mamma affected fashionable complaints, would diagnose the case in hand as "nerves all in a jangle again"; while Pip, who was lacking in imagination but possessed a retentive memory, invariably announced, with feeling, that the visitor was a victim of a "*fearful* pain in his (or her) tummy!"

Near the Talking-Hole, on a small table, stood "The Terriphone." This, they

gathered, was a sort of long-distance talking-hole. You turned a little handle, and, taking a queer, cup-shaped arrangement off a hook, conversed affably through it with unseen people, situated somewhere at the back of beyond. The children had seen Mr. Evans use it for sending messages to Father *via* Mr. Pipes. Mr. Pipes was a great friend of Pipette's. In the first place, he wore a uniform, which always appeals to the feminine mind. Then he lived in a fascinating little glass house at the gates of a great building called "The Orspital," where Father apparently spent much of his time. In the courtyard inside the gates bareheaded young men passed to and fro, discoursing learnedly of mysterious things called "Ops." Mr. Pipes wore two medals on his uniform, but beyond these there was nothing very attractive in the glass house excepting the Terriphone, which stood on a little ledge beside the pigeon-hole. Mr. Pipes, being attached to Emily, the under-housemaid, was always glad to see the children when it was that engaging damsel's turn to take them for a walk. From him they learned one day that his Terriphone communicated with the one at home, quite three streets away.

"It must be a long hole," remarked Pip reflectively to his sister.

The conversation then turned upon the weather. Mr. Pipes announced to the sympathetic Emily that, as a result of having to sit all day in a blooming greenhouse, his feet were slowly turning to ice. The authorities of the Orspital, he added bitterly, declined to allow him a fire, alleging that an oil-stove was sufficient for his needs.

"What a shime!" said pretty Emily.

"Something crool!" exclaimed sympathetic Pipette. (She had picked up this expression from Susan, the kitchen-maid, who was regarded by her colleagues as being somewhat "common in her talk.")

"Pore devil!" remarked Pip dispassionately.

"Master Pip!" cried the scandalised Emily, blushing in a manner which Mr. Pipes thought most becoming.

Pip, who had just gathered this pearl of speech from the lips of one of the hatless young gentlemen who talked of "Ops," turned his steady and inscrutable gaze upon Emily, beneath which that damsel's fetching frown faded, as it always did, into an uneasy smirk.

"There is something about that child," she once confided to Cook, "that makes

me feel as weak as water. Looks at you as though your 'air was coming down on your face smudged. Says nothink, but he's a masterful one. Be a terror some day!"

Meanwhile Pipette, in whose charitable little soul a new and splendid scheme of outdoor relief had just sprung into being, asked, in a tone of suppressed excitement—

"Mr. Pipes, *please*, does your Terriphone go straight to our house?"

"As straight as straight, me lady," replied Mr. Pipes, who affected an easy jocularity when conversing with Pipette.

"Ooh!" Pipette turned to her brother.

"Pip, amind me to tell you somethin' when we get home."

Pip turned a cold glance upon her.

"You'll tell me all about it on the way there, I expect."

"I *won't*!" cried Pipette indignantly.

"Oh, yes, you will. Women can't keep nothin' to theirselves."

This pronouncement, delivered in Mr. Evans's most impressive manner, roused Emily and Mr. Pipes to unseemly mirth, and nearly reduced Pipette to tears. Mr. Pipes remarked that Pip was a "caution," while Emily summed him up as a "cure." Shortly after that, Emily and Mr. Pipes having made a now familiar reference to "the same old spot at half-past four on Sunday," the visit terminated with the usual expressions of good-will, and the children were taken home to tea.

Pipette's offended dignity held out till next morning, when, as soon as the banging of the front door announced that Father had gone off in his brougham for his daily round, she proposed a visit to the Consulting Room.

"In the morning? What for?" said Pip.

Pipette was positively heaving with suppressed excitement.

"You go there and wait," she said, "and I'll run down to Cook a minute, and then we'll—no, I *won't* tell you yet! Go on!"

Fearful of letting her precious secret escape too soon, she gave Pip a push in

the direction of the Consulting Room and danced off to the kitchen, leaving that impassive philosopher to ruminate upon the volatile temperament of the female sex. However, he departed as bidden, and amused himself by sitting in the swing-chair, and endeavouring without success, for the hundredth time, to play a tune on a stethoscope.

Presently Pipette returned, carrying two little basins of the soup which usually served to span the yawning gulf between their breakfast and dinner.

Pip took his soup, and began to drink it.

"Stop a minute, Pip!" screamed Pipette.

Pip put down his basin.

"Well, what is it now?" he remarked.

Pipette at last unfolded her plan.

"Pip," she began a little shyly,—like all inventors, she dreaded criticism,—"you 'member poor Mr. Pipes saying how cold he was?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's send him this nice hot soup, Pip,—by Terriphone!"

The last words came with a rush. Then Pipette, heaving such a sigh as Sinbad must have emitted when he had got rid of the Old Man of the Sea, awaited her brother's reply.

Pip smiled indulgently.

"Silly kid!" he remarked.

Pipette had expected this.

"Yes," she said; "but, Pip, wouldn't it be *loverly* to do it?"

Pip's practical mind began to evolve difficulties.

"*How* are you goin' to do it?"

Pipette projected upon him a glance in which artless surprise, deferential admiration, and simple faith were exquisitely mingled,—a glance which, in after years, her husband once ruefully described as "good for a ten-pound note at any

hour of the day,"—and replied simply—

"I thought *you* would manage all that, Pip. You're so bewwy clever!"

"All right," said Pip. "Let's do it."

Thus it is that women make fools of the strongest men.

They carried their soup carefully over to the little table beside the telephone.

"I say," said Pip suddenly, "is he to have both basins?"

Pipette's bounteous nature would gladly have sacrificed both Pip's lunch and her own, but she thought it wiser to concede this point.

"No; one will do, I fink," she replied.

"All right. You can drink half mine," said Pip.

They gravely drank Pip's soup, turn about, and then applied themselves to the matter in hand.

First, they lifted the receiver of the telephone from its rest and surveyed it doubtfully. There was a cup-shaped receptacle at one end into which soup could easily be poured, but the "tube" which connected it to the instrument was of very meagre dimensions.

"Are you sure there's a pipe all the way?" inquired Pip doubtfully.

"Certain. It's just the same as the Talking-Hole, only thinner. And the Talking-Hole has got a pipe all the way, 'cause don't you remember you put a glass marble in one day when I told you not to, and it fell out in the hall?"

Pip's doubts were not quite satisfied even with this brilliant parallel.

"It'll take a long time to get through," he said. He was fingering the silk-coated wire. "This pipe's awful thin. A marble would never get down *it*."

"No, but the soup will twickle down all right," said Pipette, whose mind, busy with works of mercy, soared far above these utilitarian details. (In later years she was a confirmed bazaar organiser.)

"We'll ring and tell him first, shall we?" suggested Pip.

"Yes, let's!" murmured Pipette joyfully.

She turned the call-handle, and Pip held the receiver, just as he had seen Mr. Evans do. After a decent interval he remarked into the cup—

"Are you there, Mr. Pipes? This is us."

This highly illuminating statement met with no response.

"I suppose he can hear you," said Pipette anxiously.

"Oh, yes. I'm talkin' just as loud as Mr. Evans does."

"I suppose you'll be able to hear him, then?"

"I expect so. But it's a long way. Ring again."

This time, in turning the call-handle, Pipette accidentally placed her hand on the receiver-hook, with the result that she actually rang up the Exchange Office.

Presently a voice inquired brusquely of Pip what he wanted. His reply was a delighted yell, and an announcement to Mr. Pipes that he had something for him. Further revelations were frustrated by Pipette, who tore the receiver from his grasp, and, holding her hand over the opening to prevent eavesdropping on the part of the *bénéficiaire*, whispered excitedly in his ear—

"Don't tell him any more! We'll just pour it in now, and give him such a surprise!"

Consequently the young lady in the Exchange Office was soon compelled to relinquish her languid efforts to find out what No. 015273 really wanted, and incontinently switched him off, recking little of the way in which two small philanthropists at the other end of the wire were treating the property of the National Telephone Company.

Very carefully Pip poured the soup into the cup-shaped receiver of the telephone, which Pipette held as steadily as her excitement would permit.

From the first it became obvious that soup-delivery by telephone was going to be a slow business, for the cup transmitted the generous fluid most reluctantly.

"It's such a *very* thin pipe," they explained to each other hopefully.

At length Pip remarked—

"I should think some of it had got there by now."

"Not bewwy much, I don't fink," said Pipette; "this handle thing's still pretty full."

"But the basin's nearly empty," said Pip. "The stuff must have gone somewhere."

"Some of it has gone on the floor," said Pipette truthfully.

At this moment the clock struck one.

"Father will be in soon," said Pip. "We'd better wipe up."

They propped the telephone receiver on the little table between the directory and a bookstand, and cleared up the mess on the floor with a handkerchief—Pipette's. As they finished they heard the brougham drive up.

"It isn't nearly all gone," said Pip gloomily, peering into the receiver. "If we hang it up on its hook the stuff will all fall out. Let's leave it like it is. Father doesn't never use the Terriphone till after lunch, and it will be all gone by then. Come on, Pipette."

The two Samaritans turned their backs upon the telephone and stole out of the room, leaving that sorely tried instrument to digest its unaccustomed luncheon as best it might.

It was Mr. Evans who suffered most. He was sent into the Consulting Room just before dinner to telephone a message to a patient. The telephone stood in a dark corner, and the gas in the room was turned low. Mr. Evans was surprised to find that the receiver, instead of hanging on its hook, was lying on the little table, carefully propped between the directory and a bookstand.

On lifting it up he was surprised by an unwonted feeling of stickiness; but when he held the instrument to the light, the reason revealed itself to him immediately in the form of a dollop of congealed chicken-broth, nicely rounded to the shape of the cup, which shot from its resting-place, with a clammy thud, on to his clean shirtfront, and then proceeded to slide rapidly down inside his dress waistcoat, leaving a snail-like track, dotted with grains of rice, behind it.

Pip was sent supperless to bed, where Pipette, completely broken down by remorse and sisterly affection, voluntarily joined him not much later. The following week they were sent to school.

CHAPTER II

MR. POCKLINGTON'S

So Pip and Pipette went to school, and life in its entirety lay at their feet.

Hitherto the social circle in which they moved had been limited on the male side to Father, Mr. Evans, and Mr. Pipes, together with the milkman, the lamplighter, and a few more nodding acquaintances; and on the female to Tattie Fowler, Cook, and a long line of housemaids. The children could neither read nor write; the fact that they possessed immortal souls was practically unrevealed to them; and their religious exercises were limited to a single stereotyped prayer, imparted by Cook, and perfunctorily delivered night and morning by the children, at the bidding of the housemaid in charge, to a mysterious Power whose sole function, so far as they could gather, was to keep an eye upon them during their attendant's frequent nights-out, and to report delinquencies (by some occult means) on her return.

Of the ordinary usages of polite society they knew little or nothing. To Pip and Pipette etiquette and deportment were summed up in the following nursery laws, as amended by the Kitchen:—

> I. Girls, owing to some mysterious infirmity which is never apparent, and for which they are not responsible, must be helped first to everything.
>
> II. A boy must on no account punch a girl, even though she is older and bigger than himself. (For reason, see I.)
>
> III. A girl must not scratch a boy. Not that the boy matters, but it is unladylike.
>
> IV. Real men do not play with dolls. (However, you may pretend to be a doctor, and administer medicine, without loss of dignity.)
>
> V. Real ladies do not climb the trees in the garden in the Square. (But you can get over this difficulty by pretending to be a boy or a

monkey for half an hour.)

VI. Girls never have dirty hands—only boys. (For solution of this difficulty see note on V.)

VII. You must *never* tell tales. Girls must be specially careful about this, not because they are more prone to do so, but because boys think they are.

VIII. Real men never kiss girls, but they may sometimes permit girls to kiss them.

IX. You must eat up your bread-and-butter before you have any cake. (This rule holds good, they found out later, all through life.)

X. Do not blow upon your tea to cool it: this is very vulgar. Pour it into your saucer instead.

Clearly it was high time they went to school, and Father, who had had vague thoughts for some time about "procuring a tutor" for Pip, finally made up his mind, and despatched both children one morning in the brougham to Mr. Pocklington's.

The school was a comfortable-looking building, standing inside high walls in a secluded corner of Regent's Park. On the gate shone a large brass plate bearing the inscription—

WENTWORTH HOUSE SCHOOL
AND
KINDERGARTEN.

MR. POCKLINGTON.
THE MISSES POCKLINGTON.

The children could not read this, but Mr. Evans, who accompanied them in the brougham on the first morning, kindly consented to do so, his efforts to pronounce the word "Kindergarten" (an enterprise upon which he embarked before realising that he might with perfect safety have left it out altogether) pleasantly beguiling the time until the gate was opened by a boy in buttons.

Pip and Pipette found themselves in a cheerful-looking hall, larger and brighter than that at home, and stood staring with solemn eyes at the unwonted objects around them. From a room on their right came a subdued hum, and upstairs they could hear juvenile voices singing in chorus. They were put to wait in a small room.

Presently the door opened, and an old gentleman with white whiskers and a black velveteen jacket trotted in. Mr. Evans bowed respectfully.

"The doctor's compliments, sir, and I was to inquire what time the young lady and gentleman was to be sent for?" he said.

"Our morning hours," replied Mr. Pocklington with a precise air, "are from nine-thirty till twelve-thirty. At twelve-thirty we take exercise in the playground. Should the weather be inclement we adjourn to the Gymnasium. Luncheon is served at one-thirty, and we resume our studies at two-thirty. We desist from our labours at four."

Mr. Evans having made a dignified exit, the children, for the first time in their lives, found themselves alone in the world, and suddenly realised that the world was very big and they were very small. Pipette was at once handed over to a lady called Miss Arabella, while Pip was escorted by Mr. Pocklington to the changing-room, where he was given a peg for his coat, a peg for his cap, a locker for his boots, and a wash-hand basin for his ablutions (everything carefully labelled and numbered), and was otherwise universally equipped for the battle of life. Then he was taken into Mr. Pocklington's private sitting-room, whence, after a brief but all too adequate inquiry into his attainments, he was unhesitatingly relegated to the lowest class in the school, where he found Pipette already installed at the bottom of the bottom bench. Here we will leave them for a time, dumbly gazing at the opening page of a new reading-book, whereon appears the presentment of what they have hitherto regarded as a donkey, but which three large printed letters at the foot of the page inform them must henceforth be called an A-S-S.

Mr. Pocklington had been intended by nature for an old maid. He was an elderly faddist of a rather tiresome type, with theories upon every possible subject, from cellular underclothing to the higher education of women. He was a widower, and was assisted in the management of the school by his three daughters—Miss Mary, Miss Arabella, and Miss Amelia.

The daily routine of Wentworth House School was marked by an Old-World

precision and formality which adults might have found a trifle irksome; but it did the children no particular harm beyond making them slightly priggish in their manners, and no particular good beyond instilling into them a few habits of order and method.

The day began at twenty minutes past nine with "whistle-in." The "monitor" for the week—a patriarch of ten or eleven—appeared at the side door, which gave on to the playground, and blew a resonant blast on a silver whistle. Followed a scramble in the dressing-rooms, while boys and girls changed their boots for slippers. At three minutes to the half-hour the monitor, having hung the whistle on its proper peg and armed him-(or her-) self with a dinner-bell, clanged out a summons to "line up." Thereupon the pupils of Wentworth House School formed a double *queue* along the passage, the eldest boy with the eldest girl, and so on,—Mr. Pocklington believed in mingling the sexes thoroughly: it taught girls not to whisper and giggle, and gave boys ease of manner in the presence of females,—and at the stroke of nine-thirty, to the accompaniment of an ear-splitting fantasia on the bell, the animals marched arm-in-arm into the ark (as represented by the large schoolroom), where Noah (Mr. Pocklington), supported by Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Amazonian Miss Mary, shy and retiring Miss Arabella, and pretty and frivolous Miss Amelia) stood ready to take roll-call.

Roll-call at Wentworth House was an all-embracing function. Besides answering their names, pupils were required to state whether they required "lunch" at the interval, and to announce the name of any library books that they might be borrowing or returning. Parental petitions and ultimatums were also delivered at this time. As might have been expected in such an establishment, all communications had to be couched in elegant and suitable phraseology of Mr. Pocklington's own composition. Consequently roll-call was a somewhat protracted function. As a rule the performance consisted of a series of conversations of the following type:—

Mr. Pocklington. Reginald!

A high squeaky Voice. Present, sir. I wish to take a glass of milk during the interval, and I am returning "The Young Carthaginian," thanking you for the loan-of-the-same.

Or—

Mr. Pocklington. Beatrice!

A rather breathless little Voice. Present, sir. I wish to take a glass of milk *and* a bun [*very emphatic this*] durin' the interval, and I propose, with your permission, to borrow this copy of "Carrots Just a Little Boy"; and, please, I've got a note from mum—I mean I am the bearer of a letter from my mother asking for you to be so kind as to—to excuse my not havin' done all my home work, 'cos I forgot—

Mr. Pocklington. Beatrice!

The R. B. L. V. I mean 'cos I *neglected* [there was no such word as "forget" in Mr. Pocklington's curriculum] to take the book home. And, please, mum—my mother would have written to you by post last night, only she forg—neglected to do it till it was too late.

And Beatrice, having unburdened herself of a task which has been clouding her small horizon ever since breakfast, sits down with a sigh of intense relief.

On the first morning after their arrival, Mr. Pocklington, having called out the last name and registered the last glass of milk, drew the attention of the school to Pip and Pipette.

"You have to welcome two fresh companions this morning," he said. "I will enter their names on the register, and will then read them aloud to you, in order that you may know how to address your new friends."

Turning to Pip, Mr. Pocklington asked his name.

"Pip."

"No, no," said Mr. Pocklington testily. "Your first baptismal name, boy!"

Pip, to whom the existence of baptismal names was now revealed for the first time, merely turned extremely red and shook his head.

"We do not countenance childish nicknames here," said Mr. Pocklington grandly. "What is your Christian name, boy?"

Pip, to whom Christian and baptismal names were an equal mystery, continued to sit mute, glaring the while in a most disconcerting fashion at poor Miss Arabella, who happened to sit opposite to him.

Mr. Pocklington turned impatiently to Pipette.

"What is your brother's name?"

"Please, it's just Pip," replied Pipette plaintively, groping for Pip's hand under the desk. "He hasn't got any other name, I don't fink."

"Perhaps it is Philip," suggested pretty Miss Amelia. "I believe"—with a little blush—"that 'Pip' is occasionally used as an abbreviation for that name. Is your name Philip, little boy?" she asked, leaning forward to Pip, with a glance which he would have valued considerably more if he had been ten years older.

"I don't know," said Pip.

"I think it must be Philip," said Miss Amelia, turning to her father.

So Pip was inscribed on the roll as Philip, which, as it happened, *was* his real name. (By the way, his surname was Wilmot.)

"Now, *your* first baptismal name, little girl?" said Mr. Pocklington briskly, turning to Pipette.

"Please, it's Pipette," she replied apprehensively.

Her fears were not ungrounded. The school began to titter.

"Pipette? My dear, that is a quite impossible name. A pipette is a small glass instrument employed in practical chemistry. Surely you have some proper baptismal name! Perhaps you can suggest a solution again," he added, turning to Miss Amelia.

No, Miss Amelia could offer no suggestion. Her forte, it appeared, was gentlemen's names. As a matter of fact, Pipette's name, as ascertained by reference to Father by post that night, was Dorothea, and she had been laughingly christened "Pipette" by her mother, because her father, when summoned from the laboratory to view his newly born daughter, had arrived holding a pipette in his hand.

So Pip and Pipette, much to their surprise and indignation, found themselves addressed as Philip and Dorothea respectively, and as such joined in the pursuit of knowledge in company with a motley crew of Arthurs, Reginalds, Ermyntrudes, Winifreds, and the like. Surnames were not employed in the school. If two children possessed the same Christian name they were distinguished by the addition of any other sub-title they happened to possess.

Three unfortunate youths, for instance, were addressed respectively as John Augustus, John William, and John Evelyn.

Things at Wentworth House School move in a stereotyped circle, and Pip and Pipette soon became familiar with the curriculum. There were three classes, they found. The First Class, the veterans, nearly old enough to go to a preparatory school, dwelt in a stuffy apartment called "The Study." Their learning was profound, for they were taught a mysterious language called Latin, and another, even more mysterious, called "Alzeber" (or something like that). The Second Class, conducted by Miss Mary—formidable, but a good sort—in a corner of the schoolroom, did not fly so high. They studied history and geography, and were addicted to a fearsome form of parlour-game called "Mentalarithmetic," which involved much shrieking of answers to highly impossible questions about equally dividing seventeen apples among five boys.

Pip and Pipette occupied a humble position in the Third Class, where they soon developed a fervent admiration for pretty Miss Amelia, who was always smiling, always daintily dressed, and charmingly inaccurate and casual.

On Thursday afternoons the whole school assembled in the Music Room. Here faded Miss Arabella thumped mechanically on the piano, while the pupils of Wentworth House School chanted an inexplicable and interminable ditty entitled "Doh-ray-me-fah." The words of this canticle were printed on a canvas sheet upon the wall, and the method of inculcation was somewhat peculiar. Mr. Pocklington, taking his stand beside the sheet, would lay the tip of his little white wand upon the word "Doh" printed at the bottom. Miss Arabella would strike a note upon the piano, and the school would reproduce the same with no uncertain sound, sustaining it by one prolonged howl until the white wand slid up to "Ray," an example which the vocalists would attempt to follow to the best of their ability, and with varying degrees of success. Having rallied and concentrated his forces on "Ray," Mr. Pocklington would advance to "Me," and then to "Fah," the effects achieved by the elder male choristers, whose voices were reaching the cracking stage, as the scale approached the topmost "Doh," being as surprising as they were various.

The hour always concluded with a sort of musical steeplechase. The white wand would skip incontinently from Doh to Fah, and from Me to Soh, the singers following after—faint yet pursuing. At the end of three minutes, the field having tailed out, so to speak, every note in the gamut was being sung, *fortissimo*, by at least one member of the choir, and the total effect was more

suggestive of a home for lost dogs than an academy for the sons and daughters of gentlemen.

Our friends enjoyed this diversion hugely. Pipette, who could carol like a lark, hopped from note to note with an agility only equalled by that of the white wand itself. Pip, who had no music in his soul, adopted a different method of procedure. Selecting a note well within his compass, he would stick to it with characteristic thoroughness and a gradually blackening countenance, until a final flourish from the white wand intimated to all and sundry that this nuisance must now cease.

Pip and Pipette were also submitted to a rather farcical ordeal which Mr. Pocklington called his "common-sense test." Shortly after their arrival they were called into the Study, where Mr. Pocklington, after a little homily on the danger of judging by appearances and the fallaciousness of giving preference to quantity rather than quality, produced a threepenny-bit and a penny, and commanded his auditors to take their choice. Pipette unhesitatingly picked the threepenny-bit, and was commended for her acumen. Pip, when it came to his turn, selected the penny, and after being soundly rated for his stupidity was cast forth from the Study and bidden to learn sense. A week later he was again put to the test, and again chose the penny, repeating his performance with stolid regularity when given a further opportunity of redeeming his character the following week. After that the affair developed into a kind of round game, Mr. Pocklington producing the two coins from time to time and Pip invariably selecting the penny,—a proceeding which gave his preceptor unlimited opportunities for tiresome little lectures to the school in general, and Pip in particular, on the subjects mentioned above.

Finally, after the entertainment had been repeated week by week for some time, Pipette, whose loyal little soul chafed at the sycophantic giggles of the other boys and girls when Pip was being scarified by Mr. Pocklington, boldly broached the matter to her brother.

"Pip, why don't you take the fripenny-bit? If you did he'd stop bein' so howwid to you."

Pip regarded his sister's small eager face with cold scorn.

"If once I took the threepenny-bit," he replied, "he'd stop offerin' the money altogether. Why, I've made eightpence since I came here. Silly kid!"

This was the last occasion in their lives on which Pipette ever questioned the wisdom of her beloved brother's actions.

Both children made friends rapidly. Pip, indeed, soon after his arrival, received a proposal of marriage, which, ever ready to oblige a lady, he accepted forthwith. But he was reckoning without Pipette. That jealous little person, finding one day that Pip had suddenly deserted her, and was at that moment actually sharing his morning bun with his fiancée in the boot-room, incontinently burst in upon the lovers, and after a brief but decisive interview despatched her rival howling from the room, remaining herself to share the bun with the newly restored Pip, who, to be quite frank, had been finding the rôle of a Romeo, however passive, rather exacting.

Isabel Dinting, the disappointed lady, was inconsolable for a day or two, but she eventually recovered her spirits, and lived to heap coals of fire on Pip's head, as you shall hear.

One of the most curious and characteristic institutions at Wentworth House School was Mr. Pocklington's system of "Task-Tickets." Every boy and girl on entering the school received ten little tablets about the size of visiting-cards, inscribed with his or her name, and numbered from one to ten consecutively. If a pupil failed in a lesson or broke a rule, one of his Task-Tickets was impounded, and was not restored until the faulty lesson was perfected or a specified imposition performed. Periodically there would be an "inspection," and many a small head whose owner was discovered to be short of tickets would be hung in shame that day. Only such confirmed reprobates as Thomas Oates, the bad boy of the school (whom Mr. Pocklington in his more jocular moments addressed as "Titus," much to his hearers' mystification), could endure the stigma of being perpetually without a full complement. Thomas indeed once electrified the school by announcing to Miss Mary, when asked for a ticket in default of an unlearned lesson, that *all* his tickets were in pawn already, and that, until he had redeemed one of the same, he would be unable to oblige her. Mr. Pocklington and the majority of his staff were horror-struck at such iniquity; but Miss Mary, in whom was concentrated most of the common sense of the family, instituted a search in Master Thomas's desk, with the result that she triumphantly fished out no less than five tickets. All of which goes to prove that Thomas Oates, like a good many of us, preferred notoriety, even as a malefactor, to respectable oblivion.

The Task-Ticket system presented another feature of interest. Besides their

regulation ten ordinary tickets, Mr. Pocklington's pupils were entitled to acquire "Special Task-Tickets." If you weeded the garden, or filled some ink-pots, or wrote a specially neat copy, you were presented with a Task-Ticket marked "Special" in red ink in one corner. Next time a breakdown in work or the infraction of a rule brought you within the sphere of operations of Mr. Pocklington's penal code, exemption from punishment could be purchased by payment of one or more of your Special Task-Tickets. This scheme was attractive in several ways. Good children—chiefly little girls, it must be admitted—accumulated these treasures assiduously for the mere joy of possession, the trifling fact that their owners were far too virtuous to be likely ever to have need of them being more than counterbalanced by the comfortable glow of satisfaction with which the existence of such a moral bank-balance suffused their rather self-righteous little bosoms. Wicked children, on the other hand, would laboriously collect tickets against a rainy day, and, having accumulated a sufficient store to pay for the consequences, would indulge in a prolonged orgy of sin until the last ticket was gone. Thomas Oates once found ten Special Task-Tickets in an old desk, and having straightway filled a like number of buttoned boots in the girls' dressing-room with soap-and-water, proffered the same in compensation. However, the possession of so much hoarded virtue in such a proclaimed reprobate roused the suspicions of the authorities. Inquiries were set on foot, the fraud was discovered, and Thomas was only saved from expulsion from Wentworth House School by the intercession of pretty Miss Amelia, who cherished a weakness for all renegades of the opposite sex.

Pip's tear-stained ex-fiancée, Isabel Dinting, anxious to drive away the depression resultant upon her unfortunate attachment, allowed herself to become badly bitten with the ticket-collecting mania. Her own ten ordinary tickets invariably presented a full muster, and all her soul was set upon the acquisition of Specials. These, by the way, were transferable, and consequently Isabel's friends were requested to bestir themselves, and by extra acts of virtue earn something to contribute to her store. Pip himself assisted her. One day he caught and expelled from the classroom a troublesome bumblebee, and, much to his surprise, was awarded a Special Task-Ticket by the grateful Miss Amelia. He promptly handed over the gift to Isabel, whose gratification knew no bounds. Touched by his adorer's thanks, Pip decided in his quiet way to help her further. Next morning the schoolroom suffered from a positive inundation of bumblebees, and the services rendered by Pip in removing them were rewarded by more Specials, all of which were duly handed over to the now greatly consoled Isabel. When, however, the phenomenon occurred again on the

following morning, Miss Mary, who did not share her sister's romantic belief in the integrity of the male sex, became suspicious, and insisted on searching Pip's desk. An incautiously handled paper bag emitted a perfect cascade of moribund bumblebees, and Pip's ingenious device for obliging a lady stood revealed. After that he made no more contributions to the supply.

Mention has already been made of that arch-ruffian Master Thomas Oates. With him Pip waged war from the day that he entered the school. Hostilities commenced immediately. Thomas dared Pip to place his hand in a can of almost boiling water in the dressing-room. Pip did so, and kept it there unwinkingly for the space of a full minute. Next day his hand was skinless, and Father had to dress it for him in splendidly conspicuous bandages. Pip retaliated by initiating a breath-holding contest, in which his opponent was not only worsted, but admitted his defeat by an involuntary and sonorous gurgle right in the middle of one of Mr. Pocklington's customary harangues on nothing in particular in the large schoolroom. He was promptly scarified for his unseemly conduct and fined three Task-Tickets.

One afternoon, to the curiosity of all and the trepidation of some, "Whistle-in" sounded at two-fifteen instead of two-twenty-five. Evidently something momentous was about to occur.

All his pupils being seated, and the roll having been called, Mr. Pocklington, with an air of portentous solemnity, explained the reason for which they were assembled and met together. It was nothing very dreadful after all, but the seriousness with which the subject was treated by their preceptor impressed the children with a hazy feeling that they were assisting at a murder trial.

Some person or persons unknown, it appeared, had invaded the Study, and had embellished the features of a bust of Julius Cæsar, which stood on the mantelpiece, with some assorted coloured chalks, which further investigation proved to have been stolen from the chalk-box by the blackboard. Mr. Pocklington, who was not blessed with a sense of humour, sought to drive home the enormity of this offence by ocular demonstration. He rang the bell; and after a short but impressive pause the door of the schoolroom was thrown open by the pageboy, and the butler staggered majestically in, carrying Julius Cæsar on a tea-tray. That empire-builder's "make-up" could hardly be called a becoming one. A red nose gave him a bibulous appearance, his blue chin suggested late rising and the absence of a razor, and a highly unsymmetrical moustache, executed in mauve chalk, stood out in vivid contrast to his blackened right eye. It says much

for the impression which Mr. Pocklington's introductory harangue had produced that not a child in the room so much as smiled.

The perspiring butler having set down his alcoholic-looking burden upon a small table and withdrawn, attended by his satellite,—the only person present, by the way, who appeared inclined to regard the situation with levity,—Mr. Pocklington once more addressed his cowering audience.

"I will now ask the perpetrator of this outrage," he thundered, "to stand up, that I may punish him as he deserves."

The little girls all shivered with apprehension, but one or two little boys looked slightly amused. They were not very old or experienced, but they were not green enough to join gratuitously in a game of "Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed!"

Mr. Pocklington played his next card.

"I may add," he continued, "that a boy was seen to leave the Study in a surreptitious manner shortly after this offence must have been committed. No one has entered the Study since. That boy, therefore, must be the culprit. If he does not immediately respond to the dictates of his conscience and stand up in his place—I shall expose him! Now, please!"

There was a death-like silence, suddenly broken by piercing shrieks from one Gwendoline Harvey, aged seven, for whose infant nerves the strain had proved too great.

"Please, it wasn't me," she wailed, "and—and—and I've lost my hankey!"

Tender-hearted Miss Arabella supplied the deficiency, and led her out, still sobbing. The inquisition was resumed.

"I shall give the culprit one more minute," announced Mr. Pocklington in the tones of a Grand Inquisitor.

There was another tense silence. The inmates of Wentworth House School breathed hard, looked straight before them, and waited with their small mouths wide open. One or two little girls—and small boys, for that matter—gripped the benches convulsively, and with difficulty refrained from screaming.

"The minute has elapsed," proclaimed the Grand Inquisitor. "Philip, stand up!"

"Ah!" A long, shuddering sigh, partly of relief and partly of apprehension, ran round the room. Pipette turned deathly pale. Pip rose slowly to his feet, staring intently in his disconcerting way at the besotted features of Julius Cæsar.

"Philip," said Mr. Pocklington, "you were seen coming out of the Study at one-twenty. What have you to say?"

Pip had nothing to say, but transferred his gaze to Mr. Pocklington. As a matter of fact he had not entered the Study. He had spent some time, it was true, in the passage outside the door, but that was because he was waiting for Thomas Oates, having arranged to meet him there for five minutes, for the purpose of adjusting a small difference on a matter of a purely personal character, calling for plenty of elbow-room and freedom from publicity. Tommy Oates had not appeared, and Pip had been late for luncheon in consequence.

"Do you confess to this outrage?" inquired Mr. Pocklington, coming suddenly to the point.

Pip collected himself. Then as common politeness seemed to demand some sort of reply, he said, "No."

Another slight shudder passed round the room.

"Do you know anything about the matter?"

Pip was about to reply with another negative, when it suddenly flashed across his mind that as he stood outside the Study waiting for Master Oates he had experienced considerable difficulty in getting rid of Isabel Dinting, who had hovered around him in a highly flattering but most embarrassing fashion just when he wished to compose and concentrate his faculties for his coming interview with Tommy. What was she doing there? What could her business have been? In plain truth she had come to avert a possible battle between Pip and Tommy, but this never occurred to Pip: he had not thought it possible that any one should take such a close interest in his movements. Anyhow this was no concern of his. Accordingly he said, "No" a second time.

Then came another question.

"Do you deny having been in the Study?"

"Yes."

"But you were seen coming from the passage leading to the Study door."

No answer.

"Do you admit that you were in that passage?"

"Yes." (Sensation.)

"Philip," said Mr. Pocklington, "that passage leads only to the Study. What other motive can have taken you there?"

No answer. It is difficult on the spur of the moment to frame a plausible excuse for having in cold blood arranged a sanguinary encounter outside your Principal's study door.

"Do you decline to answer?"

Again no reply from Pip. Another pause. Mr. Pocklington, now as excited as a terrier halfway down a rabbit-hole, with difficulty refrained from pronouncing sentence on the spot. However, he restrained himself so far as to remember to sum up.

"Appearances are against you, Philip," he began. "You were seen leaving the —the scene of the outrage in a suspicious manner shortly after that outrage was committed. You decline to state what business took you there. No one else visited the spot during the time under consideration—at least—by the way, *did* you see any one else while you—during that period?"

This chance shot hit Pip hard. That Isabel Dinting should have painted Julius Cæsar's nose red seemed almost beyond the bounds of human probability. Still she undoubtedly *had* been there, and with Mr. Pocklington in his present state the sudden revelation of such a fact would probably cause a perfect eruption. Pip hesitated.

"Was any one else there?" reiterated Mr. Pocklington.

Pip was essentially a truthful boy, and the idea of saying, "No" never occurred to him. Accordingly he said nothing, as before.

The eruption immediately took place.

"Philip," thundered Mr. Pocklington, "I have asked you two questions. You have answered neither of them. Do you decline to do so?"

A very long pause this time. Then—"Yes," said Pip briefly.

"In that case," replied Mr. Pocklington, metaphorically assuming the black cap, "I must pronounce you guilty. Still, I would rather you confessed than were convicted. I will give you one more minute."

Sixty palpitating seconds passed. Forty juvenile hearts bumped tumultuously, and Pip still stood up, a very straight, very silent, and not undignified little figure.

"Have you anything further to say?" inquired Mr. Pocklington at last, now almost convinced that he was the Lord Chief Justice himself.

Pip shook his head. He seldom wasted words.

"Then I pronounce you guilty. You have committed an offence against decency and good taste that I have never known paralleled in the history of this school. Your punishment"—the children held their breath—"must be a matter for consideration. Meanwhile—"

Mr. Pocklington paused, and frowned at Isabel Dinting, who was groping for something in her desk.

"Meanwhile," he continued, having suddenly decided to keep Pip in durance vile until a punishment could be devised in keeping with his crime, "you will be incarcerated—Well, Isabel?"

Isabel Dinting was standing up in her place, with her small countenance flushed and apprehensive, but bravely waving one hand in the air to attract attention. In the other she grasped a rather grubby and bulgy envelope.

"Please, *may* I speak to Pi—Philip?" she gasped.

Mr. Pocklington was too surprised to be pedantic.

"To Philip? Why, my child?"

"Because—well, because I've got somefing to give him."

"This is hardly the time for an exchange of gifts," remarked Mr. Pocklington severely.

"But *may* I?" persisted Isabel, with a boldness which surprised herself.

"I cannot imagine what your gift can be, but if it has any bearing on the present deplorable case, I should be only too thankful to permit—"

But long before this homily was completed Isabel had slipped out of her seat and was standing by Pip's side, whispering excitedly into his ear and endeavouring to thrust the grubby envelope into his hands.

"Take them," she panted. "There's thirty-five of them. Give him them *all*, *now*, and he'll let you off."

Poor little Isabel! Surely under all the broad heavens there was no crime that could not be atoned for by the surrender of thirty-five laboriously acquired Special Task-Tickets!

Pip smiled at her. He was a plain-looking little boy, but he possessed an extraordinarily attractive smile, and Isabel felt utterly, absolutely, and completely rewarded for her sacrifice.

Meanwhile Mr. Pocklington had come to the conclusion that all this was highly irregular.

"Bring me that envelope!" he commanded.

Pip handed up the envelope. Mr. Pocklington opened it, and out tumbled the thirty-five Special Task-Tickets.

"What is all this?" he inquired testily.

"Special Task-Tickets," replied Pip.

"To whom do they belong?"

"Isabel."

"No—they belong to Pip!" screamed that small maiden. "Won't you let him off if he gives them *all* to you, please? I've given them to him. I—I don't mind losin' them."

Isabel's voice quavered suddenly; and then, having conducted her case unflinchingly past the critical point, she dissolved, woman-like, into reactionary tears.

There was a long silence now, broken only by Isabel's sobs. Pip stood still stiffly at attention, facing the grinning effigy of Julius Cæsar. Every child in the room (except Pipette) was lost in admiration of Isabel's heroic devotion, for all knew how precious was her collection of tickets to her. Miss Mary smiled genially; Miss Amelia's eyes filled with sympathetic tears. Even Mr. Pocklington was touched. Hastily he flung together in his mind a few sentences appropriate to the occasion. "Unselfishness"—"devotion to a friend"—"a lesson for all"—the rounded phrases formed themselves upon his tongue. He was ready now.

"I cannot refrain—" he began.

It was true enough, but he got no further; for above the formal tones of his voice, above the stifled whispering of the school, and above the now unrestrained lamentations of Isabel Dinting, rose the voice of Master Thomas Oates, in a howl in which remorse, hysteria, and apprehension were about equally mingled.

"It was me!" he roared. "Booh—hoo!"

His sinful but sentimental soul, already goaded to excessive discomfort by the promptings of an officious conscience, had with difficulty endured the inquisition upon the innocent Pip, and after Isabel's romantic intervention he could contain himself no longer. Confession burst spontaneously from his lips.

"It was me!" he repeated, *fortissimo*, knuckling his eyes.

There was a final astonished gasp from the school.

"It was *I*, Thomas," corrected Mr. Pocklington, the ruling passion strong even at this crisis.

"No it wasn't!" roared Thomas, determined to purge his soul. "It was *me*! I was in the Study when Pip was outside, and I did it and got out when he was talking to Isabel, and—and I won't do it again. Aah—ooh!"

Pip became a hero, of course, but bore his honours with indifference.

Isabel expostulated with him.

"It was awful brave of you to say nothin' all the time," she remarked admiringly.

"There was nothing to say," replied Pip, with truth.

"But you said nothin' when you knew it was Tommy all the time," persisted Isabel, anxious to keep her idol on his pedestal.

"I didn't think it was Tommy," said Pip; "I thought it was you."

Isabel's round eyes grew positively owl-like.

"Me? Oh, Pip! How *splendid* of you!"

In his lifetime Pip inspired three women with love for him—two more than his proper allowance. Isabel was the first. The others will follow in due course.

CHAPTER III

"HAM"

THE schoolmaster realises early in his career that he is not a universally popular person. If he keeps his boys in order and compels them to work, they dislike him heartily; if he allows them to do as they please they despise him; if he is cheerful and jocose in his demeanour, they consider him "a funny ass"; if he is austere and academic, they call him "a gloomy swine." If he endeavours, by strong measures, to call sinners to repentance, he is said to have done so from personal spite; and if he shows kindness to the few righteous persons whom he may encounter in his form, he is accused of favouritism. After he has been at school a short time he realises this, and it distresses him.

Sometimes he goes so far as to decide that he has mistaken his vocation, and he resigns and becomes a school inspector. But presently he notices that elderly and revered colleagues have laughed and grown fat under this treatment for thirty years, and indeed look upon the seething indignation of their subjects as the salt of life. This comforts him. He tries again, and presently discovers that it is possible to be the hated oppressor of his form in public and their familiar friend and trusted adviser in private. Collective hostility vanishes under the influence of a cup of tea or an evening on the river, and individual friendship takes its place. Last of all as he grows older, comes that continuous calm which marks his older colleagues: for he knows now that Jinks minor and Muggins tertius, who sit in the back row with lowering brows and grinding teeth, chafing under his tyranny and preaching sedition at intervals, will one day come and sit in his armchairs, with their feet on his mantelpiece, bearded or sunburned or distinguished, and will convey to him, if not in words, at any rate by their demeanour, their heartfelt thanks for the benefits which he lavished upon them with so unsparing a hand in the grand old days in the Shell or the Remove or the Lower Fifth. That is his reward. Men have died for less.

Now, Mr. Hanbury, lord and master of the Lower Shell, a sort of intellectual dust-heap on the Modern side at Grandwich School, was specially favoured by the gods in that he received his reward more quickly than most. He was twenty-

nine; he had been a famous Cricket Blue, and he enjoyed the respectful admiration of countless boys, who listened eagerly to his small talk, felt proud when he spoke to them unofficially, and endeavoured to imitate his bowling action.

He also possessed other qualifications. He loved his work, he took immense pains to understand each of his boys, and he endeavoured by daily admonition and occasional castigation to goad his form into respectability.

For in truth they were a poor lot. Why they were called the Shell was a mystery,—the Sieve would have described them better. Large, cumbrous persons, with small heads and colossal feet, with vacant faces and incipient beards, stuck in its meshes and remained there forever, while their more youthful and slippery brethren wriggled through. Most masters resigned their posts after a year of the Lower Shell, with the result that that glorious company were constantly entrusted to the newest and rawest recruit on the staff. Consequently discipline was lax; and when the Head rather apologetically handed the form over to Mr. Hanbury, it became instantly apparent that the ultimate result would be the collapse of Hanbury or the reformation of the Shell.

The latter alternative came to pass, but not before both sides had distinguished themselves in several engagements.

Mr. Hanbury had to teach his form self-respect. Long experience had taught them that they were incapable as a body of producing good work; and being constitutionally averse to half-measures, they were accustomed, rather than turn out a second-rate article, to turn out nothing at all. Like the Tenth, who do not dance, the Lower Shell did not work.

They therefore looked upon it as a breach of academic etiquette when Mr. Hanbury violently assaulted three of their most distinguished members, for no other reason than that they, following the immemorial custom of the form, omitted for three consecutive evenings to do any "prep." With ready acumen the Shell also discovered that their new form-master had no sense of humour. Else why, when Elphinstone, commonly known as "Top-knot," let loose a blackbird from a bandbox during the history hour, and every one else present was convulsed with honest mirth, should Mr. Hanbury, with an absolutely fatuous affectation of solemnity, have made absurd remarks about teaching small boys manners, and have laid such violent hands on Elphinstone as to make it necessary for that enterprising ornithologist to take his meals from off the

mantelpiece for the next three days?

Besides being a tyrant and a dullard, their form-master, they observed, was not even a gentleman. When Crabbe major, a youth of determined character and litigious habits, took the trouble to stay behind and point out to Mr. Hanbury that by depriving him (Crabbe major) of all his marks for the week for the paltry indiscretion of cribbing from Jones, Mr. Hanbury was outraging the most elementary principles of justice (Jones's involuntary aid being not worth even an hour's marks), his treatment of Crabbe was undignified and flippant to the last degree.

"Look here, my dear young Christian friend," he had said, "just cut away to your tea, and be thankful you are in a condition to sit down to it."

Crabbe disregarded the utter grossness of this innuendo.

"My people, sir," he remarked, "will not be pleased if I go home at the end of the term without any marks."

"Is that all?" replied Mr. Hanbury. "Step round to my room before your cab comes and I'll send you home all over them. Now, hook it, and don't be a young ass again."

A reply in the worst possible taste, the form decided.

Mr. Hanbury, or "Ham" as he was usually called, had been in charge of the Lower Shell some four years, and had long reduced that chaotic assembly to respectability, and even intelligence. It was the first morning of a new term, and he had just entered his classroom, and was engaged in greeting his pupils. The ceremony over, he mounted his throne and addressed the multitude,—

"Having said 'How do you do?' to all of you, I will now proceed to say 'Good-bye' to some of you. Hood down to Aitchison, you are promoted. Out you go! Mr. Mayor is anxious to make your acquaintance."

Ten sheepish youths rose up and filed out.

"Now, move up, all of you. We shall have some recruits in presently. Brown minor, you have not got your remove, but you are now in the proud position of head boy of this form. Hallo! here come our friends from the Lower Regions."

Eleven far more sheepish youths here entered the room, headed by a small boy

in spectacles, who made his entrance some way ahead of his fellows with a suddenness that suggested propulsion from the rear. All took up a retired position on the back bench.

"Now, sort yourselves," continued Ham. "Old guard, close up! Then the promotions, then the new boys in alphabetical order."

This arrangement left the form in something like order. At the head sat Mr. Brown minor; at the tail a small and alert youth with black hair, a face freckled like a plover's egg, and solemn eyes.

The Commander-in-Chief addressed them,—

"Brown minor, you are unanimously elected first lieutenant. You must remind me to set preparation every night, and you will write the same on the board in a fair round hand, that he who runs for tea may read. You, sir,—let me see, Wilmot: thank you" (addressing the solemn youth at the foot of the form)—"are hereby appointed scavenger. Your duties will be explained to you by Mr. Brown. They relate chiefly to the tidiness of this room. You have obtained this important post solely because of your position in the alphabet. If you had had the misfortune to be called Atkins or Absalom, you would have failed to do so. We will now proceed to the orders of the day."

And this was Pip's first encounter with one of his lifelong friends.

The friendship did not form itself all at once. For a year they struggled together, Mr. Hanbury to find something that Pip could learn, Pip to find something that "Ham" could teach. Pip, it must be confessed, was no genius, even from Thomas Carlyle's point of view, and he retained the post of scavenger for the whole of his first year in the form. Otherwise, he was well content. He acquired friends, notably one Mumford, whose superior position in the alphabet was his sole qualification for exemption from the post of scavenger.

The duties of that official, by the way, were not arduous. He was expected to open the windows wide for two minutes between each hour, to pick up stray ink-pots, and keep the blackboard clean. There were other duties of an unofficial nature attached to the post, the chief of which was to stand with an eye glued to the keyhole until the master for the hour loomed upon the horizon, and then to herald his approach by a cry of "Cave!" whereupon the form would betake themselves to their seats with an alacrity which varied inversely with the master's reputation for indulgence.

One day Mr. Hanbury thoughtlessly came by an unexpected route, and was at the door-handle before Pip realised that he was near. Consequently Pip was thrown heavily on to his back with a contused eye; and after listening throughout the hour to facetious remarks from Ham about Sister Anne and Horatius Cocles, endured the further indignity of being kicked by a select committee of the Lower Shell, who afterwards deposed him from his high office, and appointed Mumford in his stead.

Pip's services, however, were speedily requisitioned again, for Mumford proved but a broken reed. He was by nature deliberate in his movements, and the form were more than once taken by surprise owing to their watchman's remissness at the keyhole. His last performance, that which brought Pip back to office, was of such an exceptional nature, and took the fancy of the school to such an extent, that it is to this day preserved among the unwritten archives of Grandwich, bracketed equal with the occasion on which Plumbley minor walked into the French classroom whistling, with a bandbox containing a nest of field-mice under his arm, only to discover, after liberating the mice, that the Head was sitting in the French master's place.

Mumford one day stood crouching at his keyhole. All around him surged the Lower Shell, busily employed in obliterating the traces of a brief but sanguinary combat between Jenkins and MacFarlane. The fight had arisen over some small matter of an international character, and after four spirited rounds it was decided that honours so far were equally divided, and that the final round had better be postponed until the interval before dinner. The form accordingly settled down in their places, and with a passing admonition to Mumford to persevere in his vigil, betook themselves to conversation until Ham should be pleased to put in an appearance. As that tyrant had not yet appeared at the far end of the corridor outside, Mumford decided that this was a good opportunity for retiring for a brief moment from his post to his locker, for purposes of refreshment. But fortune was against him. Mr. Hanbury had been out to see the ground-man on some cricket business, and consequently came up to his classroom by that abominable "alternative route." He entered the room quietly, and after walking to his desk was on the point of reprimanding Mumford, whose head was buried in his locker, for being out of his seat, when his words were arrested by the somewhat eccentric behaviour of that remarkable youth. Mumford left his locker, and having thrust a biscuit into his cheek, walked across the room to the door, where he bent down and applied his eye to the keyhole.

The form sat spellbound; and Mr. Hanbury was too astonished to break the

silence.

Meanwhile the infatuated Mumford, having finished his biscuit, proceeded to describe to his classmates the movements of the enemy outside.

"All right!" he remarked cheerfully. "Not in sight yet—only Wilkes and Jordan. There's the Badger now. What cheer, Badger, old man?" (The Badger was the Senior Science Master.)

The form gave no sign, though Brown minor and Pip were exhibiting symptoms of incipient apoplexy; and Mr. Hanbury came to the conclusion that this comedy had better cease. But the luckless Mumford, his eye still firmly adhering to the keyhole, continued,—

"Hallo! there's the Head. Hope he meets some of those chaps. Very slack, their not goin' to their classrooms till five minutes past the hour. Wonder where Ham is. Downstairs, I expect, cadging beer off the butler. He'll probably be tight when he—"

At this point, flattered by the deferential silence with which his remarks were being received, and desirous of observing the effect of this last sally on his fellows, the doomed youth turned from the keyhole to the room. The first object which met his eye was his form-master. The effect was remarkable. Mumford's eyes, already bulging from long straining at the keyhole, nearly fell from his head; he turned deadly pale; and finally, with a whoop of terror, he dashed from the room, never stopping till he reached the seclusion of his study in his tutor's house.

He was not punished, for Ham knew well that no further penalty was required. The Lower Shell, however, unanimously voted Mumford "an abject blighter," and restored Pip to his old post.

Nearly a year passed. Pip was now fifteen. He had stayed at the preparatory school for a year longer than most boys, owing to an attack of mumps; but his appearance was so youthful and his mental abilities so limited, that he might easily have passed, as his friend Mumford frequently remarked, for twelve. Mr. Hanbury was not often puzzled by a boy's brain, but in Pip's case he had to admit himself baffled.

"I can't make the boy out," he said to his colleague, the Reverend William Mortimer (usually called "Uncle Bill"), who was Pip's house-tutor. "He has a

wonderful memory, but is either unable or unwilling to think. He prefers to learn a page of easy history by heart, and repeat it like a parrot, rather than read it through and give me the substance of it in his own words."

"Anything for a change," grunted Uncle Bill. "I would cheerfully barter my entire form of imbeciles for one such youth. Look here: here is Atkinson, with the body of a camel and the mind of a hedgehog, who has been in my form for three years, and thinks that *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is a good ending for a hexameter. And that boy's mother came and called on me last term for an hour and a half, and confided to me that a boy of Lancelot's eager spirit and delicate organism might be inclined to overwork himself. I suppose this other boy's mother,—no, by the way, he hasn't got one,—his father is a big West-End doctor. The boy must have been left very much to himself in his childhood. He has never read a story-book in his life, and the cricket news is all that he reads in the papers."

"Ah! is he a cricketer?" said Hanbury.

"On paper: his real performances are very moderate. He will tell you the batting and bowling average of every first-class cricketer, though."

"I don't think I have come across him in that line yet. I am glad he knows something. Well, I am off to my classroom."

"What? At this hour of the afternoon?"

"Yes; a meeting with a few young friends to discuss various points in the history of Samson. Four of them, including our young friend. Infernal rot, these Sunday preparations! The boys don't learn the work, and the average form-master can't explain it. They ought to be lumped together on Monday mornings for you to take, padre."

"Quite right, my son," replied Uncle Bill. "Last term Kifford told his form that a phylactery was a kind of musical instrument. Well, cut along. Be gentle with them."

It was a very hot afternoon in June. Hanbury found four discontented young persons awaiting him. He was wont to be lenient over the Scripture lesson, and a misplaced confidence in this fact had led the quartette to their downfall.

"Now, let us get this business finished," he said briskly. "Are you all ready to be questioned?"

The quartette expressed their readiness to endure the most searching cross-examination.

"Very well, then. Sit down quickly and write out, in your own words, an account of the events in chapter thirteen."

Four pens began to scratch, three vigorously, the last more diffidently. At the end of twenty minutes Mr. Hanbury called a halt.

"Show it up," he said.

Four inky manuscripts were laid before him.

"Let me see," he continued. "Manoah—angel—sacrifice—Nazarite—yes." He glanced swiftly through the papers. "You can go, you three; but you, my young friend,"—he laid a heavy hand on Pip's unkempt head,—"will stay and talk to me."

There was a hasty scuttling of feet, the banging of a door, and Pip was left alone with his master.

Pip sighed and glanced out of the window, through which came the regular knock, knock, of innumerable bats against innumerable balls all along the long line of nets.

"Come along to my study," said Hanbury. "No, no, I'm not going to execute you this time," as Pip looked a little apprehensive.

Mr. Hanbury occupied two rooms in a corner of Mr. Mortimer's house, and thither Pip was conducted.

"Now, young man, sit down in that armchair."

Pip obeyed, and took his seat on the extreme edge.

"You are a queer customer," said Mr. Hanbury meditatively. "You know ten times as much about that chapter as Marsh or Stokes or Fox, and yet you produced this. Look at it."

It certainly was an interesting document. Pip, unable to grasp the main facts of the simple narrative set forth, had adopted the, to him, easier expedient of learning the chapter, or portions of it, by heart. The result was a curious framework of absolutely valueless but fairly correct quotations, and an utter

absence of anything in the shape of coherent information.

"*And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.*"

"*And an angel appeared unto the woman and said....*"

"*And the woman came to her husband and said....*"

Here the manuscript came to an inky termination.

"What are these blanks for?" inquired Ham.

"I couldn't remember what they said, sir," explained Pip, "so I put blanks."

"H'm; I see. It gives their remarks rather an expurgated appearance, though. But look here, old man," he continued, not unkindly, "one quarter of the labour that you spent on learning this stuff by heart—you have got the first verse quite correct, you see—would have enabled you, if rightly applied, to give the gist of the story in your own words, which was all I wanted. Now, wouldn't it?"

Pip looked at him honestly.

"No, sir," he said.

"But, good gracious, when you read a novel—say Sherlock Holmes—do you find it easier to learn it by heart rather than gather the meaning as you go along?"

"I have never read a novel, sir," said Pip.

"Well, then, any book?"

"I have never read any books, except the ones in school, sir."

"I see I am dealing with a phenomenon," said Mr. Hanbury. "My poor friend, do you mean to say that your knowledge of books is bounded by Cæsar and Arabella Buckley? What did you do in your extreme youth? Didn't you ever read fairy tales? Haven't you heard of Cinderella or Jack the Giant-Killer?"

"No, sir."

"Why, your par—" Mr. Hanbury stopped. He remembered what Father William had told him, and he realised that home without a mother may indeed be

a strange place.

There was a pause. Pip, well back in his chair now, sat looking curiously at this large man, who appeared to be genuinely distressed by his ignorance of fairy tales. Presently the master continued,—

"Then you never read anything?"

"Yes, the papers, sir."

"Come, that's better. What part?"

"All the cricket."

"Are you a keen cricketer, then?"

"I'm no good, sir, but I am keen."

"Well, trot down and change, and then we'll go to the field and I'll run over your points at a net. We will see if you are as good a cricketer as you are a scholar. Stay and have some cake first. Perhaps you will excuse me if I smoke a pipe. Masters have their vices, you see. I haven't smoked for nearly three hours."

So the pair sat, Pip with a large piece of cake balanced delicately on his knee, morbidly anxious not to spill crumbs on the floor; and Hanbury lolling back in his armchair, smoking his pipe and surveying this sturdy youth before him, who knew every cricketer's average and had never heard of Cinderella.

As Pip was changing into flannels a few minutes later he encountered Mumford.

"Come to the grub-shop," said that hero.

"Can't," said Pip shortly. "Seen the comb anywhere?"

"Comb? What for?" said Mumford, who considered parting the hair during term-time an affectation.

"My hair, of course, silly swine," replied Pip, without heat.

"You must be cracked! Come to the grub-shop," reiterated his friend.

"Can't. Promised to go to a net with Ham."

And Pip, having worked up the conversation to this artistic climax, departed,

leaving Mumford, who was not an athlete, in a state of incoherent amazement.

Mr. Hanbury presently arrived at the net, with two more small boys picked up on the way. Each was given an innings, with a little helpful coaching, Pip coming last. He stood up to the bowling manfully, and occasionally slogged one of his weaker brethren; but his bat was anything but straight, and Ham bowled him at will.

"M' yes," said Mr. Hanbury, "you are only an average lot of batsmen. Can any of you bowl?"

There was a respectful chorus of "No, sir," as custom demanded.

"Well, try. I am going to have a knock."

Pip and company bowled a few laborious overs, and speedily proved that their estimate of their own powers was based upon truth, their preceptor treating their deliveries with little ceremony.

Finally they were ranged in a semicircle, and Ham gave them fielding practice.

Here Pip felt more at home. He was quick on his feet and possessed a "nippy" pair of hands. His ground fielding was especially good.

"Hallo!" cried Mr. Hanbury, as Pip got to a ball which kept low down on his left, and returned it particularly smartly; "which hand did you throw in that ball with, young man?"

Pip surveyed two grubby paws doubtfully.

"I think it was my left, sir," he said apologetically. "I can't help it sometimes."

"Ambidextrous, eh? Catch this. Now, throw it in again—left hand."

Pip did so, wondering.

"Do you ever bowl left-handed?" was the next inquiry.

"No, sir."

"Well, just come to a net for a few minutes. You other people can cut off to tea now."

The tea-bell had just rung, and the field was emptying rapidly.

"Now, my son," said the master, "you are going to bowl to me with your left hand. Plug them in."

Pip did so. His first ball was a fast half-volley, and was promptly treated as it deserved.

"Now, another. Take my ball. The groundboy will field yours."

Pip, full of importance at having some one to field for him, bowled again. This time he sent down a good length ball. Mr. Hanbury stepped out to it, played right outside it, and next moment his leg-stump was lying on the ground. He was clean bowled.

CHAPTER IV

PIP FINDS HIS VOCATION

MR. HANBURY made no comment, but requested Pip to bowl again. "A good fast one," he said.

Pip, with the most natural air in the world, obeyed orders. This time he bowled a yorker, somewhere in the direction of the off-stump. Mr. Hanbury did not trouble to play it, but chopped his bat down into the block-hole to stop it. The ball, however, chiefly owing to the fact that it curled some inches in the air, missed his bat and bowled him off his pads.

"One more," said Ham.

Pip, divided between elation at bowling a master and apprehension as to the consequences thereof, delivered his fourth ball—a full pitch to the off this time. Bad ball as it was, the curl in the air was most apparent; but Ham, who took the measure of most bowling after the third ball, stepped across, and, playing apparently about three inches inside it, caught it fairly and sent it flying.

"That will do, thanks," he said. "Now, run off to tea, but drop into my study after prayers for a minute."

Pip made his appearance very promptly after prayers.

Mr. Hanbury, who was smoking and correcting exercises, nodded to a chair, and after a few minutes' silence, broken by sundry grunts and the thud of a merciless blue pencil, put down his work and addressed Pip.

"Now, my man, I want to have a word with you. You are what is known as a natural bowler. Why you didn't find it out for yourself I can't think. Didn't you, in your extreme infancy, often feel an inclination to stir your porridge with your left hand?"

Pip reflected; and sundry nursery incidents, of no previous import, suddenly acquired a new significance in his mind.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I did. But my nur—my people used to tell me not to, and I got out of the way of it, I suppose."

"They always do it," said Ham sympathetically. "Now, listen. A man may be the fastest and straightest bowler in the world, but unless he has *pitch* he has nothing, nothing, nothing! A straight ball is no good if it is a long hop or a full pitch, and the only way to acquire the art is to practise and practise and practise until you can drop the ball on a threepenny-bit at twenty yards. Now, if I take you for half an hour at a net after tea for the next few weeks, will you agree to do something for me in return?"

Pip agreed, without asking what the conditions might be.

"What I want you to do," said Ham, "is this." He led the way to the bookshelves at the side of the room. "I want you to read some books for me. Any books will do, but you must read *something*. I should advise you to begin on something easy. Here are three. This one is called 'Treasure Island'; this big one is 'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes'; and the yellow one is 'Vice Versâ.' (Don't be afraid: it's all English inside.) Which will you have?"

Pip was somewhat dazed by this eccentric man's behaviour, but he had sufficient sense left to choose the smallest of the proffered volumes. Then he said timidly,—

"Would I have any chance of getting into the Junior House Eleven, sir?"

"M' well, perhaps. Now, hook it. After tea to-morrow at my net, mind."

Later in the evening Mr. Hanbury, enjoying the hospitality of Uncle Bill, remarked,—

"I'm sorry the St. Dunstan's match is over for this year."

"Why?" inquired his host.

"Because we could have beaten them. Anyhow, we shall do it next year."

"Why this confidence?"

"Because," said Hanbury, "I propose this day month to introduce to the school the finest bowler that it has seen since old Hewett's time."

Pip stuck to his side of the bargain manfully. He religiously waded through

"Treasure Island," marking with a pencil the place when he knocked off work for the day. The fascination of the story affected even his barbaric mind, but the effort of taking it all in more than outweighed the pleasure. "Sherlock Holmes" he voted dull; he made no conjectures as to the solution of each mystery, and consequently the pleasure of anticipating the result was lost to him. "Vice Versâ" pleased him most, though the idea of a girl running at large in a boys' school struck his celibate mind as "utter rot."

But in return for all this aimless drudgery he had the unspeakable joy of bowling to Ham every night for a short time after tea, at a quiet net in a corner of the big field. The term was not nearly half over, and already he could bring the ball down with tolerable certainty somewhere near a postcard laid for him upon the pitch, five times out of seven,—and that, too, without in any way spoiling the curl in the air by which his teacher appeared to set so much store. He was also permitted to bowl one fast ball per over, an indulgence which comforted him mightily; for like every other cricketer who ever lived, he imagined that he was a heaven-sent fast bowler.

To his unutterable disappointment he was not chosen for his Junior House Eleven, though it included such confirmed dotards as Mumford. The truth was that Mr. Hanbury had sent for Marsh, the captain of Pip's house, and asked as a personal favour that Pip might not be put in the team.

"I know these Junior House-Matches," he said. "The boy will either not be put on to bowl at all, or else he will be kept on for forty or fifty overs, tiring himself out and undoing all the work of the past five weeks. Leave him with me for another fortnight, and we'll see. I can't have growing plants strained in any way."

"Is he really good, sir?" said Marsh. "I haven't seen him play for a long time, and then he seemed no better than most of the other kids."

"That was when he was bowling right-handed," said Ham. "Come and see him to-morrow, at my net. Look here, I will make a bargain with you. When is the House-Match proper, the Final, the big affair, between you and the Hittites?"

"A fortnight on Tuesday, sir."

"Well, you may play him in that match, on the understanding that he is not to bowl for more than five overs at a time. I'll have him in good order for you, but he mustn't be overworked."

Marsh, after a glance at Pip's form at Ham's net next day, readily agreed to the proposition.

A week later Pip was informed by Mumford, during the French hour, of a curious clerical error in the list containing the names of the Hivite House Eleven, which had been put up that morning. Marsh, it appeared, in a fit of laughable absent-mindedness, had filled the last place in the list with the name of Pip, instead of that of one Elliot, who had occupied that position in the previous round.

"Rum mistake to make," said Mumford, with obvious sincerity.

"Very," said Pip shortly.

"Rather a jest," continued the imaginative Mumford, "if he didn't notice it, and you turned out on the day with the rest of the Eleven instead of Elliott!"

"Jolly comic!" said Pip, without enthusiasm. He was a modest youth, but, like other and older men, he derived no pleasure from hearing his low opinion of himself so heartily endorsed by his friends.

However, his name remained on the list, and on the great day he did turn out with the Eleven, going in last and being bowled first ball, much to the gratification of Mr. Elliott.

The Hivites made a hundred and seventy-eight,—not a bad score, as house-matches go. Then the Hittites took the field. They sent in a red-headed youth named Evans, and a long, lean individual who rejoiced in the thoroughly incongruous nickname of "Tiny." He played with an appallingly straight bat, but seldom took liberties with the bowling.

The opening of the innings was not eventful. House-matches are very much alike as a class. Everybody knows everybody else's game to a nicety, and the result is usually a question of nerves. Tiny and Evans poked systematically and exasperatingly at every ball sent down; the clumps of dark-blue Hittites and pink Hivites round the field subsided into recumbent apathy; and Pip, who was fielding at short slip, began to feel that if house-matches were all as dull as this one he might get through without further disgracing himself.

But Marsh, the bowler, was also a cricketer. He saw that Evans, who was not naturally a defensive player, was getting very tired of poking to order, and resolved to tempt him. He accordingly sent down one of the worst balls ever

seen on the school pitch. Evans wavered for a moment, but, remembering his orders, let it go by. It was followed by another, exactly like it: once again Evans restrained his itching bat. But the third was too much for him, and he smote it incontinently over the ropes, to the huge delight of the Hittites.

"Now he's got his eye in!" remarked Master Simpson of the Hittites to Master Mumford, who was sitting beside him on the railings.

"Rot!" replied that youth, as in duty bound, but without conviction. "Any ass could see that Marsh gave him that ball on purpose."

"On purpose? What for?" inquired Simpson doubtfully.

"What a question to ask!" replied Mumford, casting about for an answer. "Of course you don't know enough about the game, but the reason why Marsh bowled that particular ball was—Hooray! Hoor-a-a-ay-ee-ah-ooh! Well held, sir! What did I say, young Simpson?"

For Evans, throwing caution to the winds, had lashed out at a good ball, the last of Marsh's over, and it was now reposing safely in the hands of Mid-off.

Another disaster befell the Hittites a few minutes later. Tiny, who had been stepping out and playing forward with the irritating accuracy of an automaton, played just inside a ball from the Hivite fast bowler, Martin. The ball glanced off his bat, and almost at the same moment Pip became conscious of a violent pain, suggestive of red-hot iron, in his right arm-pit. He clapped his hand to the part affected, and to his astonishment drew forth the ball, to a storm of applause from the delighted Hivites, while Tiny retired, speechless and scarlet, to the Pavilion.

But trouble was in store for the Hivites. The two new batsmen were the opposing captain, one Hewett, a smiter of uncompromising severity, and a somewhat amorphous and pimply youth, destitute of nerves, who was commonly addressed as "Scrabbler." These twain treated the firm of Marsh and Martin with a disrespect that amounted almost to discourtesy. The score rose from forty-five to a hundred, and from a hundred to a hundred and thirty-five, notwithstanding the substitution of two fresh bowlers of established reputation and fair merit. The Hivites began to look unhappy. Their fielding, which hitherto had been well up to the mark, now deteriorated; and when the Scrabbler was missed at the wicket from a snick that was heard all over the ground, Master Simpson became so offensive that Mumford found it necessary to withdraw out of earshot.

At this point Marsh, having obeyed the law which says that when your first-eleven colour-men have failed, you must try your second-eleven colour-men; and when you have done that, you may begin to speculate on outsiders, decided to put Pip on. He accordingly tossed him the ball at the beginning of the next over.

Pip had been living for this moment ever since his name had appeared in the list, and he had carefully rehearsed all the movements necessary to the occasion. He would pick up the ball negligently, hand his cap to the umpire, and place his field with a few comprehensive motions of his arm. He would then toss down a few practice balls to the wicket-keeper, and, after a final glance round the field, proceed to bring the Hittite innings to an inglorious conclusion.

But, alas! whether it was from insufficient rehearsal, or blue funk, Pip's performance was a dreadful failure. He forgot to hand his cap to the umpire; he made no attempt to place his field; and so far was he from casting cool glances around him before commencing his onslaught that he was only prevented, by the heavy hand of the adjacent Scrabbler, from beginning to bowl before the fielders had crossed over.

And when he did begin, the ball which was to have made a crumbling ruin of Hewett's wicket proved to be a fast full-pitch to leg; the second ball was a long-hop to the off; and the third, which had originally been intended to complete Pip's hat-trick, nearly annihilated the gentleman who was fielding point. Marsh was very patient, and made no comment as ball after ball was despatched to the boundary. He would have liked to give the boy time to find his feet, but this sort of thing was too expensive. After two inglorious overs Pip retired once more to second slip, with his inscrutable countenance as inscrutable as ever, but his heart almost bursting beneath his white shirt, with shame and humiliation and a downright grief. It was the first tragedy of his life.

But he had his revenge a moment later. The Scrabbler, with a pretty late cut, despatched a fast ball from Martin straight to Pip. Pip automatically clapped his heels together and ducked down to the ball, but just a moment too late. He felt the ball glance off each instep and pass behind him. The Scrabbler's partner, seeing that Pip had not stopped the ball, called to him to come; then, seeing that the ball had only rolled a few yards, called to him to go back. But Pip by this time had reached the ball. The Scrabbler made a frantic leap back into safety. Pip's long arm shot out, and as the batsman hung for a moment between heaven and earth in his passage back to the crease, he saw wickets and bails disintegrate

themselves in wild confusion in response to a thunderbolt despatched from Pip's left hand at a range of six yards.

The partnership was over at last, and the Hittites offered little more resistance. They were all out in another half hour, for a total of two hundred and fifteen,—a score long enough to cause the Hivites to confer gloomily among themselves and ignore the unseemly joy of the Hittites. So play ended for the day.

The match was to be resumed on the following Thursday, two days later. On Wednesday evening Ham sat smoking in his room. He was expecting Pip, who generally chose that time for returning works of fiction. On this occasion Pip was rather long in coming, and when he did come he was not the usual Pip. He had not encountered his form-master in private since the house-match, and was uncertain of his reception. Only the strictest sense of duty brought his faltering feet to Mr. Hanbury's door, and it was with downcast eye and muffled voice that he proffered "Handley Cross" in exchange for "The Jungle Book."

Ham knew his man, and discreetly avoided cricketing topics for the first five minutes. He talked of Mr. Jorrocks, of Mowgli, of the weather—of anything, in fact, rather than half-volleys and full-pitches. It was Pip, with his usual directness, who opened the subject.

"Do you think it will keep fine, sir?"

"Sweltering hot, I expect."

There was an awkward pause. Then Pip said—

"I'm—I'm awfully sorry, sir."

Hanbury understood, and he glowed inwardly to think that the first feeling of this small boy, whose very soul was wrung by the knowledge that he had received his first chance in life and thrown it away, should be one of regret for having disappointed his teacher rather than one of commiseration for himself. Mr. Hanbury was still young and very human, and he felt glad that he had read Pip aright, and not pinned his faith to the wrong sort of boy.

"My dear man," he said, "you did exactly what I expected you to do—no more and no less. You bowled erratically and fielded splendidly." (The idea that he had fielded well had never occurred to Pip.) "I was sorry about the bowling, but I knew you must go through the experience. The best bowler in the world never remembered to bowl with his head his first match. He just did what you did—

shut his eyes and plugged them in as hard as he could."

Pip nodded. That was exactly what he had done.

"That's what I meant when I told you the other day that your education was not half completed. I meant that you might be able to knock over a stump at a net all day and yet not be able to keep your head before a crowd. You will do well now you have found your feet. You fielded like a man yesterday, and you'll bowl like a demon to-morrow. I expect great things of you, so keep your tail up, young man, and—By Jove, I promised to see Mr. Mortimer before nine! Excuse me a moment."

Ham bolted from the room.

For Pip, the imperturbable, the impenetrable, was—*horresco referens*—in tears! After all, he was barely fifteen, and he had endured a good deal already—the quiet disappointment of Marsh, the thinly veiled scorn of the deposed Elliott, and the half-amused contempt of the rest of the house. He had taken them all in his usual impassive way, and the critics who gathered in knots after the game and condemned Marsh for putting "an absolute kid" into the House Eleven, never suspected that the "kid" in question was struggling, beneath an indifferent exterior, between an intense desire for sympathy and a stubborn determination not to show it. And so these words from his beloved Ham, from whom he had expected at the best disappointed silence, brought to his overwrought soul that relief which he so badly needed; and a large tear, trickling down his nose, warned Mr. Hanbury to remember a pressing engagement elsewhere.

Pip soon recovered.

"Lucky Ham had to go out then," he soliloquised, "or he'd have seen me blub."

Ham returned after a discreet interval, and after a few words of wisdom and encouragement dismissed Pip to bed in a greatly improved frame of mind.

The Hivites began their second innings thirty-seven runs to the bad. This fact had impressed itself upon the mind of Marsh, the captain, and he decided, in his vigorous way, that if anything was to be done he must do it himself. He accordingly went in first, accompanied by a confirmed "stone-waller," and

proceeded to break the hearts of the Hittite bowlers. Nothing could shake the steadiness of the two players. The most beautiful balls were sent down to them—balls which pitched halfway and wavered alluringly, waiting to be despatched to square-leg, half-volleys, full-pitches, wides; but nothing would tempt them to take liberties. Marsh played sound cricket, and made runs; but his companion played a purely defensive game, his performance being accentuated by a series of sharp knocks, or dull thuds, according as he played the ball with his bat or his body. The arrears had been exactly wiped off when this hero, in endeavouring to interpose as much of his adamantine person as possible between his wicket and a leg-break, lurched heavily backwards and mowed down all three stumps. He retired amid applause.

But the Hivites were not out of the wood. The next two batsmen succumbed rather unluckily, the one leg-before, the other caught at the wicket,—the two ways in which no batsman is ever really out,—and a rot set in. Marsh, it was true, was playing the innings of his life. All bowling seemed to come alike to him, and he usually contrived to score a single at the end of the over and so prolonged the lives of his various fluttered partners. But he could not do everything, and when Pip came in last, the score was only a hundred and five, of which Marsh had made seventy.

Pip's previous performance had not been such as to justify any unbounded confidence in his supporters; but he certainly shaped better this time. He had a good eye, and by resolutely placing his bat in the path of the approaching ball he achieved the twofold result of keeping up his wicket and goading the bowlers to impotent frenzy. Once he survived a whole maiden over, though he was bombarded with long hops, tempted with slows, and intimidated with full-pitches directed at his head. He stood perfectly still; the ball rebounded from his tough young person again and again; and now and then, when the angle of incidence and the angle of reflection were very obtuse indeed, he and Marsh ran a leg-bye. The score crept up, Marsh began to get near his century, and the Hivites again plucked up heart.

After batting for nearly a quarter of an hour, Pip, much to his own surprise, scored a run—four, to be precise—due to an entirely inadvertent snick to the off boundary. This brought the score up to a hundred and thirty. Directly afterwards Marsh completed his hundred, with a mighty drive over the ropes, and "e'en the ranks of Tuscany," as Uncle Bill observed, "could scarce forbear to cheer."

After that Marsh, feeling uncertain as to how long his companion intended to

stay, determined to make hay while the sun shone. Accordingly he began to hit. Four fours in one over brought on a slow bowler, who had to be taken off again as soon as possible; for even Pip despised him, and pulled one of his off-balls to square-leg for three. But this state of affairs was too good to last. Marsh, who had been smiting all and sundry since completing his hundred, ran out to a slow ball from the Hittite captain and missed it. The wicket-keeper whipped off the bails in a flash, and the innings was over. The full score was a hundred and fifty-seven, of which Marsh had made a hundred and seventeen. Pip scored seven, not out.

Verily, this was a match. The Hittites only wanted a hundred and twenty to win; but a hundred and twenty is a big figure to compile out of the fourth innings of a house-match, when nerves are snapping like fiddle-strings. However, it was generally considered that the Hittites would win by about five wickets, and Master Simpson, by wagering an ingenious musical instrument, composed mainly of half a walnut-shell and a wooden match (invaluable for irritating nervous masters), against two fives-balls and a moribund white mouse belonging to Mumford, in support of his own house, had just brought himself within the sphere of operations of the Anti-Gambling League, when the Hivites went out to the field for the last time.

Marsh had found an opportunity for a hurried consultation with Mr. Hanbury.

"It's no use your going on to bowl at present," said his adviser. "You can't knock up a hundred and expect to take wickets directly afterwards."

"Whom shall I begin with, sir? I thought of Martin and Watkins."

"Watkins is a broken reed, but he'll last for three overs. Take him off soon, and if you are not ready yourself, give our young friend Pip another trial."

Marsh cocked a respectful but surprised eye at his master.

Hanbury saw the look. "You'll find him a very different performer now," he said. "That little bit of batting will have steadied him nicely. But don't keep him on too long, even though he takes wickets. Give him a rest after five overs, and put him on again later. Make him place his own field: the experience will be useful to him."

Things turned out pretty well as Mr. Hanbury had prophesied. Martin, a steady performer, kept the runs down at his end; and Watkins, the broken reed, bowled

exactly three good overs, in the second of which he removed the Hittite captain's leg-bail with a ball which, as Uncle Bill observed, "would have beaten the Old Man himself." After that he fell away, and having been hit three times for four in his fourth over, was taken off.

Marsh was still feeling the effects of his innings, and decided to take another ten minutes' rest. He accordingly electrified players and spectators alike by tossing the ball to Pip.

"We shall win by nine wickets now," said Master Simpson with decision —"not five."

"My dear ass," replied Mumford, "he's only put Pip on for an over to let Martin change ends."

"Well, if he bowls as he did last innings Martin won't get the chance, 'cause Pip will give us all the runs we want in one over. Let's see: six sixes are thirty-six, say ten wides, and—all right, lousy swine!"

This last remark was delivered from a nettle-bed behind the railings, and its warmth was due to the fact that the speaker had been neatly tilted backwards by a well-directed jog from the incensed Mr. Mumford's elbow.

But Pip had no intention of giving away runs this time. He was proud of the confidence in him that had been shown; he was burning to retrieve the disgrace of his last performance; and, best of all, his glorious spell of batting had soothed his nerves and accustomed him to public appearances. He arranged his field quietly, sent a couple of balls down to the wicket-keeper, and even remembered to hand his cap to the umpire.

There was a hush all around the ground as he ran up to the wicket to deliver his first ball.

Things were certainly in a critical state. Of the hundred and twenty runs required to win, the Hittites had obtained forty-five for the loss of one wicket. If the present pair could add another thirty before being separated the match was practically safe. It was felt that Marsh was playing a desperate game in risking everything on the efforts of such a tyro as Pip; and when the Scrabbler took his stand and prepared to punish his presumptuous folly, the Hittites made ready to shout, and the Hivites to decamp to their house.

Pip's head was quite clear this time. His first two balls were to be as straight as

possible and a good length; the third, if possible, was to be a fast yorker; the fourth, a good length ball; the fifth, slow and curly; and the last, Ham had told him, could be anything he pleased.

He delivered his first ball as per programme. The Scrabbler stepped well out to it, calculating, with his long reach, to be able to smother it comfortably. Much to his surprise his bat met with no resistance, for he had planted it quite two inches outside. The ball passed between his bat and his legs, whizzed past the leg stump, and was in the wicket-keeper's hands in a moment. The bails were whipped off, and the Scrabbler, who had dragged his foot right over the crease in his tremendous lunge forward, was out, stumped as neatly as possible.

A mighty shout went up as the Scrabbler retired. Two for forty-five.

Another batsman took his place. Pip delivered a ball almost identical with the first. This time the batsman, a stumpy person, not possessed of the Scrabbler's reach, played back, and succeeded in returning the ball to the bowler. Pleased with this success, and desiring to repeat it, he made the fatal mistake of deciding on his next stroke before the ball was bowled. Consequently he played back to a fast yorker, which, you will remember, came third on Pip's schedule. When he turned round his middle stump was lying on the ground, and the wicket-keeper was groping ecstatically for the bails.

Three for forty-five.

The next man was the heavy hitter of the eleven. It was his custom to smite every ball sent down, including the first, with uncompromising severity. On this occasion, however, he was sufficiently impressed with the solemnity of the occasion to endeavour to block the first ball, which was Pip's fourth,—a straight, good-length, orthodox delivery, rather on the short side. The ball rebounded from his rigid bat, and Point just failed to reach it. A little shudder ran round the ground. The slogger, observing his escape, came to the conclusion that he might as well be outed for a slogger as a poker, and lashed out widely at ball number five, which was a slow and curly one. Now, since Pip, who felt the real bowling instinct, which tells a man what the batsman expects (and prompts him to bowl something entirely different), surging up hotter and stronger in his brain every moment, bowled when still a good two yards behind the crease, the lash-out came much too soon, and the slogger's bat was waving wildly in the air what time his bails were being disturbed by a beautiful curly ball which bumped, very very gently, into his off-stump.

Four for forty-five.

There was no mistaking the shout that arose now. Previous vocal efforts had merely expressed pleased surprise at a good piece of bowling, and had voiced the gratifying fact that the Hivites, though about to be beaten, would not be disgraced; but the tornado which now rent the heavens signified that Pip had set the match on its legs again.

Our hero had now bowled five balls, all with his head. He had been holding himself in, bowling not as he wanted to bowl, but as Ham had told him to bowl, and as he knew in his heart of hearts he ought to bowl. But now he was to have his sixth ball, which he was permitted to bowl in any way he pleased. Ham should see something!

His mentor was sitting under the trees with Uncle Bill.

"What will the infant phenomenon give us this time?" inquired the reverend gentleman.

"Something terrifically fast, probably to leg," replied Mr. Hanbury, who knew human nature.

He was right. The ball caught the batsman a resounding crack on the back of the thigh, and sped away to the boundary for four—a leg-bye. So ended Pip's first over.

Martin now resumed at his end. Evans, who had been a horrified and helpless spectator of his companions' downfall, played him in a cautious manner, as became the occasion, intending to sneak a run at the end of the over and so face the redoubtable Pip himself. But it was not to be. In his anxiety to obtain the necessary run he attempted to hit a ball which he knew should have been let alone, and was caught at cover-point. Five for forty-nine.

Once more it was Pip's turn. He found himself confronted by another hard slogger, who, instead of sticking to his last, trusting to his eye, and running out to hit, stood stock-still, and having solemnly planted his bat in what he imagined was the path of the ball, awaited developments. The ball, curling like a boomerang, pitched slightly to leg, broke back, and bowled him. Six for forty-nine.

The frenzy of the Hivites was becoming almost monotonous, and it was hardly capable of augmentation when Pip bowled another man with his next ball,

bringing his analysis up to five wickets for no runs.

"The match is over," said Uncle Bill; "but it will be interesting to see if he keeps it up to the end."

"'Not for competition, but for exhibition only'—now," murmured Hanbury dreamily.

The next man held his bat firmly in the block-hole, as the best means of combating the third ball of the over,—the fast yorker,—and with the assistance of short-slip, who received the ball in the pit of his stomach and incontinently dropped it, disappointed the entire field, friend and foe alike, by spoiling Pip's hat-trick. The batsman, a person of unorthodox style, having succeeded in despatching a yorker to slip, decided that the best place for a good length ball would be long-leg. He accordingly stepped in front of his wicket for the purpose of carrying his intention into effect; but the ball, much to his surprise and indignation, evaded the all-embracing sweep of bat and hit him hard on both shins, with the result that he was very properly given out leg-before-wicket.

The spectators now realised that the match was as good as over; but curiosity to see how much longer Pip would continue his extraordinary entertainment glued them to the spot. Pip himself had lost all consciousness of the presence of others. All his little soul was concentrated on one idea—to get the last two wickets with the two balls remaining to him.

The last batsman but one took his place, and Pip bowled his slow ball. The batsman watched it as he had been told to do, and decided in a weak moment that it was going to be a good length ball on the off. This being the case, he proposed to make use of his only stroke, a rather elaborate flourish, which, if it could be engineered at precisely the right moment, occasionally came off as a late cut. The one error into which this lightning calculator fell was the belief that the ball would pitch off the wicket. It pitched absolutely straight, got up remarkably quickly, and, almost before the flourish was half over, bowled him. Nine for forty-nine.

The last man walked out slowly, but he had reached the wicket before Pip noticed him. For Pip was plunged in thought: he had once more arrived at the last ball of the over, the ball that he was to bowl in any way he pleased. A good deal—nay, everything—depended upon it. He was determined to bowl no more full-pitches to leg. A yorker, if straight, would almost certainly settle the fate of this last trembling creature; but then yorkers are not always straight. A good

length ball, on the other hand, would probably be blocked.

"Man in," said the umpire, and suddenly Pip made up his mind.

"His sixth ball!" remarked Uncle Bill under the trees. "What will it be this time, I wonder?"

"If he wants to do the hat-trick," said Hanbury, "he must take some risks. No good giving this fellow a length ball. He'll only block it. Pip'll have to tempt him."

And that is what Pip did. He bowled a very short ball, a very bad ball, a long-hop unspeakable, on the off side. Now, the batsman was expecting a good ball, and was prepared to present to it an immovable bat. But this thing, this despicable object which lobbed up so temptingly, ought he to spare it? "Take no risks," Hewett had said; but then Hewett was not expecting this demon bowler to send down tosh like this. Should he? Could he? Yes—no—yes! He raised his bat uncertainly, and made a half-hearted pull at the ball. It struck his bat somewhere on the splice,—the curl in the air had deceived one more victim,—flew up into the air, and, when it descended, found Pip waiting for it with a pair of hands that would at that moment have gripped a red-hot cannonball.

So the innings ended for forty-nine, and the Hivites won by seventy-one runs. In two overs Pip had taken eight wickets (doing the hat-trick incidentally) for no runs. Verily, in a house-match all things are possible. He never accomplished such a feat again, though his seven wickets for seven runs against the Australians ten years later, and his four wickets in four balls, on that historic occasion when the Gentlemen beat the Players by an innings, were relatively far greater performances.

He turned mechanically to the umpire and took his cap, and was in the act of unrolling his sleeves, when he was suddenly caught up, whirled aloft, and carried off towards the pavilion by a seething wave of frenzied Hivites. Those enthusiasts who were debarred from supporting any portion of him contented themselves with slapping outlying parts of his person and uttering discordant whoops.

Somewhere beneath his left arm-pit Pip discovered the inflamed countenance of Master Mumford.

"Where's young Simpson?" he screamed in that worthy's ear, not so much because he wished to know as to relieve the extreme tension of the situation.

It was a senseless and inappropriate question, but it appeared to bring Mumford's cup of happiness to overflowing point. Laying his uncombed head upon Pip's horizontal stomach, with tears of joy streaming down his cheeks, he gasped,—

"H-he went down to the house to g-get his k-kodak as soon as y-you were put on bowling, so as to phuph-photograph the winning hit. And oh, he s-said they would w-win by nine wickets! He h-hasn't got back yet."

But he was wrong. There stood Master Simpson, ready to photograph the winning hit. But, like the Briton and the sportsman that he was, he made the best of a bad job and photographed Pip instead. And an enlarged copy of that snapshot hangs in Pip's smoking-room to-day, to witness if I lie.

CHAPTER V

LINKLATER

I

LINKLATER came to school after Pip,—one year, to be precise,—but by the time that both had attained to the dignity of seniors they were firm friends. They were a curiously assorted couple. Pip at the age of eighteen was as inscrutable and reserved as ever, though his popularity with the school was unbounded, and his influence, when he chose to exert it, enormous. He had already been a member of the Eleven for three years, and should by rights this year have been captain. But alas! though Pip had been duly washed by the high tides of promiscuous September promotions out of the all-glorious Lower Shell into the Upper Shell, and from the Upper Shell by the next inundation into the Fifth, he had not as yet qualified for a Monitorship.

Linklater was a handsome, breezy, rather boisterous youth, quick of tongue and limber of limb. He possessed his fair share of brains, but not the corresponding inclination to use them; and he was a natural athlete of the most attractive type,—a graceful mover, a pretty bat, and a beautiful racquets player. But somehow he was not universally popular. Everybody was his friend, it is true, but that was chiefly because nobody cares to be the avowed antagonist of a man who possesses a sharp tongue and no scruples about using it, especially when these gifts are backed by such undoubted assets as membership of the Fifteen and Eleven. There was something not quite right about Linklater. Perhaps he was too grownup in his manners. He was popular, too, with masters, which is not invariably a good sign in a boy.

Still, he was not quite so grownup at eighteen as when he first came to Grandwich; and thereby hangs a tale.

At every public school there are certain things—each school has its own list—which are "not done." Not done, that is, until one has achieved fame,—until one is a "blood," or a "dook," or a "bug" (or whatever they call it at your school, sir); until a boy has fought his way into that aristocracy—the most exclusive

aristocracy in the world—in which brains, as such, count for nothing, birth has no part, and wealth is simply disregarded; where genuine ability occasionally gains a precarious footing, and then only by disguising itself as something else; but to which muscle, swiftness of foot, and general ability to manipulate a ball with greater dexterity than one's neighbour is received unquestioningly, joyfully, proudly. Dear old gentlemen, who are brought down to distribute the prizes after lunch on Speech Day, invariably point to Simpkins major, who has obtained a prize for Greek Iambics and another for Latin Prose, as the summit of the scholastic universe; and they beseech Simpkins's "fellow-scholars" not to be down-hearted because they are not like Simpkins. "We do not all get—er—ten talents, boys," observes the old gentleman soothingly, with a half-deferential bob towards the Head, as if to apologise for quoting Scripture before a clerical authority. He next proceeds to hold out strong hopes to his audience that if they work hard they may possibly—who knows?—come some day to resemble Simpkins major. At this all the parents, forgetful of their own youth, applaud, and the "fellow-scholars," about fifty per cent of whom do not know Simpkins by sight, while the remainder seldom meet him in a passage without kicking him, grin sheepishly, and take it out of Simpkins afterwards. The real heroes of the school, if only the dear old gentleman would realise, or remember, the fact, are those rather dull-looking youths, with incipient moustaches and large chests, who sit cracking nuts in the back row.

But this is by the way. Let us return to the things which are "not done" by the proletariat. The following are a few extracts from the unwritten but rigid code of Grandwich:—

1. You must wear your tie in a sailor's knot—not in a bow.

2. A new boy must not speak to any one unless spoken to first.

3. You must *not* shave until you are in the Fifteen or Eleven; after that you must shave every Saturday night, whether you need it or not.

There was a merciful proviso attached to the last remarkable enactment—namely, that all whose growth of hair had outrun their social status might shave to an extent sufficient to make them presentable, provided that the operation did not take place in public. Consequently many undistinguished but hairy persons were compelled to shave in bed at night after the gas was out. I have often wondered what their mothers would have thought if they had known. Fortunately

there is much in our lives that our mothers never hear of. If they did, public schools (among many other things) would cease to exist.

Now, Linklater, who, as has been already mentioned, was a precocious youth, —a typical cock-of-the-walk from a preparatory school,—spent his first few weeks at Grandwich in running foul of all the most cherished traditions of that historic foundation. He arrived in a neat bowtie, and proceeded to wear the same, despite the pointed criticisms of a multitude of counsellors, for the space of a week; at the end of which period it was taken from his neck by a self-appointed committee of the Lower Fourth. Finding that his eccentricities were earning him a certain amount of unpopularity, Linklater decided, like the born opportunist that he was, to allay popular feeling by a timely distribution of largesse. He accordingly paid a visit to the school tuck-shop, where he expended two shillings and sixpence on assorted confectionery. On his way back he encountered no less a person than Rumsey, the captain of the Eleven, and, feeling that he might as well conciliate all classes while he was about it, cried, "Catch, there!" and launched the largest sweet he could find in the bag in the direction of Rumsey. The feelings of that potentate on receiving a *marron glacé* in the middle of his waistcoat from a diminutive fag deprived him for the moment of all power to move or speak, so that the unconscious Linklater, passing on unscathed, lived to tell the tale, and subsequently to hear it told and retold by hysterical *raconteurs* to delighted audiences for months afterwards.

"Heard the latest about that new bloke?" inquired Master Mumford of Pip one evening, under cover of the continuous hum of conversation which always characterised "prep" in the Hivite house.

"What new bloke?"

"Linklater. Seen him?"

Yes, Pip had seen him at nets that day, and had noticed that he was a jolly neat bat.

"Notice his boots?" pursued Mumford.

"Can't say I did."

"Well, they were white!"

Master Mumford fairly overflowed with happy laughter at the richness of the jest. The wearing of white buckskin boots was one of the privileges of the First

Eleven, and Linklater had run counter to custom and habit again.

"Oh," said Pip, "I suppose he didn't know."

This childishly lenient view of the case did not appeal to Mumford, who, with all the small-minded man's respect for the letter of the law, was thirsting to punish the evildoer.

"Beastly side!" he ejaculated, "that's all. We are going to fill them with soap and water after prep, and put a notice beside them telling him not to stick on so much of it. I'm writing it now. How many *e's* are there in beastly?"

"Dunno," replied Pip shortly.

"Will you come and help?"

"No. He looks rather a decent chap. He's only been here a week; he may not know about white boots."

"Ought to, then," snapped the bloodthirsty Mumford. "Other people find things out all right."

"Not all," grunted Pip. "How about stamps?"

Master Mumford turned his back with some deliberation, and addressed himself severely to the labours of composition. Once, during his first week at Grandwich, he had called at the Head Master's, and having, after a wordy encounter with an unexpected butler in the hall, succeeded in pushing his way into the study, had endeavoured, in faithful pursuance of the custom in vogue at his private school, to purchase a penny stamp for his Sunday letter from the stupefied autocrat within.

Linklater's white boots were duly filled with soap and water, but Pip was not present at the ceremony. He sought out the victim next evening and invited him to supper—sardines, and condensed milk spread on biscuits—in his study after prayers. An invitation from Pip was something sought after among the Juniors in "Uncle Bill's" house, for Pip, though only fifteen, was regarded as a certainty for his Eleven colours this year, after his electrifying performance on last year's house-match.

Linklater gratefully accepted the invitation, and the two became friends from that day. They possessed opposite qualities. Pip admired Linklater's vivacity and

bonhomie, while Linklater was attracted by Pip's solid muscle and undemonstrative ability to "do things." But cricket was their common bond. Linklater was almost as promising a bat as Pip was a bowler, and the two rose to eminence side by side. But despite their early proficiency, it was fated that neither should be Captain of the Eleven,—Pip for reasons already stated, and Linklater for another, which came about in this way.

Nearly every schoolboy has a *bête noire* among the masters, and every master has at least one *bête noire* among the boys. Fortunately it very seldom happens that the antipathy is mutual. If it is, look out for trouble, especially when the boy has a dour temper and the master is fault-finding and finicky. Such an one was Mr. Bradshaw, late Scholar of Balliol College, Oxford, and a born fool.

Hostilities began early. On Linklater's first appearance in the Lower Sixth, Mr. Bradshaw remarked unfavourably on the shape of his collar, and elicited loud and sycophantic laughter—which is always music in the ears of men of his type—by several facetious comments on the colour of his tie. Linklater chafed and glowered, and muttered "Swine!" under his breath,—symptoms of discomfiture which only roused Mr. Bradshaw to further humorous efforts. Thereafter the two waged perpetual warfare. Linklater took his opponent's measure with great accuracy, and then advanced to battle. He discovered that Mr. Bradshaw was deaf in his left ear. He therefore made a point, whenever possible, of sitting on that side and making obscene noises. Mr. Bradshaw was extremely bald, and ashamed of the fact. Linklater had noted in his study of the Scriptures that the prophet Elisha had suffered from the same infirmity: consequently Mr. Bradshaw found his blackboard adorned every morning for a month with the single word ELISHA in staring capitals. When Mr. Bradshaw was irritable Linklater was serenely cheerful; when Mr. Bradshaw was blandly sarcastic Linklater was densely stupid; and after ostentatious efforts to understand his preceptor's innuendoes, would shake his head pityingly, with a patient sigh at such ill-timed levity.

So the battle went on. Every schoolboy knows what it must have been like. Matters were bound to come to a crisis. One morning, during a Cicero lesson, the form came upon a Greek expression amid the Latin text, and Mr. Bradshaw, who rather fancied himself at this sort of thing, added a touch of distinction to his translation by rendering the word in French. The form received this flight of scholarship without enthusiasm, merely wondering in their hearts how any man could be such an unmitigated ass as to be desirous of elucidating for them a language of which they knew but little by translating it into another of which

they knew still less.

"Yes, *élan* is exactly the right translation," quoth Mr. Bradshaw, well pleased. "There is always a way out of every difficulty if we only look for it. Get on!"

"Please, sir, what does *élan* mean, exactly?" inquired Linklater, not because he wished to know, but in the hope that "Braddy" would waste several precious minutes in explaining.

The master rose to the bait.

"Mean? Bless my soul, what a question! Not know? Here, tell him, somebody —Martin, Levesley, Smith, Forbes, next, next, next!"

Various futile translations were offered, and Mr. Bradshaw stormed again.

"Do you fellows do *anything* in the French hour except eat bananas?" he inquired. (Deferential sniggers.) "What are French lessons but an excuse for idleness? Really, I must ask the Head—"

They let him run on, while the golden moments slipped by. As soon as he showed signs of flagging, Linklater, seeing that it still wanted eight minutes to the hour, repeated—

"But what *does* it mean, sir?"

"Mean, you insufferable dolt! It means—it means—er, 'energy,' 'verve,' 'dash'—yes, that's it! 'dash'!"

Linklater held up a respectful hand.

"I said 'dash!' sir, the moment the question passed me," he remarked meekly.

The form roared, and unanimously decided afterwards that "Link was one up on Braddy." Mr. Bradshaw, after the manner of his kind, reported Linklater to the Head for "gross impertinence." The Head, who had not reached his present high position for nothing, took a lenient view of the case, merely requesting Linklater to refrain in future from humour during school hours. But for all that Linklater determined to be "even with Braddy" for reporting him: and so successful was he in his enterprise that he effectually destroyed his own last chance of leading a Grandwich Eleven to Lord's.

The schoolboy is an observant animal. Mr. Bradshaw, like most men who

carry method and precision to extremes, was a mass of little affectations and mannerisms, one of the most curious of which was his habit of passing his right hand in one comprehensive sweep along his bald head and down over his face. The boys knew this trick by heart: Braddy was much addicted to it at moments of mental exaltation,—say, when standing over a victim and thinking out the details of some exceptionally galling punishment. Milford tertius, the licensed jester of the Lower Fourth, had indeed been caned by the Head for a lifelike imitation of the same, rendered to a delighted pewful of worshippers during a particularly dull sermon in chapel.

The schoolboy, as we have said, is an observant animal. Very well, then.

One morning Mr. Bradshaw, as he entered his classroom, majestic in cap and gown, closing the door carefully and lovingly behind him, with all the cheerful deliberation of a Chief Tormentor who proposes to spend a merry morning in the torture-chamber, suddenly beheld Linklater stand up in his place and heave a "Liddell & Scott" (medium size) across the room at an unsuspecting youth in spectacles, who was busily engaged in putting the finishing touches to a copy of Greek Iambics.

The book, having reached its destination, rebounded in obedience to one of the primary laws of mechanics, and fell with a heavy thud upon the floor. The form, after the first startled flutter, settled down with a happy sigh to witness the rare spectacle of a volcano in full eruption.

Mr. Bradshaw's eye sparkled. Assuredly the enemy was delivered into his hand this time. Mounting his rostrum, he stood gazing, almost affectionately, upon the perpetrator of the outrage, mentally passing in review all the possibilities of punishment, from expulsion downwards, and busily caressing his countenance the while.

Presently some one in the form tittered. Then another, and another, and another. Then the whole room broke into a roar. Mr. Bradshaw, in high good-humour, allowed them to continue for some time: he wanted to rub it into Linklater. At last he cleared his throat.

"Your friends may well smile, sir," he began majestically. (Cheers and laughter.) "So serene are you in your conceit and self-assurance that you proceed to break rules, to behave like a board-school boy, without even taking the trouble to observe if one in Authority"—he smacked his lips—"be present or no. What is the result? Pride has a fall, my young friend. You make a spectacle of yourself

—"

Here the speaker was interrupted by a perfect tornado of merriment. A master can always raise a snigger at the expense of a boy, but such whole-hearted appreciation as this had not fallen to Mr. Bradshaw's lot before.

"—a ludicrous exhibition," he continued, after the noise had subsided.

Cheers and laughter, as before.

"If you could only see yourself now, my boy, only behold the spectacle you present—"

This time his audience became so hysterical that Braddy was conscious of an uneasy suspicion that something must be wrong. Suddenly his eye fell upon the pad of foolscap before him, upon which he had been emphasising his remarks by vigorous slappings. The paper was covered with numerous impressions of his hand, neatly outlined in some jet-black substance. After a hasty inspection of the hand itself the awful truth began to dawn upon him, and the now frenzied Lower Sixth were regaled with the spectacle of a man attempting to scrutinise his own countenance by squinting along his nose.

It must have been about this time, according to the best authorities, that the Head came in. That benevolent despot, passing the door on his way to his study, had been attracted by the sounds of mirth within; and under the impression that owing to some misunderstanding Mr. Bradshaw was not taking his form that hour, he entered the room to maintain discipline until the errant master could be found. After his usual punctilious knock—he was a head master of the velvet glove type—he opened the door, and stood an interested and astonished spectator of the scene within.

What he saw was this—

On the benches rolled thirty boys, helpless, speechless, tearful with laughter; and upon the rostrum, with a parti-coloured bald head and a coal-black face, there mowed and gibbered a creature, which rolled frenzied eyes and gnashed unnaturally whitened teeth in impotent frenzy upon the convulsed throng before him.

Linklater had covered the door-handle with lampblack, and Mr. Bradshaw's favourite mannerism had done the rest.

II

Linklater's escapade took place at the end of the Christmas term. Early in the following January the Cricket Committee held their customary meeting in the President's study, to elect a Captain and Secretary of the School Eleven for the following summer term.

Usually such functions were of the most formal character. The senior "old colour" was elected Captain, and the next man Secretary; the Reverend William Mortimer was unanimously re-elected President (with an ungrammatical vote of thanks for past services thrown in); and the proceedings terminated.

But this term matters were not so simple. There were five old colours available: Pip, sturdy, popular, just eighteen, the best bowler, according to that infallible oracle the ground-man, that the school had known in a generation; Linklater, a beautiful bat and a brilliant field, with the added recommendation of a century against the County last summer; Ellis, a steady bat and a good change bowler, a singularly right-minded and conscientious boy, and therefore slightly unpopular; Fagg, a wicket-keeper pure and simple; and Jarvis, a stripling of considerably more promise than performance, who had scraped into the Eleven at the end of the summer term on the strength of a brilliant but fluky innings against the Authentics.

Of these five, Pip, from every conceivable point of view save one, was the obvious and natural man for the post. But the captaincy of the Eleven carried with it a School Monitorship, and the Law, as represented by an inflexible head master's decree, said that no member of the school could wear a Monitor's cap who was not a member of the Sixth. Now, Pip was only a member of the Fifth, and occupied but a sedimentary position in that. Consequently the Committee heaved a resigned if dissatisfied sigh when Uncle Bill, after taking the chair, announced with real regret that Wilmot—this, you may possibly remember, was Pip's name—was not eligible for the post of Captain.

"Lucky thing Link got his remove this term," whispered Fagg to Jarvis, "or he'd have been barred too."

"Dry up," said Jarvis, with a warning nudge; "Uncle Bill has got something on

his chest."

Uncle Bill indeed appeared to be labouring under some embarrassment, for his good-humoured face was clouded, and he hesitated before continuing his remarks.

"I have another message from the Head," he said at length. "I will give it you exactly as I received it, without comment. It is not a pleasant message, but you—we have no choice but to obey orders. It is this. The next in seniority, Linklater, is a member of the Sixth, and therefore eligible for office; but on account of his—of a regrettable incident in connection with Mr. Bradshaw last term, the Head feels unable to make him a Monitor, and consequently he cannot be Captain of the Eleven."

Uncle Bill had created a sensation this time. There was a startled stir all round the table, and one or two glanced stealthily in the direction of Linklater. He was deathly pale. He was an ambitious boy,—as he was an ambitious man in after life,—and the snub hurt his pride more than most of them suspected. The fact that a far better man than himself had been passed over, too, did not occur to him. He was not that sort.

"That is not an agreeable message to have to deliver," continued Uncle Bill, who felt the necessity of breaking the silence. "But whatever our private feelings in the matter may be,"—Uncle Bill did not like Mr. Bradshaw, and he was inwardly raging at the calamity which had befallen his beloved Eleven,—"we have no choice in the matter but to obey orders and—er—pull together for the good of the school. We have still to elect a Captain."

"I should like to propose Ellis," said Pip at once.

"Ellis is proposed. Will somebody second?"

All eyes were turned upon Linklater, but that modern Achilles was too mortified to respond to their mute inquiry. Accordingly, after an awkward little pause, Ellis was seconded by Mr. Hanbury, who was present in his capacity of Treasurer, and unanimously elected. Pip was appointed Secretary.

"I'm sorry for Ellis," remarked Hanbury to his colleague as they sat down for a pipe after the meeting. "It's a poor business giving orders to two infinitely better players than yourself, especially when they enjoy the advantage of being martyrs into the bargain."

"If I wasn't a parson I should call the whole thing d——d nonsense," remarked Uncle Bill with sudden heat. He had fathered the School Eleven for fourteen years, and he was now very sore that this disaster should have fallen upon the most promising side he had ever coached. "I don't want that young ass Linklater particularly, although they'd have followed him all right; but, as I said to the Head, here was a splendid opportunity for making an exception to the rule about not appointing a Fifth-Form fellow. If there had been a decent alternative to Pip I should have said nothing. Ellis is not popular with the school as it is, and the fact of his having supplanted two favourites will make his position simply unendurable. Poor chap! For sheer moral worth I don't suppose there are half a dozen boys in the school to compare with him. But after all he's only a plodder. He has no more influence than—than Bradshaw himself. The Eleven won't follow him: they think he is 'pi.' He'll stick to his guns, but he'll be miserable all the time, and he'll look it too, and altogether he'll cast a blight over the best Eleven I have ever seen at Grandwich."

Hanbury, who knew that his senior would feel better if allowed to have his say, smoked on. Presently he said—

"I think you are rather reckoning without our friend Pip. He hasn't an ounce of jealousy or meanness in his composition. Linklater will behave like the young sweep that he is, but Pip will back Ellis through thick and thin. Just you see if he don't. Cheer up, old man, and we trample on the County and St. Dunstan's yet!"

The school had already regretfully resigned themselves to the prospect of not having Pip as Captain of the Eleven, but the news that Linklater had been barred too created a storm that was not allayed for some weeks. Linklater, much to his own gratification, found himself a hero, and without ado collected around him a band of sympathisers of the baser sort, who assured him twenty times a day that he was the only "sportsman"—overworked word!—in the school, and asserted with the unreasoning logic of their kind that things ought to be "made warm" for Ellis when the summer term arrived.

Pip said nothing about the matter at all. It was a way he had. He methodically made up his fixture card for the cricket season, and remarked to Ellis that if the present extraordinarily mild winter ended as it had begun, they ought to be able with any luck to get up a little net practice during the fag-end of the spring term

after the Sports.

But all thoughts of cricket, and indeed of every other suggestion of summer, were speedily brought to an end by the coming of the great and historic frost—subsequently known as the Hot-Water Frost—which is talked about in Grandwich to this day. It arrived rather late,—the first week in February,—and it held continuously and unrelentingly until the last week in March.

Morning after morning the mercury in the thermometer outside Big School was found to have retreated unostentatiously into its bulb; day after day a watery and apologetic sun shone forth upon a curiously resonant and rigid world; and night after night the black frost came down like a cast-iron pall, repairing in a moment the feeble and ineffective ravages of the winter day.

Not very far away enthusiastic persons were endeavouring to roast an ox whole in the middle of the Thames, and at Grandwich many an equally unusual and delightful pastime was improvised. There was much sliding: there was no other way of getting about; and boys and masters slid or glid, with more or less agility and immunity from disaster, to and fro between house and school for several weeks. There was a magnificent slide, slightly downhill, all the way from Big School door to the Gymnasium, which offered an exhilarating rush through the air of nearly seventy yards—an offer of which Mr. Bradshaw, accidentally discovering the existence of the slide when walking home from dinner one dark night, involuntarily availed himself.

There was skating galore, for the Head, taking it for granted that each day's frost must be the last, gave extra half-holidays with a liberality which continued, perforce, for seven weeks. There was tobogganing, too, down a smooth hillside ending in a plantation of young trees, against which the adamantine heads of the youth of Grandwich crashed unceasingly from dinnertime till tea. Every night, between "prep" and prayers, a picked band from the Hivites house, which stood adjacent to the slope, sallied out, often headed by their house-master in person, carrying pots and kettles filled with hot water to pour upon the worn parts of the toboggan-slide; rags and sacking, too, wherewith to bandage the trunks of such of the young trees as were beginning to suffer from unceasing collision with the heads of youthful Grandwich. Under this scientific treatment the toboggan-slide increased rather than decreased in excellence. The long slope, though slightly abraded towards the end of a day, always emerged glossy and speckless with the morning's light, and fearsome was the speed with which the toboggans rushed down to arboreal destruction at the foot. "Monkey" Merton, the most agile boy in

the school, used to shoot down on skates, saving his life with incredible regularity at the end of each descent by hooking on to a tree as a street arab hooks on to a lamp-post.

And if there were joys outside there were others within. The classrooms were so cold that the benches were deserted, and boys and master sat round the great open fireplace in a sociable semicircle. In the houses too, there were unlimited fires; and unlimited fires meant unlimited other things. There was a fireplace at the end of each of the big dormitories, and fires now blazed in these from seven o'clock every evening. Theoretically these dormitory fires, not being stoked after 9 P.M., died a natural death shortly after the boys had retired to bed. In practice, however, they glowed like the altars of Vesta all night long, for every boy made it his business to convey a regular contribution of coal to his dormitory. (Handkerchiefs were an appalling item in the laundry-bill that term.) Their united efforts were thus sufficient to keep the fire going all night, and the *élite* of the dormitory used to bivouac round it, in baths filled with bedclothes. This practice, of course, varied in its extent, and depended entirely on the house-master's capacity for keeping his house in order. Among the Hivites it is sufficient to say that the nocturnal fire-worshippers were never once disturbed during the whole seven weeks of frost.

Besides fuel, it was only natural that light refreshments should find their way up to the dormitories, and many and festive were the supper-parties which were held, with the senior monitor in the chair—or rather the bath-chair—supported by the nobility and gentry sitting well into the fire, while the fags sat and munched upon their hat-boxes in the outer circle.

A change of routine always tugs at the bonds of discipline; for a boy, like his noble and infinitely more useful fellow-creature, the horse, though you may drive him daily with ease and comfort so long as you do so under monotonously normal conditions, kicks over the traces at once if you change his oats or take his blinkers off. Pip's house, the Hivites, had recently changed hands. "Uncle Bill" had been promoted to the largest house in Grandwich, and had left his flock lamenting, taking Hanbury with him; and the house, under the benevolent sway of his successor, Mr. Chilford, a fine scholar but no master of men, was in that state of discipline usually described as "lax." Mr. Chilford, who disliked boys, and saw as little of them as possible, left a good deal of the management of his house to monitors—a sound plan, provided, firstly, that it is adopted by the house-master to give his monitors experience and reliability, and not to save himself trouble; and secondly, that the monitors have the right stuff in them. But

when the monitors' excessive authority is entirely due to the house-master's lack of the same, things are bound to happen.

Now, Mr. Chilford's monitors that term were not a very strong lot. They were chiefly of the clever and rather undersized type, with an unwholesome respect for the burly malefactors of the Fifth and Modern Side. Their ranks had recently been stiffened by the inclusion of Pip,—non-membership of the Sixth was no bar to a house-monitorship,—and he and Linklater were the only representatives of authority for whom the house could be said to have any respect whatsoever. Pip, as junior monitor, did not participate largely in the direction of affairs, but he backed the house's nominal head, one Maxwell, with a good deal of unostentatious energy whenever that incompetent official could be cajoled or reviled into doing his duty; and he kept a quiet but effective hand upon the house-bullies.

But, as has been the case ever since history grew old enough to repeat itself, the chief danger came not from without but within. Linklater, second only to Pip in popularity and influence, once deposed from the captaincy of the Eleven, became, as Ham had predicted, the prey of the parasite and the flatterer. Such, little though they cared for their much vaunted hero-martyr, were delighted with any policy which presented them with an opportunity of pursuing a career of misdemeanour under monitorial authority. Did Pip go to quell a riot in a study, Linklater was in the midst of it; was a boy of the baser sort detected in any particularly unlawful offence, he said that "Linklater had given him leave."

Pip bore it all patiently, while he thought the matter over. Linklater was his friend, the one boy in Grandwich for whom he felt any real affection. He had an intense admiration for Linklater's superb brilliancy in many departments of school life, and especially for the readiness and vivacity that he himself lacked. They had fought their way up the school together, and had stood back to back in more than one tight place. The fact that "Link" was at present completely "off his rocker" was entirely due to the scurvy manner in which he had been treated by the Head—or rather by Braddy; for the Head, Pip admitted, was bound to back weak masters up. Link would inevitably recover his balance in time: at present allowances must be made for him.

However, there is a limit to all things. One evening, after the frost had lasted for nearly a month, the monitors were lingering over the tea-table in their own private apartment. A half-holiday for skating had been granted that day, and the monitors, pleasantly replete, reclined round the greatly lightened board,

unwilling to drag themselves away from the *débris* of a fine veal-and-ham pie which somebody's "people" had kindly sent for somebody's birthday.

Suddenly the door was opened with a rapid, nervous flourish, and the Reverend James Chilford appeared on the threshold. It was plain that he was suffering from an attack of energy. For days he would leave his house to its own devices, and then, suddenly goaded to a sense of duty by some slight misdemeanour, would make a lightning descent upon his pupils, and, having thoroughly punished the wrong boy, disappear as suddenly as he came.

"Maxwell!" he exclaimed, in his high, querulous voice, to the head boy, "are you *quite* incapable of maintaining discipline in the house? Here I have a letter from the parents of Butler, complaining that their son is being shamefully and systematically bullied by an organised gang. I look to you to clear the matter up immediately. Come and report to me at nine o'clock that you have detected the offenders and soundly punished them!"

The door banged, and this paragon among house-masters was gone.

Maxwell looked round feebly.

"Well, what are we to do, you chaps?" he inquired, seeking to shift responsibility in his turn.

"What's the good of doing anything for a swine who doesn't knock at the door when he comes in?" grunted Blakely, the second monitor.

"I suppose we'd better have Butler in and ask him," said Maxwell, forced to take the initiative.

"Fat lot of good that would do," put in Pip. "He wouldn't dare to tell you even if he *has* been bullied, which I doubt."

"Better send for Kelly and Hicks," said somebody.

Maxwell grew red, and there was a general laugh, for it was known that he was desperately afraid of Kelly and Hicks, two bulky and muscular libertines who did pretty well what they liked in the house.

"It's not Kelly or Hicks this time," said Pip, getting up and going to the door, "I'm pretty sure of that."

"How do you know?"

"Had my eye on them all the time."

"Oh!" The other monitors sighed rather enviously. Their chief object in life was not to keep their eye on Kelly and Hicks, but to keep the eye of those freebooters off themselves.

"Where are you going? Don't clear out till we have settled something," said Maxwell helplessly, as Pip turned the door-handle.

"All right!" said Pip, and was gone.

He turned down a passage towards a district known as "the Colony," where the boys' studies were situated. He was not on the track of Kelly and Hicks this time. Another idea had occurred to him—an idea which set the seal of certainty on a series of conjectures which had been forcing themselves upon his reluctant mind for some weeks. After a brief sojourn in a study *en route*—usually known as "the Pub," from the fact that it was always full—into which he was unanimously haled to decide an acrid dispute over certain questions connected with the Outside Edge, he steered a course for Linklater's apartment, which was situated somewhat remotely at the end of the passage. Linklater, by the way, had left tea some time before Mr. Chilford's angry visit.

He gave his usual heavy thump on the door, and walked in.

Linklater was at home. He sat in an armchair with his back to the door. In his hand he held a red-hot poker, the end of which swayed gently backwards and forwards not more than two inches from the paralysed countenance of Master Butler, who, cut off from retreat by an intervening table, and rigid with terror, was staring helplessly at the glowing point with the thoroughness of a fascinated rabbit.

III

Hearing the door open, Linklater looked round. Almost simultaneously a brown and muscular hand reached over his right shoulder and whipped the poker from his grasp.

"You can clear out, Butler," said Pip.

Master Butler departed like a panic-stricken rocket, and Pip and Linklater were left alone.

Linklater eyed his friend furtively, with an uneasy grin. He knew that he had to deal with a boy who was his superior in every way, and the fact that the boy was his best friend did not make the coming interview appear any less unpleasant.

Pip sat down and used the poker, which he still held in his hand, to burn elaborate holes in his host's mantelpiece. At length he remarked,—

"Link, old man, you are making a bally ass of yourself."

"Thanks!" said Linklater laconically.

"You are putting me in an awful hole over it, too."

"Indeed? Why?"

"Well, this sort of thing has got to stop, and I don't quite know how to set about it."

"Is it absolutely necessary for you to try? Are you head of the house?"

"No, I'm not. But Maxwell is. He's a rabbit, and the next four are rabbits, too. That leaves you and me. By rights you ought to be the man to keep the house on its legs. But you seem rather inclined to—to leave it to me. See?"

Linklater glared.

"It's a large order for one monitor," continued Pip, "but I'm going to do it, my

son."

Pip finished a rather ornate pattern on the mantelpiece, laid down the poker, and continued talking, looking straight into the fire.

"What sort of state do you think the house will be in by the end of the term if it's to be run by Kelly, Hicks, and—you in your present state? Rotten! I've seen that sort of thing before. Kendall's house went just the same way four years ago, and—look at it now! *We* aren't going that way if I can help it. If only you'll pull yourself together—"

"What the blazes do you mean?" broke out Linklater passionately. "Do you think I'm going to stop taking it out of an idle little hog of a fag just to please you?"

"Oh, Butler? I wasn't talking about him," said Pip. "Listen a minute. Lately I've been able to get no good out of you at all, and you don't seem to have had much use for me either. It's not my business to jaw, but I think you have rather allowed yourself to be talked over by a pretty rotten lot—sorry, if they're friends of yours!—and the result, to be quite frank, is that you are simply playing Hades with the house."

"What have I done?" snapped Linklater.

"Well, the monitors are a weak enough gang in all conscience, and it takes them all their time to run things as it is; but when they find you in the middle of every riot and row they're told to suppress, I don't wonder that they all go about looking as if they wanted to blub. Then, one night last week in the dormitory I woke up—about two in the morning, I think—when you were still sitting with some of your pals round the fire. As far as I remember there were you and Hicks and Kelly and little Redgrave—"

"You ought to set up as a private detective," said Linklater, in tones which were meant to be sarcastic, but which only succeeded in sounding rather frightened.

"I happen to know," said Pip, "because you were talking rather loud—at the top of your voices, in fact. And to judge by your conversation you were brewing whiskey-punch."

He stopped, and looked at his friend inquiringly.

"I wonder you didn't rush and tell Chilly," said Linklater witheringly.

"I might have done," agreed Pip, "only it happens to be rather a serious matter for a monitor to be nabbed in a business like that."

"So you thought you'd give me a pi-jaw instead! That was decent of you."

Pip took this affront quite impassively.

"Don't talk rot," he said. "You know perfectly well that this isn't a pi-jaw. They're not in my line. We—we are both people of the same sort of character. The only difference is that at present you happen to be rather off your oats owing to the Head's treatment of you, and that fills you with a desire to raise Cain and drink punch in the dormitory—eh?"

This exceedingly handsome way of putting things appealed even to Linklater's selfish soul.

"Well, perhaps you are right," he growled. "But why can't you be a sportsman and join in?"

Pip laughed.

"I wonder how many good chaps have gone to the devil through fear of not being thought 'sportsmen,'" he said. "No, Link, old man, I won't join in. I have my vices, but whiskey-punch in tooth-mugs at 2 A.M. isn't one of them."

"Very well," said Linklater ungraciously. "Sorry to have disturbed your slumbers. I'll tell the chaps to meet in the East Dormitory tonight. Sure Maxwell will be pleased to see us!"

Pip stood up and sighed heavily. He knew he was dealing what would probably be its deathblow to one of the few friendships he really valued, but this was no time for ignoble compromises. He leaned rather dejectedly against the mantelpiece, this David, and looked down upon the unworthy Jonathan before him.

"Link, the whole business has got to be dropped—absolutely. Surely you've got the sense to see that."

He spoke almost appealingly, still clutching at the fast receding hope that his friend would pull himself together yet. But he saw in a moment that the hope was a vain one. Linklater's teeth shut with a snap, and his eyes blazed.

"Drop it, must I? Indeed? And who is going to stop me? You, I suppose, you —you swab!"

Pip put his last regrets from him, and answered briskly—

"Correct!"

"And why?"

"Because—well, because I happen to be rather fond of this old house,—we've both had a good time in it, Link,—and I don't want to see it turned into a fully-licensed pub. Also, because I don't like to see my friends make asses of themselves. Also, because—I suppose I ought to have mentioned this first—because it happens to be what I was made a monitor for."

"O lor!" said Linklater, turning up his eyes; "talking about his 'duty' now. We shall have a prayer next!"

"Yes, horrid word, 'duty,' isn't it?" said Pip. "I know no sportsman would ever use it. But I'm going to do mine for all that, my lad."

"May I venture to inquire how?"

"Well, there you rather have me. But I shall begin by going round the house with a stick and making myself deuced unpleasant."

"How the house will love you!"

"They'll thank me in the end," said Pip stoutly.

"What else will you do?"

"Well, if I can't stiffen up the other monitors enough to get things right again, I shall have to make Maxwell report some of the worst people to Chilly."

"Maxwell? He'd never dare."

"Then I'll do it myself."

"Go and blab! That's right. Great Scott! you must have got religious mania, or something."

"But of course," said Pip reassuringly, "I should only do that as a last resource. I should try the other way first. To begin with—but, by the bye, where do you

get your whiskey?"

"What the devil has that got to do with you?" roared Linklater.

"Lots. I'm going to cut off the supply."

"Find out where it comes from first."

"I'm going to. Do you get it from the butler?"

"Find out."

"Right-o! But if I accuse him of supplying smuggled whiskey to the house, and he happens to be innocent, it's possible he may consider it his duty to mention the matter to Chilly. Won't you be rather landed if he does?"

He gazed inquiringly at Linklater, and the latter, thus suddenly cornered, lowered his eyes.

"It isn't the butler," he growled.

"Who is it?"

A pause. Then—"Atkins." (Atkins was the gate porter.)

"Thanks," said Pip. "I'll tell Atkins that if he supplies another bottle I'll report him to the Head. But all that is by the way. What I want to say is this, Link: will you promise me on your honor to drop all this monkey-business and back me up in putting the house in decent order again? This long frost is playing Old Harry with the place; but if you—if we play the man this day, the bottom will drop out of the opposition completely. Will you promise, Link?"

Pip was extremely red in the face. One cannot strain the foundations of an ancient friendship without feeling it.

Linklater looked at him for a moment, and then gazed into the fire.

"Supposing I don't," he said at length.

"But you will?"

"Yes; but supposing I *don't*?"

"Then," said Pip deliberately, "I should have to give you a thundering good licking, Link."

Linklater was no coward, but Pip's slow words dropped into his heart like ice. He felt miserably petty and mean, and he knew that he looked it. He raised the ghost of a laugh.

"Wha—what the blazes do you mean, old man?" he queried uneasily. "Rum way to treat your friends, isn't it?" It was the first time that he had admitted their friendship during that interview.

"Yes, filthy," said Pip. "But there's only one alternative—to report you to Chilly, and I don't want to do that. The less masters have to do with this job the better."

Linklater plucked up courage. Pip seemed so good-tempered and serene.

"Well, old chap," he said easily, "I absolutely refuse to fight you. The idea's absurd. So there!"

He leaned back in his chair with the air of a man who has neatly turned an awkward corner.

Pip looked at him grimly.

"I didn't say fight," he explained. "I said I should have to give you a licking,—an ordinary, low-down caning, that is,—a monitor's lamming,—in here. Of course, if you resist, I shall have to knock you down till you give in; and then I —I shall bend you over in the usual way, that's all."

He did not speak boastfully, but quietly and evenly, with his serious blue eyes fixed upon the boy in front of him. He had figured out the situation, and settled on his course of action. To him Linklater had ceased to be a friend, and was now an abstract problem, to be solved at all costs. He was prepared to knock Linklater senseless, if necessary, until he purged him of the evil spirit that possessed him. And Linklater knew it.

There was a pause, and then Linklater's weaker nature suddenly crumpled up like a wet rag before Pip's overbearing steadiness.

"All right!" he replied petulantly. "Anything you like. You've beaten me! I'll give in, curse you! And for Heaven's sake stop staring at me like that!"

His overstrained nerves could endure no more, and he rushed from the study, leaving his guest master of the situation.

Pip sighed heavily, and diverted his devastating gaze into the fire.

He had lost a friend, but he had saved the house.

IV

Thereafter there was no more trouble with the unruly element. Bereft of pseudo-monitorial support, Messrs. Hicks and Kelly found the ground slipping from under them. They were routed on several occasions, for Pip exercised a good deal of quite unconstitutional authority, and wielded the rod in a manner which they regarded as excessively unfair. The half-hearted monitors took courage; presently the house began to understand the meaning of the word obedience, and its self-appointed leaders came to the reluctant conclusion that the game was not worth the candle. To crown all, the frost broke, and the long-deferred joys of football soon dissipated the last relics of discontent and insubordination for everybody.

For everybody but Linklater, that is. His pride had had a fall, and he was not the boy to recover easily from such a disaster. His interview with Pip had been absolutely private—apart from the momentary intrusion of Pip upon the torture of Master Butler, a scene which had lost none of its dramatic force from that infant martyr's description of it; but the house, though they knew nothing for certain, observed two things—(*a*) that Linklater was no longer the sworn foe of law and order, and (*b*) that he was no longer the friend of Pip; and putting two and two together and adding them up in time-honoured fashion to a total of five, they came to the unanimous and joyous conclusion that Pip had "lammed Link till he promised to dry up."

Pip, if he felt any satisfaction over the result of his labours, displayed none. He invited Linklater to take supper in his study the following Sunday evening, and though little surprised at the answer he received, all his stolid philosophy could not prevent him from feeling distinctly unhappy.

One night he lay awake, thinking. The school clock had just chimed midnight, and the dormitory was given up to a well-modulated *concerto* for seventeen nasal organs. Pip found himself wondering if Linklater was asleep. Happy thought! he would go and see.

The night was cold, and the moon shone brightly through the uncurtained oriel windows upon Pip's bare feet as they paddled along the boarded floor. Pip's

cubicle was next to the dormitory door, while Linklater's was at the extreme end, the two monitors thus dividing the dormitory between them.

Pip had something to say to Linklater.

Presently he arrived at his friend's cubicle. It possessed no door, and the moonlight illuminated the interior quite plainly, in spite of the fact that the lower half of the window was obscured by a human form—the form, in fact, of the owner of the cubicle. He was leaning far out, and was apparently endeavouring to communicate with some one in the garden below.

No; he was hauling something up! Pip could see the regular motion of his elbow as the line came in hand over hand. What had this midnight fisherman hooked? And who had put the fish on the hook for him? And what on earth—?

Suddenly the motion of Linklater's elbow ceased. Still intent on his employment, he stepped back a pace and scientifically "landed" his quarry. Simultaneously Pip realised that this performance was not intended for the public eye. He must either take official notice of it or go back to bed.

He went back to bed.

"I wonder," he said to himself, as he settled down under the clothes again, "if they ever wrap up anything *but* bottles in those straw things? He can't have taken to drink! Atkins, of course, daren't supply him with any more, so he must be—But surely he doesn't find it as necessary as all that! Perhaps it's only cussedness. Let's hope so! Poor old Link! In the morning I'll—"

Here Pip joined the well-modulated *concerto*.

Pip's sleepy surmises had been more or less correct. It *was* a bottle, but Linklater had not taken to drink. It was, as Pip opined, chiefly "cussedness." Pip, argued Linklater, had suddenly turned religious, and by a most unwarrantable parade of muscular Christianity had compelled him, Linklater, the idol of the school, to eat humble pie and then efface himself. But not even Pip should stop his fun. He would show his independence!

Hence the bottle of highly inferior whiskey, obtained at an appalling cost from an individual known to the boys as the One-Eyed Tout, who resided in the

adjacent village, and whose visits to the school (events which the vigilance of the authorities rendered infrequent and furtive) were invariably for some nefarious purpose. It is true that Linklater did not like whiskey, though plenty of hot water and sugar enabled him to swallow it with a fair show of enjoyment. But it was forbidden fruit. Few of us, from Eve downwards, have ever been able to withstand that temptation, and, as his dormitory parties had been perforce discontinued, Linklater conceived the happy notion of giving a "small and early" in his own study. And on these hospitable thoughts intent he invited Kelly and Hicks to "look in" directly after prayers if they wanted "a little something, hot."

Kelly and Hicks both nodded knowingly, and accepted the invitation with much pleasure. Their sentiments were perfectly genuine. In the first place, it is gratifying for ordinary house-bullies to be noticed by a celebrity in the Eleven; and in the second, it is comforting to feel that in the event of a collision with the powers that be, the entire responsibility will fall upon the exalted shoulders of your host.

Bedtime at Grandwich lasted from nine-thirty till ten-fifteen. The school retired to roost in detachments—"squeakers" at half-past nine, Middle School at ten, and the Sixth at a quarter-past. At that hour the senior boy was supposed to turn off the gas, and slumber reigned officially till six-forty-five the following morning.

The dormitory cubicles, as has already been mentioned, possessed no doors, and the partitions were only seven feet high. Each cubicle was entered by an opening some three feet wide, across the top of which ran a stout wooden bar. The bar, originally devised to strengthen the framework of the doorway, had been used for generations by Grandwich boys for the performance of gymnastic exercises. Indeed, it was incumbent upon every newcomer, after he had been a member of the school a fortnight, to do six "press-ups" on his cubicle-bar, under penalty of continuous and painful assistance (with a slipper) from the rest of the dormitory until proficiency was attained.

On the evening of Linklater's party, Pip arrived in the dormitory, as was his custom, shortly before ten, and after attiring himself in his pyjamas proceeded to his usual exercises. Five minutes' club-swinging warmed his blood nicely; and he had just completed his preliminary "toe-and-up," and was sitting balanced on the bar, when the dormitory door, which adjoined the entrance to his cubicle, suddenly swung open, and Linklater appeared upon the threshold. He was singing, blindly, lustily, raucously; and Pip realised at a glance that the "straw

thing" *had* contained a bottle, and that his friend was now a fully-qualified candidate for "the sack."

Linklater arrived opposite Pip's cubicle, where he drew up with a slight lurch and a suggestion of a hiccup. Small boys, who, attracted by his corybantic entrance, had come to the doors of their cubicles to see what the matter was, regarded him furtively with looks of mingled fear and amusement.

Pip slipped off his bar.

"Have you been making that filthy row all the way up from your study?" he inquired.

Linklater turned a slightly glazed eye upon him, and nodded.

"In that case," said Pip, "you'll probably have Chilly up any moment. If he catches you like this you'll get sacked—do you understand?—*sacked!* Go to bed, quick—you swine!"

He took his bemused friend by the shoulder and turned him in the right direction. But two glasses of toddy held firm sway in Linklater's unaccustomed interior, and for the moment Dutch courage was the order of the day.

"Think I care?" he roared. "Where *is* old Chilly? Let me get at him! Chilly be __"

"There he is!—downstairs—now!" hissed Pip in his ear. "Get to your cubicle and into bed, as quick as you can. I'll try to keep him down at my end; but if he comes along to you, pretend to be asleep. It's your only chance."

All the time he was hustling the highly indignant Linklater towards his cubicle. Downstairs Mr. Chilford's high voice could be heard querulously announcing its owner's determination to unearth "the perpetrator of this outrage."

For a moment it seemed as if Pip's determined strategy would succeed. But just at the entrance to his cubicle Linklater broke away with a sudden twist, and in a moment was flying down the dormitory again with the avowed intention of interviewing his house-master.

"Where is the blighter?" he shrieked. "Lead me to him, and I'll—Pip, you cad, leave me alone! Help! rescue! cad—hrrrumph!"

The last ejaculation was caused by sudden contact with his own pillow, for

Pip, losing all patience, fairly picked him up in his arms, and, carrying him kicking and struggling the whole length of the dormitory, through a double rank of trembling and ecstatic fags, heaved him through the doorway of his cubicle on to his bed.

"Get him into bed and sit on his head," he whispered rapidly to the two biggest boys present. "Chilly is coming upstairs now. Never mind his clothes. Quick!"

His lieutenants, though they risked a heavy punishment for being found in another boy's cubicle, turned to their task with the utmost cheerfulness and vigour, while Pip raced down the dormitory to repel the invader. When that well-meaning but incompetent pedagogue entered the door Pip was preening himself upon his cubicle-bar.

Mr. Chilford began at once—

"Wilmot, what is the meaning of this disgraceful disturbance? I insist upon having the names of those responsible. Do you hear? I insist, I say,—I insist!"

"Disturbance, sir?" said Pip blankly.

"Yes—disturbance, brawl, riot, pandemonium, boy! Who is responsible?"

"What sort of disturbance was it, sir?" inquired Pip respectfully, his cast-iron features unmoved.

"What sort? Are you deaf? Do you mean to say you heard nothing?"

Pip reflected.

"I think I did hear somebody singing, sir," he admitted at length.

"Hear?" Mr. Chilford almost screamed. "I should think you did! And, what is more, I believe he was coming up to this dormitory. Who was it?"

"I think it must be a mistake, sir. There is nobody singing here; you can hear that for yourself, sir."

Mr. Chilford was accustomed to cavalier treatment from boys, but Pip's bland rudeness was rather more than even he was prepared to stand. For a moment there was dead silence in the dormitory, broken only by spasmodic quakings from one or two beds. Then, just as Mr. Chilford braced himself for a thorough

scarifying of Pip,—a congenial task which would probably have occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else and so tided over a disaster,—there came from the far end of the dormitory a loud, resonant, and alcoholic chuckle, and out of the gloomy recesses of Linklater's cubicle there arose once more the refrain of that very song which had brought Mr. Chilford flying from his study.

Pip ground his teeth. But he broke in quickly,—

"Would you mind telling me if I do a straight-arm balance right, sir?" (Mr. Chilford had been something of a gymnast in his youth, and many a hard-pressed sinner had escaped punishment at the eleventh hour by asking his advice on the subject.) "My left arm seems to go wrong somehow. Do you think—"

But Mr. Chilford had heard the noise.

"There—I knew it, I knew it!" he cried. "It *is* in this dormitory. Who is it, Wilmot? I insist upon you giving me his name."

"I expect it's Linklater, sir," said Pip, after consideration. The dormitory shivered. Surely Pip was not going to throw up the sponge now! "He often sings in his sleep, sir," he added.

The dormitory breathed again, and Mr. Chilford, completely baffled by Pip's heroic coolness, paused irresolutely. Meanwhile, in the murky recesses of Linklater's abiding-place, the two sturdy Fifth-Form boys did not cease to sit precariously but resolutely on Linklater's head.

"Where I go wrong, sir," continued Pip, following up his advantage, "is here." He poised himself on the bar and began to sink his head slowly down, while his rigid body and legs, hinged on his elbows, swung slowly up. "My left arm begins to go as soon as the weight—"

Mr. Chilford began to take an interest, in spite of himself. But then—ten thousand horrors!—there was a sound as of heavy bodies in conflict, and Linklater's raucous voice was once more uplifted—

"What? Here, is he? Just the man I want to see! Lead me to him, lead me to him, I tell you! Lead—"

"Should I have my thumbs round the bar, sir, or alongside my fingers?" gasped Pip, upside down and desperate.

But it was too late. Mr. Chilford, roused at last, turned on his heel and rushed up the dormitory in the direction of Linklater's cubicle.

He had only taken a few steps when his course was arrested by the sound of a crash and a dull thud behind him. He whirled round again to see what had happened. Pip was no longer balanced on the bar, but lay on the floor beneath, a motionless heap of arms and legs and striped pyjamas.

Providence had stepped in at the eleventh hour, and the unjust had been saved, not for the first time, at the expense of the just.

Seven feet is not a very long way to fall, but when you do so head first, and alight on the point of your left shoulder on a boarded floor, something is bound to go. Pip's collar-bone went, and his thick head also suffered considerable concussion. However, his injuries, as described to Master Linklater by the entire dormitory next morning, were sufficient to give that late disciple of Bacchus a very bad fright indeed. His recollection of the disaster itself was vague in the extreme, but the strictures on his own part in the affair, received from numerous angry people during the next few days, had an effect upon him which was to last the rest of his life. Consequently it was a very remorseful and repentant Linklater who presented himself at the Sanatorium two days later, on a visit to the invalid.

"Five minutes and no more!" said the decisive matron, as she showed him into the sick-room. "His head is still very painful."

Linklater, to his eternal credit, devoted the greater part of the five minutes to an abject apology for his baseness and ingratitude. Pride—most invincible of all devils—was swept aside at last, and his broken words embarrassed Pip considerably.

"All right, old man, you can dry up now," he remarked nervously, as Linklater paused for breath. "Let's drop the subject once and for all. It's all over."

"Is it? Pip, they say you won't be able to bowl next term."

This possibility had not occurred to Pip, but if he felt any disappointment he displayed none.

"Yes," he said, "it's a pity. Never mind!"

"And it's all my fault, my fault!" Linklater held his head in his hands and groaned aloud.

"Your fault? Piffle, my dear man! What on earth had you to do with my falling off a bar? You were at the other end of the dormitory. The whole thing was an accident: it happened at a rather lucky time for you, that's all. You'd better cut now."

Linklater rose to go, mightily comforted.

"I heard how you held out against Chilly, trying to keep him from coming—"

"Oh, hook it!" remarked the patient uneasily.

But Linklater lingered a moment. He wanted to say something.

"I'll—we'll look after the house till you come back, Pip," he said awkwardly.

"Right. Back Maxwell up. He's a puker, Link."

"Well, so long!"

"So long!"

Linklater reached the door, and turned.

"It's a rum world, Pip," he said. "If you hadn't tumbled off that bar at that precise moment I should have been sacked."

"You would," assented Pip.

Then, as the door closed upon his friend, he turned to the wall, and murmured with a contented chuckle,—

"That's why I did it, my son!"

CHAPTER VI

Petticoat Influence

"PIP!"

"Well?"

"May I come in?"

"All right," said Pip in a surprised tone. His sister was not in the habit of craving admission to his den in this formal manner.

The reason revealed itself with the opening of the door. Pipette entered the room with another girl, at whose appearance Pip, always deferential to the point of obsequiousness in female society, rose up hastily and removed his pipe from his mouth. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and otherwise unprepared for company. His private apartment was in a state of more than usual confusion, for a difference of opinion had arisen between John—the fox-terrier—and a cricket-boot, and the one-sided conflict that ensued, together with the subsequent chastisement of John, had deranged even the primitive scheme of upholstery that prevailed in "the pig-sty," as Pip's apartment was commonly called.

"This is Elsie Innes," said Pipette. "My brother."

Pip saw before him a girl of about sixteen. She had extremely fair hair, a clear skin, not unbecomingly freckled, and eyes which had a habit of changing from blue to grey in different lights. Girls of sixteen are not always graceful,—like their male prototypes they frequently run to knees and elbows,—but this girl appeared to be free from such defects. She possessed a slim, lithe, young figure, and carried herself with an elasticity and freedom that spoke of open air and early bedtimes. She was in the last stages of what slangy young men call "flapperdom," and her hair was gathered on the nape of her neck with a big black bow. Pip, of course, did not take in all these things at once, but he had time to note especially the neatness of Elsie Innes's feet and the whiteness of her teeth. From which it will be observed that, though his experience in these matters was limited and his judgment unformed, Pip's instincts were sound.

"Please sit down," he said, sweeping John and "The Field" from out of the armchair. "Pipette, what on earth did you bring Miss—Miss, er—"

"Innes."

"—Miss Innes up to this untidy hole for?"

"The drawing-room has got two plumbers in it, and they are laying lunch in the dining-room, and Father is in the study, so we came here," said Pipette.

Pip expressed his delight rather lamely, and the girls sat down.

"You must endure us till lunch," continued Pipette. "I suppose you know that this is the day of the Blanes' garden-party?"

"So it is! I had forgotten."

Pipette smiled amiably and turned to her friend.

"What did I tell you?" she said.

"You said," replied Miss Innes, "that he would say he had forgotten all about it."

"Pip, dear," continued Pipette, pointing an accusing finger, "don't think you can deceive *us*!"

"What do you mean?" inquired Pip uneasily.

"You know," said Pipette. "Think."

Pip thought, apparently with success. "Oh," he said, growing red in the face,—he had never outgrown that childish weakness,—"you are a little ass, Pipette!"

Pipette nodded sagely and smiled at Miss Innes. That young person smiled indulgently upon Pip, and heaved a little sigh which intimated that boys would be boys.

For Pip was at this time involved in the meshes of his first serious love-affair. Being without skill in the art of dissimulation, he made no attempt to conceal his condition, and in consequence was now acting as target for the playful and occasionally rather heavy banter of his friends. Why, goodness knows! We have grown so accustomed to regard the youthful lover as an object of humour, that a young man, if he happens to fall in love, is now compelled to conceal the fact,

or, at any rate, dress it up, and endeavour to pass the affair off as at most a mere airy flirtation.

Now, roughly speaking, a man is in love from his fifteenth birthday onwards: nature has ordained it. But in most cases civilisation, convention, society—call it what you like—has ordained that he must not treat this, the most inspiring passion of human life, as anything more than a jest for another ten years or so. And therein lie more little tragedies—disintegrated castles-in-the-air, secret disappointments, and endless efforts of self-repression—than this world dreams of. The boy may keep the girl's photograph on his mantelpiece, and that is just about all he may keep. Contrast with this the happy case of the girl. If *she* chooses to fall in love at the age of eighteen, nothing is deemed prettier or more natural: she is at liberty to enjoy her birthright openly; she receives sympathetic assistance on every hand; and if at the age of nineteen or twenty she decides to marry, society comes and sheds rapturous tears at the wedding. What of the boy who has been her playmate for years back; who has taken the lead in all their childish escapades; who has been her trusted guardian and confidant ever since they pulled crackers and kissed under the mistletoe at children's parties? What of him? He is still a boy. True, he is a year older than she is, but by an immutable law he is for all practical purposes ten years her junior. She has sprung up at a stroke of some mysterious magician's wand into a woman, a personage with an acknowledged position in the scheme of things; and he, her old sweetheart, is only a poor, broken-hearted hobbledehoy. He will get over it, you say? Quite true. But that will not make things any easier for him at present. Ten years later he will take a girl away from some other hobbledehoy and marry her. He will then be in the prime of young manhood; and he will behold his first love, plump, matronly, and rather *passée*, sitting in a back pew at the wedding. It seems rather a dull sort of revenge, somehow.

Of course boy and girl marriages would never do. Joint inexperience is a sure guarantee of disaster. Still, sentimental persons may be permitted one sigh of regret for a millennium which, however hopelessly idyllic and unpractical it might be, would at any rate prevent young men from marrying wealthy widows, and pretty girls from giving themselves, in exchange for a position in society, to middle-aged gentlemen with five-figure incomes. And if a young man must spend the best years of his life in repressing his tenderest instincts, let us at any rate refrain from laughing at his struggles.

All of which brings us back to Pip.

The female sex exercised a more than usual fascination over him. Brought up in a circle almost exclusively male,—Pipette was too completely subservient to himself to have any direct influence on the moulding of his character,—Pip regarded women in general much as the poor Indian regards the sun, moon, and other heavenly bodies,—as things not to be understood or approached, but merely to be worshipped. Pip was a Galahad,—an extremely reserved, slow-moving, and, at times, painfully shy Galahad,—but a very perfect gentle knight for all that. He treated all women, from his sister's friends to the most plebeian young person who ever dispensed refreshment across a bar, with a grave courtesy which the more frivolous members of that captious sex occasionally found rather dull.

Such a girl was Miss Madeline Carr. Pip had met her six months before on a visit to the home of his friend Dick Blane, and, being a healthy young man and twenty-one, had fallen in love with her. Being Pip, he did the thing thoroughly, and made no attempt to conceal his devotion. Unfortunately, Madeline was of a type, not uncommon, which only wants what it cannot get, and thinks but little of what may be had for nothing.

She was an exceedingly pretty girl of twenty, in her second season, and consequently almost sufficiently worldly-wise to be Pip's mother. Having made an absolutely bloodless conquest of Pip, she valued him accordingly, and Pip was now beginning to realise that there must be something wrong with an attachment which consisted of perpetual devotion on the one side and nothing but an occasional careless acknowledgment of services rendered on the other. Of late, however, the situation had improved. Madeline had come up to Cambridge for the May Week, and finding that Pip occupied a position of authority and even admiration among his fellows that she had never dreamed of, and of which she had gathered no hint from Pip's own references to his 'Varsity life, Miss Carr decided in her shrewd, business-like, and thoroughly cold-blooded little heart that, for the time being, considerable *kudos* might accrue to her as the exclusive proprietress of the most popular man of his year. Consequently for a brief week Pip had basked in the unaccustomed sunshine of her smiles; and though there had been a perceptible lowering of temperature since their return to town, he was still about as cheerful as a man in love has any right to be.

He turned to Miss Innes.

"Are you going to the party?" he asked.

"Look at me!" replied his guest. "No, not at my face,"—Pip was regarding her resolutely between the eyes,—"my clothes. Can't you see I'm dressed for a party?"

"Ah!" remarked Pip meditatively, shifting his gaze lower down, "I see. You are coming with us, I suppose?"

"Not us," interposed Pipette,—"you."

"What! aren't you coming yourself?"

"No. The Lindons are to be here for lunch, and I must stay and entertain the old lady while Father and Sir John sit in the study and talk shop."

"Bad luck!" replied Pip. "Sir John Lindon and the dad are always searching about inside people and finding new diseases," he explained, turning to Elsie. "It is called Research. I remember once in the 'lab' at—"

"So you must escort Miss Innes, Pip," said Pipette hastily.

"Right! That will be first-rate," said Pip, with a heartiness which quite surprised himself.

Presently they went down to lunch, and after Pip had arrayed himself in tennis costume, the two set off for the Blanes' garden-party.

It was the last week in June. Term was over, and ten places had been filled up in the Cambridge Eleven against Oxford. Pip so far had not received his Blue. He had just completed his first year, for he had not gone direct from school to the University, partly because his attainments were not quite up to the standard of the Previous Examination, and partly because he had never quite shaken off the effects of his fall in the dormitory that eventful night two-and-a-half years ago. A trip round the world with a tutor had corrected these deficiencies, and Pip was now at the end of his period of "Fresherdom" at the University of Cambridge.

But somehow all was not well with his cricket. He had been tried against the M.C.C. and had not been a success. His chief rival, Honeyburn of Trinity, had been tried against Yorkshire, and had been a failure. The University captain had been reduced to experimenting with a lob-bowler, and such a creature had been tried against an England Eleven a week before. But though he had taken two good wickets they had cost forty-four runs apiece; and his further services had

been dispensed with. So the last place was still unsettled. Pip, knowing that University captains very seldom go back to their first loves, had little hope of being chosen, though he had a good college record. Most probably the captain, rendered desperate, would fall back on some well-tried friend of his own on whom he could rely to a certain, if limited, extent; or else—horror of horrors!—bring up some last year's Blue, dug out of an office or a public school, and so blight the last faint pretensions of all those gentlemen who were still hoping to be chosen, if only in the humble rôle of a *pis aller*.

It was now Wednesday, and Cambridge was to play Oxford at Lord's on the following Monday. Pip was a phlegmatic youth, but the knowledge that Cayley, the Cambridge captain, who was Mrs. Blane's nephew, would probably be at the garden-party, gave him a vague feeling of unrest. Perhaps Cayley had not made up his mind yet; perhaps the proverb about "out of sight out of mind" was capable of working negatively; perhaps—

"Do you imagine you are entertaining me?" inquired a cold voice at his side.

Pip started guiltily. "I had forgotten you were there," he said.

"I thought you had," said Miss Innes composedly.

Pip smiled at her in his most friendly and disarming fashion. "Very rude of me," he continued: "I'm sorry. The fact is, I never can think of things to say to people."

"Why not tell me what has been going on in your mind all this time?" suggested the girl. "That would be something."

"Oh, that was only cricket," said Pip.

"I thought so. You were wondering if you were going to get your Blue."

Pip turned and regarded this discerning young person with increasing interest.

"How did you guess that?"

"Well, it was not very difficult. I should be too, if I were in your place. The papers are quite full of it. 'The Sportsman' says—"

"Do you read 'The Sportsman'?" asked Pip, much softened.

"Yes; and of course I read 'The Field' on Saturdays. Now, tell me what you

were twisting your left wrist about for?"

"Great Scott! Was I?" cried Pip, turning pink.

"Yes; and you were skipping about just like you do when you run up to the wicket to bowl."

Pip was too perturbed by this information to notice the compliment implied by Miss Innes's familiarity with his bowling action.

"I must have looked an ass," he said apologetically. "Bad luck on you, too!"

"Oh, I was all right. I walked a yard or two behind. People didn't know I was with you."

"Oh!" said Pip, rather sheepishly.

"And as I was watching your action," continued the girl judicially, "I thought of something—just as you dodged round that old gentleman at the corner of Reedham Gardens."

"I didn't notice him," said Pip humbly.

"No? Well, he noticed you, I think, because he stopped and spoke to the policeman at the corner after he had passed us," said the girl gravely.

"I seem to have been going it. But what was the thing you thought of?"

"Well, you bowl left-handed."

"Yes; I know."

"You run up to the wicket in rather a queer way, as though you were going to bowl at point, and then you suddenly swing round the corner and let the batsman have it instead."

"Quite right. But where on earth—?"

"Don't interrupt! I am speaking to you for your good." The girl was genuinely in earnest now. "Well, you always bowl over the wicket, don't you?"

"Yes; why not?"

Elsie looked at him severely.

"Don't you see what a grand chance you have been throwing away all this time?" she said. "If you bowled *round* the wicket, you would—"

"I see, I see!" roared Pip, slapping his leg. "Confound my thick head! The umpire! If I bowl over the wicket I'm in full view of the batsman all the time; but with my diagonal run, if I bowled *round* the wicket I should pass behind the umpire just before delivering the ball, and so bother the batsman? Is that it?"

"That's it. You should have thought it out for yourself years ago," said the girl reprovingly.

The conversation was interrupted by their arrival at Mrs. Blane's house.

Miss Innes was immediately snapped up to play tennis, and Pip drifted off in search of the lady to whom he was wont to refer with mingled pride and depression as his "best girl." They greeted each other in their usual manner, the balance of cordiality being heavily on Pip's side; and Miss Carr inquired—

"Who is your friend—the school-girl person in the white frock?"

Pip, anxious to clear himself of any appearance of faithlessness, explained that Miss Innes was a friend of his sister's, and hastened on his own part to disclaim anything approaching intimacy with the lady. He then craved the favour of a game of croquet.

"Not at present," said Miss Carr, who had just been introduced to a young Guardsman,—"I'll see later. But you can go and get me some strawberries and bring them over to the croquet-lawn."

Pip departed as bidden; but somehow he was not conscious of the glow of heroic devotion that usually actuated him when obeying Madeline Carr's behests. He had a feeling that she might have said "Please!" and a further feeling that "other people"—no further specification—would have done so at once.

At this point in his reflections he arrived at the croquet-lawn with the strawberries, and was promptly commanded to put them down and stand by for further orders. This treatment, customary though it was, annoyed him; and, feeling unusually independent and assertive, he drifted behind a rhododendron bush, where he encountered his crony, Mr. Richard Blane, the son of the house, who was enjoying a quiet cigarette during a brief lull in the arduous labour of dispensing hospitality.

"Hallo, Pip!"

"Hallo!"

"Cigarette?"

"Thanks."

The two smoked silently for a moment, sitting side by side on the garden-roller.

"I say," inquired Mr. Blane, "who is that flapper you brought with you? All right—eh?"

"Name of Innes," replied Pip shortly. "Scotch—pal of Pipette's."

"Seems to be a pal of Cayley's, too," said Blane. "They were having a quiet ice in the shrubbery just now. Very thick, they looked."

"Is Cayley here, then?" said Pip, looking more interested.

"Yes. Has he given you your Blue yet?"

Pip shook his head gloomily.

"Bad luck! Well, there are still a few days. I expect he is waiting to see if the wicket is going to be hard or soft."

"I suppose he hasn't given it to Honeyburn?"

"Don't think so."

"I expect he will," said Pip in resigned tones.

"Rot! You seem to be fearfully down on your luck this afternoon, old man. Come and have an orgy of claret-cup. It's about all we keep to-day." Mr. Blane rose from the roller, brushing some blades of grass from his immaculate flannels.

"Sorry—can't," said Pip. "Miss Carr said she might be able to play croquet with me about now," he explained awkwardly.

Dick knew all about his infatuation.

"Pip," said that youthful sage, inclining his head at a judicial angle, "you drop that girl! She's the wrong sort."

"Look here, Dick—" began Pip indignantly.

"Yes, I know," continued the voice of the misogynist. "She's perfect and all that; but no woman is worth the seriousness you are putting into this business. I believe it's spoiling your eyes, for one thing. Madeline Carr is simply making use of you. You see how she is behaving just now—playing a sort of in-and-out game? Well, she is waiting to see if you get your Blue. If you do, she will trot about with you during the luncheon interval at Lord's, and so on. It'll make the other girls jealous. If you don't—well, she'll have no use for you. Oh, I know 'em!" The orator wagged his head and paused for breath.

To Pip most of this diatribe was rank blasphemy, but he felt uncomfortably conscious that there was some truth in his friend's remarks. Still, he stood up stoutly for his ideal.

"Don't talk rot, Dick!" he said. "There may be a few women like that,—just one or two,—but this girl isn't one of them. Why, you have only got to look at her face to see that!"

The world-weary Blane surveyed his friend with something approaching consternation.

"A bad case!" he remarked, shaking his head. "Her face? My boy, faces are the most deceptive things in the world."

"Hers isn't," maintained Pip. "She is most sincere. You have only to look her in the eyes to see what is going on inside."

He stopped suddenly. He realised that he was growing too communicative.

"Eyes? That's just it. A girl makes eyes at you, Pip, and you crumple up. I had no idea you were in such a drivelling state as this, or I should have jawed you sooner. Come and drink stimulants,—claret-cup, lemonade, iced-coffee, anything to drown the past,—but come. And never again, after this experience, trust a girl with big eyes and little ways."

So saying, the counsel for the prosecution took the counsel for the defence by the arm, and the two, nobly sinking their differences in a common cause, cast their cigarettes away and sallied forth to distribute tea and ices among hungry chaperons and plain girls.

Meanwhile Miss Elsie Innes and the Cambridge captain were conversing in a

retired part of the garden. An introduction had been effected by Miss Blane, though at whose instigation need not concern us.

Cayley, whose conversational stock-in-trade was limited, was feeling unusually complacent. The conversation had never flagged once, for this girl, though obviously young and inexperienced, had proved herself to be intelligent and appreciative beyond her years.

"I suppose you are going to beat Oxford," said Miss Innes, looking at her companion with innocent admiration.

"That is a large question," replied Cayley heavily. "These things aren't settled by the spin of a coin. But we are going to do our best," he added, with an indulgent smile.

"Have you picked your team yet?"

"All but one. I want another bowler."

"I see. What sort of bowler?"

"A good bowler," replied the captain, facetiously. It was hardly worth while wasting technicalities on a girl.

"Oh! Can't you find one?"

"I have got three in my eye, but I can only choose one."

"I saw the Cambridge Eleven play against the M.C.C.," said Miss Innes, apparently changing the subject.

"Which day?"

"The second. *You* made sixty-nine, not out."

Mr. Cayley, much gratified, coughed confusedly.

"Oh, that was a fluke," he said. "The difficulty that day was to get wickets."

"There was one Cambridge bowler," continued the girl, "who looked as though he ought to take wickets but didn't."

"Who was that?" inquired the captain, much amused.

"A man with black hair and blue eyes."

Mr. Cayley scratched his nose reflectively. His recollections of the eyes of his team were vague. Their individual shades he had never observed, though he had frequently condemned them collectively.

"Well, really—" he said. "Do you remember anything else about him?"

"He was a medium-paced, left-handed bowler, breaking both ways, with a good deal of swerve as well," said Miss Innes, becoming suddenly and surprisingly technical: "he had a curious oblique run, and he usually bowled about one really fast ball every over."

"Oh—Pip!" said the captain at once.

"That is the name," said the girl; "I remember now, when a catch went to him in the outfield, you called out, 'Run for it, Pip!'"

"That's him," said Cayley. "Yes, he has been disappointing lately. He is a good bowler, too; but somehow he is not taking wickets at present."

"Have you ever tried him round the wicket?" asked Elsie. "With his run he would pass behind the umpire just before delivering the ball."

The captain was fairly startled this time. He turned and regarded the *ingénue* beside him with undisguised interest and admiration.

"I say," he remarked, with the air of one who has just made a profound discovery, "you know something about cricket!"

Miss Innes, much to his surprise, blushed like a little schoolboy at the compliment.

"I was brought up to it," she said. "I am a sister of Raven Innes."

Then the captain understood; and he almost fell at her feet, for the name of Raven Innes is honourably known from Lord's to Melbourne.

"Do you play yourself?" he asked.

"A bit. I don't bat quite straight, but I can bowl a little. Leg-breaks," she added, with a touch of pride.

The captain's appreciative reverie was interrupted by the appearance of a third party—Pip, to wit—who now drifted into view and hovered rather disconsolately in the offing, as if uncertain whether to approach. He was a prey

to melancholy, having just completed a final rupture with Madeline Carr, and under the stress of subsequent reaction was anxious to escape home.

"Hallo!" said Cayley. "There's your man, Miss Innes."

Miss Innes glanced in Pip's direction.

"So it is. I can recognise him," she answered, with an air of gratified surprise. "Will you take me to have some strawberries now, please?"

The couple departed, leaving Pip still hove-to on the horizon.

"Rum things, women," mused the captain. "This girl's quite out of the common. I thought at first she must be keen on Pip, or something; but she doesn't seem even to know him. Not often you get a woman taking a purely sporting interest in a man like that!"

Which is nothing but the truth.

Delighted to find a woman possessed of "some sense," Cayley, who was by nature a homely person with bachelor instincts, unbent still further, with the result that the end of a long bout of cricket "shop" with Elsie found him fully convinced—somewhat to his surprise, for he had hitherto been unable to make up his mind on the subject—that Pip was exactly the man he wanted for next Monday.

Elsie finally joined Pip, who was waiting, slightly depressed, to take her away.

"Had a good time?" she inquired brightly, as they walked home.

"Rotten," said Pip.

"Didn't you meet any friends?"

"Yes, a good many 'Varsity men."

"I meant lady friends."

"I haven't got any," said Pip glumly.

"You should speak the truth," said his companion with some acerbity. "How about Miss Carr?"

Pip glanced at her; and then, moved by an impulse which he did not quite

understand at the time, he said, with sudden and unwonted heat,—

"I never wish to set eyes on Miss Carr again."

After this outburst they walked on silently, till they came to a house in Sussex Gardens.

"I live here," said Miss Innes. "Good-bye, and thank you so much for bringing me home."

They shook hands.

"When shall I see you again?" said Pip regretfully.

The girl smiled at his frank seriousness.

"Lord's, on Monday," she said. "Come and see me in the luncheon hour, or before, if Cambridge is batting."

"I say," said Pip gruffly, "aren't you rather taking things for granted?"

"You mean your coming to see me?"

"Gracious, no!" cried Pip in genuine distress. "I meant about my playing."

Elsie Innes looked him straight in the face. "Pip," she said, "do you wear gloves?"

Pip extended two enormous palms and inspected them doubtfully. "Sometimes," he said—"at weddings."

"Very good. I'll bet you ten pairs of gloves to one that you get your Blue."

"Don't!" said Pip appealingly. "You couldn't afford it. I take nines."

"My size," said Miss Innes, "is six-and-a-quarter. White kid—eight buttons. Good-bye!"

She turned and vanished into the recesses of the hall, a receding vision of white frock, glinting hair, and black bow.

After Pip had walked down two streets and halfway across a square, he stopped suddenly and dealt his leg a blow with a tennis-racquet that would have maimed an ordinary limb for life.

"By gad," he cried to a scandalised pug-dog which was taking the evening air on an adjacent doorstep, "she called me Pip!"

Next morning he received a communication from the authorities of the Cambridge University Cricket Club.

An hour later he was being shepherded, scarlet in the face, by a posse of stentorian shopwalkers, through an embarrassing wilderness of ladies' hosiery to the Glove Department of an establishment in Oxford Street.

BOOK TWO

THE MAKING OF A MAN

CHAPTER VII

A CRICKET WEEK

I

BY the time that Pip had reached his twenty-fifth year his name was scarcely less familiar to the man in the street than that of the leading picture-postcard divinity, and considerably more so than that, say, of the President of the Royal Academy. The English are a strange race, and worship strange gods. Pip's admission to the national Pantheon had been secured by the fact of his having been mainly responsible for the sensational dismissal of the Australians, for an infinitesimal score, in the second innings of the third Test Match.

The morning papers referred to him as "that phenomenal trundler, the young Middlesex amateur"; the sporting press hailed him as "the left-handed devastation-merchant"; and the evening "specials" called him "Pip," pure and simple.

To do him justice, Pip cared for none of these things. He was much more concerned with the future than the present. He had scraped a pass degree at Cambridge, and was now nominally studying medicine. But he knew in his heart that he had not the brains to succeed in his task, and he persevered only to please his father, who, though he admitted that his son could never hope to put up a specialist's plate in Harley Street, considered him (just as a race-horse might consider that anything on four legs can haul a cab) quite capable of doing well in a country practice.

One morning in July Pip received an invitation to play in the Rustleford Cricket Week, an honour calculated to inflate the chest of any rising amateur with legitimate pride. John Chell, the Squire of Rustleford Manor, was of a type now too rare. An old Grandwich captain, an old Oxford captain, and an old All England Eleven player, descended from a long line of top-hatted cricketers, he devoted what he called his "declining years" to fostering the spirit of the game. Rustleford Manor was one of the strongholds of English cricket. John Chell's reputation as a judge of the game was a recognised asset of the English Selection

Committee, and more than one great professional had received his first chance on the Rustleford ground.

Pip was not intimately acquainted with John Chell, though he had frequently met him at Lord's and elsewhere, and had known his son Jacky at Cambridge. But he was genuinely pleased with this recognition of his merit. It was a thing apart from journalistic celebrity and the adulation of a Surrey crowd. No man was invited to Rustleford who was not a cricketer, out and out; and a man who played in the Rustleford Manor Eleven was hall-marked for life.

The night before his departure he dined alone with his father. Pipette was out at the theatre.

The great physician looked aged and ill, and Pip, noticing this for the first time,—we are unobservant creatures where our daily companions are concerned,—and stricken with sudden pity, offered to abandon his cherished cricket week and accompany his father on a short holiday to a health resort.

The doctor shook his head.

"Can't get away, my boy," he said. "Wish I could. But it can't be done. I have consultations every day for five weeks, and hospital work as well. After that, perhaps—"

"After that your fixture-card will have been still further filled up," said Pip.

His father laughed.

"You are right," he said, "I believe it will: it's a way it has."

"Well, why not fix up a month's holiday, say in five weeks' time, and stick to it?"

"And who is going to do my work?"

"I wish *I* could," said Pip, impulsively for him. "Dad, I must be a devil of a disappointment to you. Fancy you—and me!"

By the latter rather condensed expression Pip meant to express his surprise that such a clever father should have produced such a stupid son.

"We don't all get ten talents, old man," said his father. "But soon, I dare say, when you are qualified, there will be lots—"

Pip put down his glass of port.

"Dad, I shall never be qualified," he said.

"Why?"

"Because I haven't got it in me. You are so clever that you can't conceive what a fool's brain can be like. I tell you honestly that this thing is beyond me, Governor. I have worked pretty hard—"

"I know that," said his father heartily.

"—And I think I am rather more at sea now than I was four years ago. I have learned a few things by heart—anything that can be picked up by those jingles and tips that coaches give one—and that is just about all. Fancy me going over a patient's ribs and mumbling rhymes to myself to remind me what part of his anatomy I had got to!"

Father and son laughed. Some of the *memoria technica* of the medical student are peculiar.

"I have been meaning to tell you a long time," continued Pip, "but I saw you were keen on my getting through, if possible, so I stuck to it. I think I know my limits. I'm not cut out for the learned professions. Fact is, I'm a blamed fool."

They smoked on silently after that. The doctor was not altogether surprised at Pip's outburst, for he had lately been realising, from the casual utterances of lecturers and examiners of his acquaintance, that Pip's prospects were hopeless. But he was sadly disappointed for all that. He had been a lonely man all his life, and now, especially that his health was uncertain, he realised the unhappy fact that his son—his big, strong, healthy son, to whose intellectual companionship he had looked forward so eagerly—was never to give him a shoulder to lean on save in a physical sense.

At this moment, much to the relief of both, the door opened and Pipette came in. She was just twenty-two, and to the tired man in the armchair by the fire she was her mother over again.

She threw off her opera-cloak and wrap and slipped into the chair beside her father. Then after one brief glance into his face she inquired—

"Well, old boy, what's the trouble?"

"Pip wants me to go for a holiday," said her father.

"Carried unanimously!" announced Pipette. "When shall we start?"

"Can't be done at present. Too busy."

"Get somebody from the hospital staff to do your work."

"Hear, hear!" said Pip.

Dr. Wilmot gazed into the fire. Presently he said,—

"It's not altogether professional work. Pip, you said just now that you were a blamed fool. Your father is another."

"Let us hear all about it," said Pipette maternally.

"Well, I am a prosperous man as professional men go. But a few years ago I realised a good many of my investments—"

"What does that mean?"

"I sacrificed my savings to get ready money, to finance that private cancer-research commission that Sir John Lindon and I got up,—you remember, Pip?"

"Yes; go on."

"Well, the Government ultimately paid the expenses of the commission,—we shamed them into it,—and I got my money back. When I came to reinvest it, instead of putting it into the old safe place, I devoted most of it to buying shares in a wild-cat Australian scheme—"

"Which has gone bust?" said Pip.

"Not quite. But the shares are down to the bottom mark, and there is no dividend. I believe the thing is sound, and that in a year or two we shall be all right again. Meanwhile—meanwhile, children, I am extremely hard up!"

To people who have never been hungrier than an unpunctual cook can make them, the prospect of actual poverty is always rather sobering. There was a long pause. Presently Pipette slipped a soft and protecting arm round her father's neck.

"Dad," she asked, "why did you buy those queer shares?"

"To get rich quick."

"Why quick?"

"Because"—the doctor hesitated, surveyed his son and daughter rather doubtfully, and finally proceeded—"because human life in general is an uncertain thing, old lady, and my life in particular happens to be—don't choke me, child!"

Pipette's encircling arm had grown suddenly rigid, and her father heard her heart flutter.

"Wh—what do you mean, Daddy?"

"I mean that I possess what insurance companies call 'a bad life.' Nothing serious—slight heart trouble, that's all. I shall have to be careful for a bit, and all will be well. It's the cracked pitcher that lasts longest." Dr. Wilmot had unconsciously dropped into the easy and optimistic tones which he reserved for nervous patients.

After a little further conversation Pip and Pipette, somewhat reassured, retired to bed.

Next morning Pip departed to Rustleford, but not before he had conferred briefly with Pipette.

"Do you think I ought to leave the Governor?" he said.

Pipette puckered her alabaster brow thoughtfully.

"Yes; why not?" she replied at length. "It isn't as if he were in bed or anything. He'll go to his work just the same whether you are here or not. I have made him faithfully promise to come away for a holiday for the whole of September, so we must just let him have his way just now. You go and enjoy yourself, little man. I'll look after him. Besides"—Pipette's angelic features relaxed into the suspicion of a smirk—"I heard yesterday that a particular friend of yours was to be there."

"Who? Linklater?"

"No—a lady."

"Not Madeline—"

"Dear no. I thought you had forgotten her. Can't you guess?"

Pip turned a delicate plum colour.

"Ah, now you are getting nearer," said Pipette. "It's your little flapper friend, Elsie Innes. How long is it since you saw her?"

"About a year, I think. She has been away from town a lot lately," replied Pip, rather incautiously.

"She has put her hair up," said Pipette.

II

That evening Pip arrived at Rustleford.

He was hospitably greeted by John Chell, introduced to Mrs. Chell, Miss Emily Chell, and Miss Dorothy Chell, renewed his acquaintance with Jacky Chell, and then turned to the inspection of the rest of the house-party, most of whom were known to him.

The cricketers were headed by Raven Innes, a little past his best now, but still to be reckoned among the six finest bats in England. Then came Mallaby and Oake, the Oxford and Cambridge captains for that year. There was also a comic man—the Squire knew well that it takes all sorts to make an Eleven—a member of a noble house, with a polysyllabic and historic title; but nobody ever called him anything but "Cockles." There were one or two county cricketers of established merit, with or against whom Pip had waged many a gallant battle; and it was reported that the Squire had up his sleeve a young local professional, who would one day be the finest fast bowler in England.

Finally, there were two guests who require more elaborate introduction. The first was a young man of about twenty-three. His name was Gresley. His father was sole proprietor of the Gresley Motor Works, and (it was said) a man of millions. He had sent his only son to Cambridge; and the son, a shy and retiring boy, after devoting his first two years to the study of mechanical science, oblivious of the glad fact that the world contained other things to do, had suddenly sprung into fame, almost *malgré lui*, as a bowler of absolutely natural "googlies," which fearsome term means an off-break with a leg-break action. This priceless talent had been accidentally discovered by Pip during a visit to Gresley's home in the vacation, in the course of a game of stump-cricket on the lawn after lunch. A year later Gresley had played for Cambridge at Lord's, with a success which had qualified him for an invitation to Rustleford. Indeed it was to him, together with Pip and the Squire's professional dark horse, that the Eleven looked for its wickets. Gresley was a small, slim fellow, looking much younger than he really was. He had been brought up by his widowed father almost by hand, and had never been to a public school. He was not quite at his ease in a crowd of people, and was devotedly attached to Pip, who had done him more

than one good turn since they became acquainted.

The other man, Cullyngham, was of a very different type; and indeed Pip's first action on catching sight of him playing bridge in the hall was to seek out Raven Innes and inquire, with unusual heat, what "that swine" was doing in the house.

"Can't say, laddie," said Innes. "The Squire asked him, not I. I suppose he has only met him casually, and just knows him as a first-class cricketer."

"First-class cad!" grumbled Pip.

"Quite so, my son; but it's not our house, and he's not our guest. Still, it will do no harm to keep an eye on him."

A sudden idea struck Pip.

"Wouldn't it be a sound scheme," he suggested, "to warn your young sister about him?"

Raven cocked an inquiring eye at him.

"Why her in particular?"

"I meant all of them," corrected Pip, rather lamely.

"I've only got one."

"No, no; I meant all the girls here."

"Not much," said the sagacious Raven; "they'd be after him like bees!"

After that the conversation reverted to ordinary channels, and Pip was apprised of the week's programme. On the morrow, Wednesday, the House Eleven, under the Squire himself, would play the village, led by the Vicar—a time-honoured fixture. Thursday would be an off-day; on Friday they would meet the Grandwich Old Boys, who were on tour and would put up at "The George"; and on Saturday would come the tug-of-war, the match against the Gentlemen of the County, who were reputed to have whipped up a red-hot side.

Pip, who had arrived late for tea, met the ladies of the party in the drawing-room before dinner. They were of the usual diverse types. There was Kitty Davenport, slangy and mannish, who would not thank you for describing her as "a charming girl," but would be your firm friend if you called her "a good sort."

There were the Misses Chell, fresh, unaffected, and healthily English. There were the two Calthrop girls, pretty, helpless, and clinging—a dangerous sort this, O young man!—together with an assortment of girls who were plain but lively, and girls who were dull but pretty, and a few less fortunate girls who were neither lively nor pretty. There was a solitary "flapper" of fifteen, who, untrammelled as yet by fear of Mrs. Grundy, was having the time of her life with the two callowest members of the Eleven.

And there was Elsie. Pip encountered her suddenly on the staircase. She was clad in the severely simple white frock that marks the *débutante*, and her lint-coloured hair was "up," as Pipette had said. It was two years since Pip had seen her, for she had been to a finishing-school in Paris. He shook her hand in a manner which left that member limp and bloodless for the rest of the evening, and accompanied her downstairs, to find on reaching the hall that some never-to-be-sufficiently-blessed fairy had arranged that he was to take her in to dinner.

The most confirmed believer in the decadence of the Anglo-Saxon race might have been converted by the sight of the company round Squire Chell's table that night. Young men and maidens, healthy, noisy, effervescent, ate and drank, babbled and laughed, flirted and squabbled with whole-hearted thoroughness from the soup to the savoury; and Pip, sitting silently ecstatic by Elsie, beheld the scene and suddenly realised that life was very good. What a splendid assemblage! The girls, of course, were girls, and as such beyond criticism. And the men? Maybe they were youthful and conventional,—each would probably have cut his own father dead in the street if he had met him wearing a made-up tie,—but Pip knew that they were for the most part clean-run, straight-going people like himself, good fellows, "white" men all. With one exception. And suddenly Pip realised that the exception was sitting on the other side of Elsie.

Cullyngham was smiling and talking. He always was smiling. He smiled when he made a century. He smiled when he made a blob. He smiled when a rising ball hit him on the knuckles. He was smiling now, and Elsie was smiling too; and Pip felt suddenly murderous.

They were talking of golf. Elsie, who had spent most of her life on the east coast of Scotland, was discussing matters that were Greek to poor cricketing Pip, —stymies, mashies, Kites, Falcons, and other fearful wild-fowl,—and Cullyngham was offering to play Elsie a match round the home course next day. A brief review in Pip's mind of the most expeditious forms of assassination was interrupted by a cheery hail across the table from Jacky Chell, a hearty but

tactless youth of boisterous temperament.

"Quite like old times, seeing you and Cully together, Pip," he cried. "Played each other any billiard matches lately?"

Elsie scented a story.

"What billiard match?" she inquired, turning to Pip. "Did you two play much together at Cambridge?"

By this time Jacky Chell's stentorian laughter had reduced the table to silence, and all waited for Pip's answer, which when it finally came, was to the effect that Jacky Chell had better dry up. Cullyngham continued to smile, apparently without effort.

"What is the story, Jacky?" said the Squire down the table.

"Cockles will tell it," said Jacky. "He'll make much more of it than I can."

The patrician humourist, thus flatteringly introduced into the conversation, readily took up his parable.

"Well, it fell out on this wise, ladies *and* gents," he began. "Old Cully here regards himself as an absolutely top-hole pill-player, and one day he was laying off to some of us in the Pitt—"

"In the *what*?" exclaimed Mrs. Chell.

"Undergraduates' Club," interpolated her husband swiftly. "Go on, Cockles."

"Well, suddenly Pip cuts in and says, 'Look here, you've talked about your billiards for the last twenty minutes. I'll play you a hundred up now and beat you!'"

"And did he?" said several ladies.

"Wait a bit, *if* you please. None of us knew much about Pip's game, as he had just joined the club, but we all went into the billiard place next door, and I stood on a sofa and made a book—"

"What price?"

"Three to one on Cully."

"Who *won*?" cried the flapper.

"*Wait* a bit," said Cockles severely. "Don't crab my story. Cully went off at the start and rattled up a couple of fifteens almost before Pip got his cue chalked. He reached his fifty just as Pip got to five."

Sensation.

"The odds," continued the narrator, smacking his lips, "then receded to ten to one, and no takers. Then Cully got to seventy-five just after Pip had reached eighteen—wasn't it, Pip?"

No reply.

"Right-o! Never mind if you're shy. Anyhow, old Cully, being naturally a bit above himself, gave a sort of chuckle, and said, 'What odds now, Pip, old man?'"

"Ooh!" said Miss Dorothy Chell. "How rash! It was quite enough to change your luck, Mr. Cullyngham."

"Did you tap wood when you said it, Mr. Cullyngham?" screamed the flapper down the table.

Mr. Cullyngham, possibly owing to the effort involved in keeping up a protracted smile, did not reply.

"Well," continued Cockles, "Pip just turned to him and said, 'I won't take any odds, but I'm da—blessed if I don't beat you yet.' And my word, do you know what he did?"

"What?" came from all corners of the table.

"He got the balls together a few minutes later, settled down—and ran out!"

"What for?" inquired Miss Calthrop languidly.

"What for? He *won*. A break of eighty-three, unfinished. He wouldn't go on. Said he had come there to beat Cully, not to make a show of himself. The old ruffian! He had lain pretty low about his powers. Hadn't he, Cully?"

Cullyngham, to his eternal credit, still smiled.

"Rather!" he said. "You had me that time, Pip, old man."

Cullyngham's good nature and tact having smoothed over the rather jarring sensation produced by Cockles's thoroughly tactless reminiscences, conversation became general again. But Pip wriggled in his seat. He hated publicity of any kind, and he felt, moreover, that although he was the undoubted hero of Cockles's story, the smiling, unruffled man on the other side of Elsie was coming out of the affair better than he, if only by reason of the easy nonchalance with which he had faced a situation that had been rather unfairly forced upon him.

III

Next day came the match against the village. It was a serio-comic fixture, and as such does not call for detailed description. The Squire was early astir in cricket flannels and Harris tweed jacket, the latter garment being replaced at high noon by an M.C.C. blazer which ought to have been let out at the seams twenty years ago: and in good time all the company assembled on the Rustleford Manor cricket-ground.

The village won the toss, and the Vicar, accompanied by the blacksmith, opened the innings. The attack was entrusted to Pip and the local phenomenon. The latter proved to be a bowler of appalling pace but uncertain length; and the blacksmith, whose generous figure offered a fair target to any ball directed within a yard of the wicket, growing restive under the bombardment, forgot more than once in his comments on the situation that a clergyman was standing less than twenty-two yards away.

The Vicar, an old Blue, played a skilful and patient innings, but the blacksmith did not stay long. As was natural, his chief stroke was a rather laboured upheaval of the bat over his head, followed by a downward sledge-hammer drive across the path of the elusive ball. He timed it correctly just once, and the ball, rebounding from the ground like a flash, sang over the head of the Squire at point and proceeded to the boundary for four. That was all. Next time, in endeavouring to bring off a particularly pyrotechnic late cut, the batsman was bowled. He made doubly sure of his dismissal by simultaneously bringing down his bat upon the top of the off-stump with a force which called for the united efforts of the umpire and Cockles, who was keeping wicket, to get it out again.

The next comer was the Vicar's son, a public-school bat of the highest promise; and for a merry half-hour *père et fils* set Pip and partner at defiance, and piled up runs to the credit of the village green. It was not until the Squire's prodigy had been taken off and Gresley put on that the schoolboy, tempted by one of the latter's insidious "googlies," mistimed a stroke and put up an easy one to Raven Innes at cover-point.

The next batsman was the booking-clerk from the station. Humourists on the

boundary cried out that they expected something "first-class" this journey. They were doomed to disappointment, for the batsman was bowled first ball, a mishap which a facetious friend in the shade of the refreshment tent attributed to natural anxiety not to waste the return half of his ticket.

Eighty-two for three wickets is a good score for a village club; but when the three wickets grew to four, and so on to six, without any appreciable increase in the score, things cannot be regarded as so satisfactory. A rot set in after the Vicar was dismissed, and it was not until the last man came in that the hundred was reached. A really creditable stand now ensued, the village policeman laying on for Tusculum at one end, while the curate (whom the parish darkly suspected of ritualistic tendencies) laid on for Rome at the other. These twain brought up the score to a hundred and twenty, at which point the policeman, in attempting a sort of truncheon-stroke to point, was deftly caught at second slip by Cullyngham.

The Rustleford Manor Eleven, as was usual in this fixture, took the field tail first, a proceeding which brought Pip to an unwontedly exalted position in the batting-list. He went in first wicket, two minutes after the commencement of the innings, Gresley having knocked off his bails in a misguided attempt to pull the first ball he received. The other end of the pitch was occupied by the Squire, who had gone in first in this match for twenty years. He liked plenty of time to make his runs, he explained, increasing girth precluding any great feats of agility between the wickets.

The bowling was shared by the Vicar and the policeman, the former with lobs, the latter with a delivery so frankly illegal that Pip, gazing open-mouthed at the bowler, made no attempt to play the first ball he received, and was nearly bowled.

"Rather a doubtful delivery that, isn't it?" he remarked to the umpire at the end of the over.

"No possible doubt about it whatever, sir," said the grizzled ground-man decisively.

"You mean to say he doesn't throw?"

"I mean to say he does throw, sir."

"Then why don't you take him off?"

"Take him off, sir?" The veteran smiled indulgently in the direction of the

bowler. "Lor' bless you! Now, why, sir? 'E ain't doin' no 'arm."

Pip could not but agree with the undeniable correctness of this pronouncement, which was shortly afterwards endorsed by the captain of the side, the limb of the law being relegated to a distant beat in the outfield and his place taken by another. The newcomer, an erratic bowler of great swiftness, shot his first ball into the Squire's knee-pad, and immediately appealed for leg-before-wicket. The village umpire, after an obvious struggle between a desire to get rid of a dangerous batsman and an inherent sense of loyalty to the feudal system, finally decided in favor of the gyrating Squire, and the game proceeded. Pip was bowled next over by one of the Vicar's lobs, and retired amid applause with a score of two fours and a six to his credit.

Outside the tent he espied Elsie. He sat down beside her, and the subsequent proceedings interested him no more. However, the House Eleven, after losing five wickets for thirty runs, at last began to put real batsmen into the field. When the match ended at six o'clock the score was a hundred and eighty-five for seven wickets, the Oxford and Cambridge captains, Mallaby and Oake, being not out with fifty-five and forty-eight respectively. By this time Pip had asked for and been promised a lesson in golf next morning, when there was to be no cricket.

There was a nine-hole course round the house park, and here the lesson was given. After breakfast the two repaired to the tee, where Pip, whose whole weapon of offence consisted of an ancient left-handed cleek (discovered in the gunroom), made laborious and praiseworthy efforts to imitate Elsie's St. Andrew's swing, and to hit the little balls which she placed on the tee for him. He had asked for the lesson from purely ulterior motives, but in half an hour he was badly bitten with the desire to excel at the game itself. He no longer regarded golf as a means to an end, but found himself liking it for its own sake. He listened carefully to Elsie's helpful instructions, ground his teeth when she heaved a resigned sigh, and glowed rosily at her rare expressions of approbation. Twelve o'clock found him still hewing his way enthusiastically round the course, Elsie, appreciative of his keenness but a trifle bored, nonchalantly playing a ball to keep him company.

The afternoon was devoted to a river picnic, at which Pip, to his huge disgust, found himself in the wrong boat both going and returning. Beyond a few minutes of what he called "good work" under a tree after tea, the afternoon was a blank for him; and it was with mingled feelings of ordinary jealousy and real concern for the girl that he found himself a helpless spectator of Cullyngham's undoubted

progress in Elsie's good graces.

The evening was given to bridge, and Pip—one of the few men in Great Britain who combined the misfortune of being a hopelessly bad player with the merit of realising the fact—played billiards with Raven Innes till bedtime. Next morning broke dull and cloudy, and by the time that the Grandwich Old Boys had won the toss and decided to bat, the clouds broke and the rain came down in torrents.

There is no duller or more depressing spectacle in this world than that of two elevens waiting in the pavilion for the rain to stop. Nervous men who have to go in next move restlessly about, much harassed by the exuberance of joyous youths who play small-cricket against the dressing-room door. Weather prophets gaze pessimistically at the weeping heavens and shake their heads, while optimists point out to each other fragments of blue sky, invisible to the unbiassed eye, in distant corners of the firmament. The pavilion bore descends upon you, and having backed you into a corner of the veranda, where the rain can comfortably drip through a leak in the roof down your neck, regales you with stories which Shem probably told to Ham and Japheth under precisely similar circumstances.

On this occasion the cricketers divided their energies pretty equally between bridge and bear-fighting. Pip, who was in a contemplative mood, sat smoking patiently on the veranda railing. Presently Cullyngham, who had just cut out at bridge, came to the doorway and looked round. His eye fell on Pip, and he smiled in a friendly manner.

"Game of picquet, old man?" he inquired.

"No, thanks. Get another mug!"

This was rude of Pip, but Cullyngham took it angelically.

"Dear old Pip!" he cooed. "I wish I could say caustic things with that air. It's so effective."

At this moment Gresley came up the steps.

"Ah, here's my man!" exclaimed Cullyngham. "You are a sportsman, anyhow, Gresley. Come and have a hand at picquet till lunch."

Gresley, much flattered at this notice from a celebrity, agreed readily, and the pair disappeared into the dressing-room, where, since the rain continued for the greater part of the day, they were destined to spend a considerable time.

IV

That evening there was an impromptu dance. It was much the same as other dances. There was plenty of music and champagne and laughter; and as usual several people tried, and as usual failed, to solve the problem of how it is that an ethereal-looking and fragile slip of a girl, wholly incapable of carrying a scuttle of coals upstairs or of walking five miles without collapsing, can go through an arduous night's exercise, waltzing strong men into a state of coma, without turning a hair.

Pip did his duty manfully, though his glimpses of Elsie were few and far between. That young lady, whether by accident or design, had filled her card rather fully before Pip reached her side. Consequently it was something like midnight when the piano and violin struck up the waltz that she had promised him, and Pip, hastily returning the eldest Miss Calthrop to her base of operations, braced himself for *the* moment of the evening.

He waited for some time at the door of the dancing-room scanning the returning couples, but Elsie did not come; and Pip, who was preeminently a man of action, set out to look for her.

He came upon the truant rather suddenly, round a screen at the end of a passage. She was sitting on a settee with Cullyngham, who, with his head close to hers, was talking softly and rather too earnestly Pip thought. On seeing Pip, Cullyngham began to smile at once, but Elsie looked a little confused.

"My dance, I think," said Pip gruffly.

Cullyngham rose to his feet.

"A thousand apologies, old boy," he said easily. "I had no idea the music had started again. So sorry! I surrender Miss Innes forthwith. *Au revoir*, partner, and thank you."

He swung gracefully down the passage and was gone.

Elsie felt a little uncomfortable. The woman never yet lived who did not enjoy playing two fish simultaneously, and under ordinary circumstances Elsie would

have handled her line with all the pleasure and finesse of an expert. But somehow Pip was different. He was not the sort of person who shared a hook gracefully. He was perfectly capable of disregarding the rules of the game and making a fuss and breaking the line, unless treated with special and separate consideration.

She rose lightly.

"So sorry, Pip," she said, taking his arm almost caressingly. "I didn't mean to keep you waiting. Shall we go and dance?"

"No," said Pip. "Sit down a minute, please."

Elsie obeyed.

"It's only this," said Pip bluntly. "I can't help it if I offend you. Have as little to do with that chap as you can."

A brief silence, and these two young people surveyed each other. There was no flinching on either side. Then Elsie's eyes blazed.

"How paltry! How mean!" she said hotly. "Fancy trying to do it that way!"

"What do you mean by 'it'?" said Pip.

Elsie bit her lip. She had given herself away.

"You mean," went on Pip, "that I say this because I am jealous."

That was exactly what Elsie had meant, and she knew in her heart now that she had been wrong: Pip was not that sort. Still, she was young and independent. Pip was young and tactless. An older and more experienced girl would have seen that Pip's warning was well worth listening to. An older and more experienced man would have delivered it in a different way. Neither of them being possessed of these advantages, the net result of Pip's impromptu effort was to invest Cullyngham with a halo of romantic mystery in the eyes of Elsie, who, after all, was only nineteen, and a daughter of Eve at that. Here were the elements of a pretty quarrel.

Five minutes later, after a hot altercation, Elsie sailed into the ballroom alone, with her small and admirably formed nose slightly in the air, leaving Pip, tardily recalling Raven's advice, to curse his tactless tongue on the settee behind the screen.

To him entered young Gresley. He dropped listlessly on to the settee.

"Pip," he said, "I'm in a devil of a hole."

"What's the matter?"

"I'm dipped—badly."

"Oh—money?"

"Yes."

Pip's eyes suddenly gleamed.

"Cullyngham?"

Gresley nodded.

Pip rose and pulled the screen completely across the passage.

"They'll think we're a spooning couple," he said. "Go on."

Gresley told his story. Flattered by Cullyngham's invitation, he had agreed to play picquet—a game with which he enjoyed only what may be called a domestic acquaintance—in the pavilion before lunch.

"I suppose we will play the usual club points?" Cullyngham had said.

"And like a blamed fool," continued Gresley, "I didn't like to let on that I didn't know what the usual club points were, but just nodded. I lost all the time, and when he added up at one o'clock I owed him five hundred points. He said I must have my revenge in the afternoon if it went on raining. Well, as you know, it did go on raining, and by the end of the day I was fifteen hundred points down. Then he told me, what I hadn't had the pluck to ask him, what we were playing for. He said that the ordinary club points were a fiver a hundred, and that I owed him seventy-five pounds."

"The d——d swine!" said Pip through his teeth.

"*Are* they the ordinary club points, Pip?" said Gresley anxiously.

"Ordinary club grandmother! It's a swindle. He probably cheated in the actual play, too. What are you going to do?"

"I shall pay."

"Quite right," said Pip approvingly. "Pay first, and then we can go for him without prejudice. Have you got the money?"

The boy shook his head dismally. "About ten pounds," he said.

"I could raise a couple of fivers, perhaps," said Pip. "But in any case your best plan is to go straight and make a clean breast of it to your Governor."

"Pip, I couldn't! He's fearfully simple and straight in these things. It would break him up."

"I know him well enough," said Pip, "to be quite certain that you ought to tell him. He can't eat you, and he'll respect your pluck in being frank about it. If he finds out by accident, though—"

"You are right, Pip. I'll do it."

"Good! If you'll do that, I'll promise you something in return. I'll give Master Cullyngham such a quarter of an hour of his own previous history that he'll leave the place to-morrow morning and never darken its doors, or any other doors I care to specify, again. Now, you write straight off to your Governor; or, better still, make an excuse and run up to town and see him to-morrow, and leave me to tackle friend Cullyngham. I think I shall enjoy my interview more than you will."

Mr. Rupert Cullyngham had divested himself of his dress-coat, and was engaged in unfastening a neatly tied white tie, when his bedroom door opened and Pip came in.

"Cullyngham," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone, "you must leave this house to-morrow morning."

Cullyngham turned and surveyed his visitor for a moment with some amusement. Then he said,—

"Certainly! No idea you had bought the place. Can I have a trap, or must I walk?"

Pip did not rise to the level of this airy badinage. On the contrary, he was

brusque and rude.

"You will get your cheque all right," he continued. "It will reach you on Sunday morning, so there's no need to hang on here for it."

"May I inquire—*what* cheque?"

"The money young Gresley owes you."

Cullyngham whistled softly.

"So it's to that young fool that I owe the honour of this visit," he said. "Look here, old chap—"

Pip broke in.

"Thanks, I can do without that. Let us have no rotten pretence on the subject. To be quite frank, I was rather surprised to find you in this house at all—so was Raven Innes. However, we decided not to make any remark—"

"That *was* decent of you!"

Pip continued, meditatively—

"Chell had probably asked you here on your cricket reputation. However, as I find you can't refrain from behaving like the cad you are, even when asked down to a house like this, I have decided to take things in hand myself. You will make an excuse to the Chells in the morning, and go straight away back—"

Cullyngham, who had been restraining himself with difficulty, turned suddenly round and advanced upon him.

"Get out!" he said, his eyes blazing.

Pip, who was lounging on the arm of a chair, never stirred.

"If you will sit down for five minutes," he observed steadily, "I'll give you a few reasons for my assurance in this matter. The fact is, Cullyngham, you aren't in a position to retaliate. To-day, for instance, you were wearing the colours of your old school club. You are not a member. They don't elect people who have been—sacked. Also, I came across a friend of yours not long ago. She wanted your address, or rather her daughter did. Her name was—"

Cullyngham, whose face had been gradually changing from a lowering red to

a delicate green, suddenly noticed that the door was standing ajar. He hurried across the room, shut it, and turned the key.

Ten minutes later the door opened again, and Pip stepped out into the dark passage. An item in his host's valedictory remarks took him back into the room again, and he stood holding the door-handle as he spoke.

"Cullyngham, you certainly owe me one for this, so you can blackguard me to your heart's content. Also, you may interpret my motives as you like; but—we will leave ladies' names out of this question, please. Remember that!"

V

At breakfast next morning, amid much masculine concern and feminine lamentation, Cullyngham announced that unexpected and urgent family business called him away to town.

The Squire expostulated.

"My dear fellow, this is simply outrageous! What are we to do? The Gentlemen have whipped up the hottest side I have ever seen on this ground, and first of all young Gresley slips off before breakfast, and now you want to go. We shall get simply trampled on!"

Cullyngham, his smile once again in full working order, confessed himself utterly desolated; but the business was of a pressing, and, he hinted, rather painful, nature, and go he must.

Accordingly a trap was ordered round for the twelve o'clock train, and the depleted Eleven, together with the greater part of the house-party, strolled down to the ground to face the redoubtable Gentlemen of the County.

Pip had been promised an hour's golf with Elsie after breakfast. He was at the tee at the appointed hour of ten, but was not in the least surprised when his teacher failed to put in an appearance. After smoking patiently upon the sand-box for a quarter of an hour, the unconscious target of a good many curious eyes on the terrace above, he sadly knocked the ashes out of his pipe and returned to the house, to prepare himself for the labours of the day.

This was to be no picnic match. The County Club had no other fixture that day, so could put its full amateur strength into the field. With Gresley and Cullyngham playing the sides would have been about equally balanced, but now it was odds on the visitors.

However, the men of Rustleford, fortifying themselves with the comforting reflection that cricket, like most other departments of life, is a game of surprises, enrolled two substitutes for their absent warriors, and took the field with a stout heart, having lost the toss as a preliminary.

There had been more rain during the night, and the wicket, though sodden, was easy. The Gentlemen opened nicely, scoring forty-five runs by pretty cricket before a wicket fell. After that two more wickets fell rather easily, and then came another stand, during which the score rose from forty-five to eighty, at which point the more passive of the two resisters was given out leg-before-wicket. Then came a *débâcle*, absolute and complete, but not altogether inexplicable. The clouds were dispersing rapidly, and, once free of their nebulous embraces, the July sun began to beat down fiercely, "queering the patch" in the most literal sense of the word, and thus enabling Pip and the village prodigy to dismiss an undeniably strong batting side for a hundred and eight.

Loud were the congratulations of the spectators. The ladies especially were jubilant, the flapper going so far as to ask her two admirers for a quotation of odds—in the current coin of flapperdom, chocolates—against Rustleford's chances of an innings victory. But the Squire looked up at the blazing sun and down at the rapidly drying pitch, and glanced inquiringly at Pip.

Pip removed his pipe from his mouth, and grunted,—

"Lucky if we get half the runs."

As it turned out, this was an overestimate. The Rustleford Manor Eleven went in to bat at one o'clock precisely, and were all dismissed in the space of forty-five minutes for forty-nine runs. The pitch was almost unplayable; each bowler found a "spot"; and it was only some berserk slogging by Pip, who went in last and refused to allow any ball to alight on the treacherous turf at all, that this insignificant total was not halved.

The Elevens lunched together in the pavilion, but the rest of the party returned to the house. Here Elsie, who had spent a not altogether comfortable night and morning, was somewhat surprised to find herself seated next to Cullyngham.

"I thought you had gone," she said.

"Unfortunately," he replied, "I came down at twelve to drive to the station, to find that I had misunderstood Mrs. Chell and kept the trap too late to have any chance of catching the train."

"Never mind," said Elsie. "You'll be able to come and see the match now. It is going to be tremendously exciting."

Cullyngham lowered his head in her direction, and said,—

"Will you let me have that round of golf this afternoon—the one I should have had next Monday?"

Elsie surveyed him doubtfully. Under ordinary circumstances she would have preferred to see the cricket, but she was not insensible to Cullyngham's charms, and she liked the flattering way in which he had couched his request.

"But the cricket?" she said. "Surely you—"

"Some things are worth many cricket-matches," said Cullyngham sententiously.

Elsie gasped a little, and Cullyngham continued,—

"You will come? Leave the cricketers to themselves this time. They'll get too conceited with so much attention."

Now, whether Cullyngham meant this remark to have a particular significance, or to be merely of general application, one cannot say, but its effect was to suggest to Elsie a most appropriate punishment for Pip. Instead of sitting on the pavilion lawn applauding his performance, she would stay at home and play golf with his rival. Little boys must be taught not to be jealous.

"Very well," she said.

Cullyngham called for more whiskey-and-soda.

The Gentlemen of the County began their second innings after lunch. News of the exciting state of the game had spread abroad, and the Manor ground was rapidly being encircled by a ring of carriages and motors, tenanted by masses of white fluff, which at intervals disintegrated itself into its component elements for purposes of promenade, dress-reviewing, and refreshment.

It was quite plain that runs would be hard to get on that wicket. There was a crust of dried mud on the top and a quagmire below. The sun still beat down strongly, the birds were celebrating the termination of twenty-four hours' rain in every tree, and everybody was alert and excited at the prospect of an open game and a close finish.

Their expectations were fully realised. The Gentlemen of the County, either through anxiety to eclipse their rivals' sensational breakdown, or through excess of confidence, or simply because they could not help it, scored exactly thirty-five

runs. Pip took eight wickets for sixteen. He was always a bowler of moods, and his work in the morning, though good enough, had not been particularly brilliant. A man can no more take a wicket than he can take a city unless he gives his mind to it, and it must be confessed that up to the luncheon interval Pip had been wool-gathering. His interview with Cullyngham, his rather brief night's rest, and his tiff with Elsie had kept his wits wandering. Now, braced by the knowledge that Cullyngham was speeding on his way south, that Elsie was sitting safely on the pavilion lawn, and that—most blessed of rest cures!—there was work, hard work, before him, Pip rolled up his sleeves, set his field, and bowled. He made no fuss about it; he merely rose to the top of his form and stayed there. The wickets fell like ninepins, the crowd shouted itself hoarse, and when it was all over, Pip, walking soberly in with the rest, found himself punched, slapped, and otherwise embraced by various frantic people in the pavilion.

Among the forest of hands, each containing a sizzling tumbler, that were extended towards him, Pip observed one containing a telegram. Mechanically he took the orange-coloured envelope with one hand and a tall tumbler with the other, and, thrusting the former safe out of harm's way in his pocket, devoted his attention to the latter.

This done, he put on his blazer, lit his pipe, and took up his favourite position on the railing of the pavilion veranda, what time the two chief batsmen of his side buckled on their pads. There were ninety-five runs to make, and they had to be made on a wicket in the last stages of decomposition. The two heroes, nervous but resolute, took the field for the last time, and, with nearly three hours before them, set to work, slowly and cautiously, to make the runs.

But Pip was not watching the cricket. His eye was travelling steadily round the pavilion lawn, dodging pink frocks and skipping over blue frocks in its search for the white piqué costume that Elsie had worn that morning. It was not there.

Mindful that the female sex, not content with having once successfully surmounted that most monumental nuisance of civilisation, the daily toilet, is addicted to inexplicable and apparently enjoyable repetitions of the same, Pip tried again, and scrutinised the pink frocks and the blue frocks. Elsie was not in any of them. Pip felt vaguely uneasy. Of course Cullyngham was almost back in town by this time. Still—The two batsmen were making a respectable show. Pip was to go in last. The greatest possible series of catastrophes could not bring his services into requisition for another twenty minutes at any rate. He would run up

to the house and see. See what? He did not know, but he would go and see it.

He vaulted over a fence, slipped through a plantation, and tramped under the hot afternoon sun across the meadow which separated the Manor from the cricket-ground. Suddenly, in his pocket, his hand encountered the telegram that had been handed to him after the innings: it had gone right out of his memory.

"Wonder if it's an abusive message from Cully," he said to himself.

No, it was from Pipette, and Pip sat down on a hurdle and steadied himself after reading it. Presently, after a stunned interval, he continued mechanically on his way.

"Let me see," he found himself saying,—"I had better pack up my things, get a trap at the stables, and catch the five-thirty train. I'll leave a note for the Chells, and then I shan't have to face the whole crowd again. If there's no trap to be had I'll leave my bag and leg it. Only a mile or so,—I wish it was more,—got an hour and a half to fill in."

By this time he had reached the house. The place was deserted, for the butler and, indeed, most of the establishment were down at the cricket-ground. Pip went rather heavily upstairs and packed his portmanteau, which he presently brought down to the hall door. After that he went to the library and wrote a brief letter.

"Now to find some one to leave this with," he said to himself. "The maids can't all be out. After that I'll go to the stables. Hallo! That sounded like a voice. There it is again! A sort of shriek! It comes from the conservatory. My God! it's —"

He hurried into the drawing-room and darted across to the large French windows that opened into the conservatory. Then, stepping out and passing round a great orange tree in a green tub, he came suddenly on a sight that caused something inside him to gather into a sickening knot and sink down, down, down, dragging his very heart with it.

Elsie and Cullyngham, the latter with his back to Pip, were standing face to face in the middle of the conservatory. They were pressed close together, and both Elsie's arms were round Cullyngham's neck.

VI

Somehow the golf-match was not quite as amusing as Elsie had expected. Cullyngham was all deference and vivacity, and played like the stylist he was. Still, Elsie could not help wondering how the cricket-match was getting on; and when at half-past three the round of nine holes was completed, she announced her intention of going down to the ground to see the finish.

"What, and desert me?" inquired her opponent pathetically.

"You can come too, if you like."

"Hardly worth while, I'm afraid. I have to pack my bag and get some tea, and then I shall be due at the station."

"I thought your bag was packed already. You were to have gone by the twelve train, you know," said Elsie rather doubtfully.

"Yes," said Cullyngham easily, "but you forgot I had to unpack again to get out my golfing shoes. Now, I'll tell you what," he continued rapidly. "They are going to give me tea in the conservatory before I go: won't you stay and pour it out for me? Just five minutes—*please*!"

Elsie felt that she could hardly in decency refuse, and accompanied Cullyngham to the house and thence to the conservatory, where the maid who brought the tea informed them of the glorious downfall of the County Eleven and of Pip's share therein.

This decided Elsie. She had no desire to appear in any scene where Pip was the central figure, so she accepted Cullyngham's pressing invitation to share his tea, and, sinking into a large armchair, prepared to spend an idle half-hour until popular enthusiasm on the cricket-ground should have abated. Pip was unconsciously proving the profound wisdom of the maxim which warns us to beware when all men speak well of us. He was paying the penalty of success. If he had been bowled first ball, or had missed three easy catches, Elsie, being a woman, would probably have melted and been kind to him. But to unbend to him now would savour of opportunism, hero-worship, and other disagreeable

things. Elsie set her small white teeth, frowned at an orange tree in a green tub, and prepared for a *tête-à-tête*. The house seemed deserted.

"Penny for your thoughts!" said Cullyngham.

Elsie smiled composedly.

"If they were only worth that I would make you a present of them," she said. "If they were worth more they would not be for sale."

"Are they worth more?"

"I don't know, really. Anyhow, they are not on the market." She drank some tea with a prim air, uncomfortably conscious that she was blushing.

There was a short pause, and Cullyngham spoke again.

"I hope I'm not boring you," he said, with a smile which took for granted the impossibility of the idea.

"Oh, dear, no. I'm seldom bored at meals." Elsie took a bite out of a bun.

"Very well. Till you have finished tea I will keep quiet; after that I will endeavour to amuse you."

The meal continued solemnly. Once or twice Elsie directed a furtive glance at the man beside her, and detected him eyeing her in a manner which made her feel hot and cold by turns. It was not that he was rude or objectionable, but Elsie suddenly felt conscious that Pip's open stare of honest admiration was infinitely less embarrassing than this.

Cullyngham, as a matter of fact, was in a dangerous mood. His was not a pride that took a fall easily, and the fact that he had been compelled to submit to Pip's unconditional ultimatum was goading him to madness. No man is altogether bad, but we are all possessed of our own particular devils, and Cullyngham accommodated more than his fair share of them. He had never denied himself the gratification of any passion, however unworthy, and at that moment his one consuming desire was to retaliate upon the man who had humiliated him. He looked around the empty conservatory, and then again at the girl in the basket-chair beside him. He could punish Pip now in a most exquisite manner.

Elsie caught the glance, and for a moment was suddenly conscious of an emotion hitherto unknown to her—acute physical fear. But Cullyngham said

lightly—

"Enjoyed your tea?"

"Yes, thanks," she replied rather tremulously, putting down her cup.

"Then may I smoke?"

"Certainly. But I am going now."

"Right, if you must. I'll just light my cigarette and see you to the end of the drive."

Cullyngham produced a box of matches, and, with the paternal air of one endeavouring to amuse a child, performed various tricks with them. Then he lit a cigarette, and showed Elsie how, by doubling up your tongue, it is possible to grip the cigarette in the fold and draw it into your mouth, reproducing it, still lighted and glowing, a minute later.

"Quite a little exhibition!" said Elsie, at her ease again. "You ought to set up as a conjurer. Now I must be off."

"There is one other little trick with a match that might amuse you," said Cullyngham. "It was taught me by a girl I know. She made me go down on my hands and knees—"

"I refuse to go down on my knees for anybody," said Elsie, with spirit.

"Never mind. I will do that part. I go on my hands and knees on the floor, like this, with a match lying on my back between my shoulder-blades. Then the other person—you—has his hands tied together with a handkerchief, and tries to brush the match off the other person's back. It's extraordinary how difficult it is to do it with one's hands tied and the other person bobbing and dodging to get away from you."

"It sounds absolutely idiotic," said Elsie coldly.

"It isn't, though. Of course it would be idiotic for you and me to play it now by ourselves; but I'll just show you the trick of it, and you will be able to have some sport with them in the billiard-room to-night. Shall I show you?"

Elsie agreed, without enthusiasm. It seemed churlish to refuse such a trifling request to a man who was making laborious efforts to amuse her; but, for all that,

this *tête-à-tête* had lasted long enough. However, she would be on the cricket-ground in a few minutes.

Her doubts were in a measure revived when Cullyngham tied her two wrists together with a silk handkerchief. He performed the operation very quickly, and then dropped on to his hands and knees on the floor and carefully balanced a match on the broad of his back.

"Now," he said, looking up at her, "just try to knock that match off my back. Of course I shall dodge all I can. I bet you won't be able to do it."

Elsie, feeling uncommonly foolish, made one or two perfunctory dabs at the match with her bound hands. Once she nearly succeeded, but Cullyngham backed away just in time. Piqued by his derisive little laugh, she took a quick step forward, and leaning over him, was on the point of brushing the match on to the floor, when suddenly Cullyngham slewed round in her direction, and, thrusting his head into the enclosure of her arms, scrambled to his feet. Next moment Elsie, dazed, numbed, terrified, found herself on tiptoe, hanging round a man's neck, while the man's arms were round her and his hateful smiling face was drawing nearer, nearer, nearer to her own.

Never was a girl in more deadly peril. Elsie uttered a choking scream.

"It's no good, little girl," said Cullyngham. "I've got you fast, and there's not a soul in the house. A kiss, please!" He spoke thickly: the man was dead within him.

Elsie, inert and drooping, shrank back as far as her manacled wrists would allow her, and struggled frantically to free herself. But Cullyngham's arms brought her towards him again. And then, paralysed with terror, with eyes wide open, she found herself staring right over Cullyngham's shoulder at—Pip!—Pip, sprung from the earth, and standing only five yards away.

"Pip!" she moaned; "Pip, save me!"

Almost simultaneously Cullyngham became conscious of something that gripped him by the nape of his neck, just below Elsie's fettered wrists—something that felt like a steel vice. Tighter and tighter grew the grip. The veins began to stand out on Cullyngham's forehead, and he gurgled for breath. Down he went, till his head was once more on a level with the floor and his aristocratic nose was rubbed into the matting. In a moment the girl had slipped her wrists

over his head and stood free—pale, shaken, but free!

"Run into the house," said Pip. "I will come in a minute."

Elsie tottered through the French window and disappeared, with her hands still bound before her, and the two men were left alone.

Finding himself in a favourable geographical position, Pip kicked Cullyngham till his toes ached inside his boots. Then he thrust him away on to the floor. Cullyngham, free at last and white with passion, was up in a moment and rushed at Pip. He was met by a crashing blow in the face and went down again.

If Pip had been himself he would have desisted there and then, for he had his enemy heavily punished already. But he was in a raging passion. He knew now that Elsie was more to him than all the world together, and his sudden realisation of the fact came at an inopportune moment for Cullyngham. Pip drove him round the conservatory, storming, raging, blaring like an angry bull, getting in blow upon blow with blind, relentless fury. Cullyngham was no weakling and no coward. Again and again he stood up to Pip, only to go down again under a smash like the kick of a horse. Finally, in a culminating paroxysm of frenzy, Pip took his battered opponent in his arms and hurled him into the green tub containing the orange tree.

Then he went into the house, locking the French window behind him. The fit had passed.

Five minutes devoted to a wash, and a slight readjustment of his collar and tie, and Pip was himself again. Presently he went to seek Elsie. The girl had succeeded in freeing her hands from the handkerchief, and was sitting, badly shaken, a poor little "figure of interment," as the French say, on a sofa in the library. She looked up eagerly at his approach.

"Oh, Pip, did you hurt him?"

"I hope so," said Pip simply. "Will you tell how it happened? At least—don't, if you'd rather not."

But she told him all. "You were just in time, Pip," she concluded. "I was just going to faint, I think."

She looked up at him with shining eyes. Pip saw them, and permitted himself one brief gaze. This was no time for tender passages. He put his hand in his

pocket and produced a rather crumpled envelope.

"Would you mind giving that to the Squire for me?" he said. "I have to go away."

"Go away? Oh, Pip! Now?"

"Yes, you see, I have just—"

"But are you going to leave me in the house with that man?" cried Elsie, with a sudden access of her old terror.

"If I am any judge of human nature," said Pip, "he is out of the house by this time. I don't think he will even wait for his luggage. He—he's not very presentable. I see the trap has come round for him. It can take me instead, and I'll cart his luggage up to town and leave it at his club. I owe him some consideration," he added, surveying his knuckles thoughtfully.

Elsie acquiesced.

"Yes, that will be best," she said. "The Chells will think he went off in the ordinary way, and nobody will ever know—Pip, it was awful."

She broke off, and shuddered again and again.

"I should go and lie down till dinner if I were you," said Pip gently. "All over now: forget it. Good-bye."

They shook hands and walked to the door together.

"Why are you going away like this?" said Elsie, as the groom piled the luggage into the trap.

Pip's face clouded.

"I'm ashamed to say that what has happened made me forget for a bit," he said. "I have just had a wire from Pipette—I say, here is the whole cricket-party coming across the lawn! I simply can't face them now. I could have told you about it, but not them. Good-bye, and—good-bye. I shall see you again soon, I hope."

He jumped into the cart, and was rattling down the drive by the time that the cricketers and their attendant throng, hot, noisy, and jubilant, burst like a wave into the hall. Elsie turned hastily from a window as they entered.

"Hallo, Elsie," cried Raven Innes, "what are you doing here?"

"Rather a headache, Raven. I have stayed in since tea," said Elsie.

"You certainly don't look very well, dear," said Mrs. Chell.

"You missed a great finish," said Cockles.

"Only two wickets," shrieked the flapper.

"Yes," added the Squire, "and if one of them had gone down we should have been dished. Pip deserted. Where was the ruffian? Have you seen anything of him, my dear?"

"Yes," said Elsie; "he was here just now."

One or two knowing smiles illuminated the honest faces of the cricketers.

"He came up," she continued composedly, "about four, and hurried away to catch the five-thirty train. He has just gone. He gave me this note for you, Mr. Chell."

The Squire took the note and read it, and his jolly face grew grave.

"Poor fellow!" he said soberly.

"What is it?" said everybody.

"Pip has had a wire from his sister to say that his father died suddenly this morning—heart failure. Pip has slipped away by the afternoon train: he did not want to spoil our fun. He asks me to say good-bye to all of you from him."

CHAPTER VIII

LIFE AT FIRST-HAND

I

PIP reached London that evening to find the great gloomy house in Westock Square shuttered and silent. His father's brougham had driven up as usual at lunch-time, after the morning round, and its owner had been discovered lying in a dead faint inside it. He had been carried into the house, to die—not even in his bed. Death, with whom he had waged a vicarious and more than commonly successful warfare for thirty-one years, had conquered at last, and that, too, with grim irony, in the very arena of the dead man's triumphs—his own consulting-room. The great physician lay peacefully on an operating-couch near the darkened window, surrounded by life-saving appliances and books that tell how death may be averted.

His affairs were in a hopeless tangle. He had risked almost every penny he possessed in an ill-judged effort to "get rich quick," and so provide for himself, or at any rate for his family, however sudden and direct the course that his malady might take. Half his capital had been sunk in unremunerative investments, which might or might not pay fifty per cent some day; and the other half was gone beyond recall on an unrealised anticipation of a fall in copper shares.

A week later Pip, Pipette, and Mr. Hanbury—the latter ten years older than when we last heard of him, but not much changed except for a little reasonable adiposity—sat at dinner. It was almost the last meal they were to take in the old house, for now *res angustæ* were to be the order of the day.

The meal ended, and coffee having been served, Pipette, looking pale and pretty in her black evening frock, gave each of the men a cigar, snipping the ends herself, as she had been accustomed to do for her father; and the trio composed themselves to conversation.

"I saw Crampton to-day," said Pip. (Crampton was the family lawyer.) "He

gave me the facts and figures about things. I couldn't follow all the stuff on blue paper, but I asked him questions and jotted down what I wanted."

"How does it work out?" inquired Hanbury.

"By putting what money there is in the bank into Consols, and adding the interest on the few investments that are paying anything at all, the total income of the estate comes to exactly one hundred and fifty a year," said Pip.

"So long as the capital sunk in the other investments produces nothing, that is?"

"Yes. There is a matter of fifteen thousand pounds buried in some Australian mining group: it might as well be sunk in the sea for all the good it is doing us. Of course it may turn up trumps some day, but not at present, Crampton says. So Pipette and I are worth just a hundred and fifty a year between us."

There was a silence, and the ash on Pip's cigar was perceptibly longer when he spoke again.

"A hundred and fifty," he said, "is not much use for two, but it's a comfortable little sum for one; so Pipette is going to take it all."

Pipette came round and sat on the arm of Pip's chair with the air of one who wishes to argue the point, and Pip continued hurriedly,—

"We talked it over with her this afternoon, Ham, and she agreed with me that for the present it will be best for her to accept the Rossiters' invitation to join them on their visit to Spain and Algiers, which is to last about a year. Pipette will be able to pay her full share of the expenses, so she won't be dependent on anybody. At the same time she will be having a good time with really nice people instead of—instead of—"

"Instead of sitting all day in a two-pair-back in London?" said Hanbury.

"That's it, exactly," said Pip, grateful for this moral support. "Of course it would be ripping".—Pipette was beginning to shake, and he put his arm clumsily round her—"it would be ripping to have remained together, but it can't be done at present. In a year, perhaps. The old lady has been very sensible about it."

Apparently being "sensible" did not include abstinence from tears, for Pipette was now weeping softly. She had lost her father only a week, and now she was

to lose her beloved brother.

Hanbury, who, like most strong men, was helpless against feminine tears, coughed self-consciously.

"It sounds a good arrangement," he said. "I suppose it is quite impossible for you two to live together? With the hundred and fifty, and what you could make yourself, Pip—"

"How am I going to make it?" inquired Pip.

"What are your prospects?"

"What are my accomplishments? I am just twenty-five; I am sound in wind and limb; and I sometimes take wickets. Can you suggest anything else?"

"Yes; you possess a stout heart and a hard head."

"If by hard you mean thick, I do," agreed Pip dismally.

"Thick heads have their market like everything else. Where are you going to take yours?"

"Where would you suggest? I have my own ideas on the subject, of course, but I should like to hear yours, Ham."

Hanbury looked across at him quizzically.

"My young friend," he said, with a flash of his old pedagogic manner, "long experience of your character warns me that you have determined on some crack-brained scheme, and are now prepared to defend it against all comers. Proceed."

Pip grinned.

"As you like," he said. "But I think a discussion would clear the air. Here goes! Pipette is appointed chairman. The subject for debate is 'The Choice of a Career for a Young Man without Education, Ability, or Prospects.' Fire away, Ham, and bear in mind that all the learned professions are barred to me."

"I'm not sure of that. How about school-mastering?"

"At a Preparatory?"

"Yes."

"Do you recommend the billet?"

"Frankly—no. Preparatory work is all right provided that you don't mind a berth in which your real work only begins at playtime, and which, unless you can afford ultimately to set up for yourself, offers you an absolutely maximum screw of about two hundred a year."

"I know the sort of thing," said Pip. "You start on about eighty, with board—"

"Which means a poky dust-hole to sleep in, meat-tea, and—"

"'*The post is one we can unreservedly recommend*'—I know."

"'*Write promptly yet carefully,*'" chanted Ham, "'*to the Principal, the Rev. Adolphus Buggins—*'"

"'*Explaining that you have heard of this vacancy through our agency—*'"

"'*Stating your degree and previous experience (if any)—*'"

"'*If a member of the Church of England—*'"

"'*Your willingness to participate in school games—*'"

"'*If musical—*'"

"'*If possible, a photograph*'—yah!"

"Don't you think we are rather wandering from the point?" inquired the mystified chairwoman.

The rhapsodists ceased their antistrophes and apologised.

"True," said Ham. "Suggestion number one is negatived without a division. Let us try a fresh cast. Have you any influence with business firms?"

"No, thank God!" said Pip simply. "An office would just kill me. If I had any chance of a post I should of course have to apply; but I haven't, so I needn't."

There was another pause.

"If," said Ham reflectively, "there was any prospect of your sunken capital rising to the surface again, say in two or three years' time, and it was simply a matter of hanging on till then, you could afford to spend the intervening period in a very interesting fashion."

"As how?"

"Go and see the world for yourself, above and below, inside and out. Knock about and rub shoulders with all sorts of folk. Plunge beneath the surface and see things as they are. Make your way everywhere, and if possible live by the work of your own two hands. You would acquire a knowledge of mankind that few men possess. At the worst you could hang on and make a living somehow until your ship came in—if it were only as a dock-hand or a railway porter. It would be a grand chance, Pip. Most men are so unenterprising. Those at the top never want to see what things are like below, and those below are so afraid of staying there forever that their eyes are constantly turned upwards and they miss a lot. I'd give something to be a vagabond for a year or two."

"What fearful sentiments for a respectable house-master!" said Pipette severely; but Pip's eyes glowed.

"However," continued Hanbury more soberly, "Pip can't afford to waste time observing life in a purely academic way down in the basement. He must start getting upstairs at once."

"Hear, hear!" said the chairwoman.

"As a matter of fact," said Pip, "the scheme I have in my eye rather meets the case, I think."

"What is it?"

"Well, I made a list of all the careers open to me. I'll go through them."

Though his final choice was all they wished to know, his audience settled themselves patiently to listen. They knew it was useless to hurry Pip.

"The things I thought of," continued the orator, "are—cricket-pro, gamekeeper, policeman, emigrant to Canada, and Tommy."

He smiled genially upon his gaping companions. "They are all good open-air jobs," he explained.

Pipette stiffened in her chair.

"But they will none of them do," he added.

Pipette relaxed again.

"This," said Hanbury, "is interesting and human. We must have your reasons for rejecting these noble callings, *seriatim*. A cricket-pro, for instance?"

"Once a 'pro' always a 'pro,'" said Pip. "I hope some day to play as an amateur again. And while we are on the subject, I may as well say that I'm *not* going to be a professional-amateur. No two hundred a year as assistant-deputy-under-secretary to a county club for me, please!"

"Good boy," said Hanbury. "Now, please—gamekeeper?"

"I'm too old. A gamekeeper requires to be born to the job. I have the ordinary sporting man's knowledge of game and sport generally, but I should be a hundred before I learned as much about the real ins and outs of the business as—a poacher's baby."

"Quite so. Policeman?"

"The only chance of promotion in the police force is in the detective direction, and I—I think detection comes under the head of learned professions."

"Tommy, then?"

"A Tommy's would be a grand life if there was always a war. But, Ham, think what the existence of a gentleman-ranker must be in time of peace. A few hours' duty a day, and the rest—beer and nursemaids! Help!"

"You have been devoting much time to reflection, Pip. Well, to continue. How about emigrating?"

"Emigration is such a tremendously big step. If one is prepared for it, well and good. But I'm not ripe yet. You see, Canada and Australia are so far away, and I'm not quite prepared to give up—"

"England, home, *and* beauty—eh, Pip? Is that how the wind blows?"

"Dry up!" said Pip, hastily passing on to his peroration. "Before I try any of these things I am going to see how my own pet scheme pans out."

"And that is—?" said Pipette breathlessly.

"I can use my hands a bit, and have a sort of rough knowledge of mechanics," continued Pip, staring into the fire and stating his case with maddening deliberation, "and I don't mind hard work. Mind you—"

"Pip, *do* get on!" almost screamed poor Pipette.

Pip, looking slightly surprised, came to the point.

"I am going to try for a job," said he, "at a big motor works I know of. I will start as a cleaner, or greaser, or anything they please, if they'll take me; and when I have got a practical knowledge of the ins and outs of the business, I shall try to set up as a chauffeur."

He broke off, and scanned his hearers' faces rather defiantly.

"How do you like the idea?" he asked.

"You'd get horribly dirty, Pip," said practical Pipette. "Think of the oil!"

Pip laughed. "I'll get used to that."

"And how long would you stick to it?"

"What, the oil?"

"No, the trade."

"That depends. If I find the life absolutely unbearable for any reason—Trades Unions, for instance—I shall jack it up. But I don't think it is very likely."

"Neither do I," said Hanbury, who had had exceptional opportunities for studying Pip's character.

"Then," continued Pip, with something like enthusiasm, "if those sunken shares took up, and there was money to be had, I might buy myself a partnership in a motor business. If they don't take up, I must just save my wages till I can afford to go out and farm in Canada. I'll take you with me, Pipette, if I go," he added reassuringly.

II

A month later Pip obtained a humble and oleaginous appointment at the Gresley Motor Works in Westminster Bridge Road.

The foreman who engaged him was short-handed at the time, and though Pip was obviously too old for a beginner, he was impressed with his thews and sinews. After a few weeks, finding that Pip did not drink, and if given a job, however trivial, to perform, could be relied on with absolute certainty to complete it on time, the foreman unbent still further, and paid Pip the compliment of heaping upon him work that should have been done by more competent but less dependable folk. Pip throve under this treatment, and in spite of the aloofness of his fellow-workmen, who scented a "toff," the novelty and genuine usefulness of his new life inspired him with a zest and enthusiasm that took him over many rough places.

For it was not all plain sailing. The horny-handed son of toil is no doubt the salt of the earth and the backbone of the British nation, but he is not always an amenable companion, and he is apt to regard habitual sobriety and strict attention to duty in a colleague as a species of indirect insult to himself. However, abundance of good temper, together with a few hard knocks when occasion demanded, soon smoothed over Pip's difficulties in this direction; and presently the staff of Gresley's left him pretty much to himself, tacitly agreeing to regard him as an eccentric but harmless lunatic who liked work.

Pip purposely avoided young Gresley when he applied for the post. His idea was to obtain employment independently, if possible, and only to appeal to his friend as a last resource. He was anxious, too, to spare Gresley the undoubted embarrassment of having to oblige a venerated member of his own college and club by appointing him to a job worth less than thirty shillings a week. Gresley, moreover, would probably have foisted him into a position for which he was totally unfitted, or would have pressed a large salary on him in return for purely nominal services. Pip was determined that what he made he would earn, and so he started quietly and anonymously at the foot of the ladder. He even adopted a *nom de guerre*, lest a glance at the time-sheet or pay-list should betray his identity to his employer. The Gresley Works contained seven hundred men, and

it was not likely, Pip thought, that young Gresley, who, though he was seen frequently about the shops, spent most of his time in the drawing-office, would recognise even his most admired friend amid a horde of grimy mechanics.

But for all that they met, as they were bound to do. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Pip's reliability and general smartness soon raised him from the ruck of his mates, and presently his increasing responsibilities began to bring him in contact with those in authority. He had not counted on this; so, realising that recognition was now only a matter of time, and wishing to avoid the embarrassment of an unpremeditated meeting in the works, he waylaid his friend one morning in a quiet storehouse. The surprise took young Gresley's breath away, and Pip took advantage of the period preceding its return to give a hurried explanation of his presence there, coupled with a request that his anonymity might be respected.

That night young Gresley, filled with admiration, told the whole story to his father.

"Of course, Dad, you'll move him up to a good post at once?" he said.

Old Gresley, leaning his scraggy face upon his hand, replied curtly, "I shall do no such thing."

The son, who knew that his father never said a thing without reason, waited.

"Wilmot? He was the young fellow who helped you when you went fooling away your money at cards, wasn't he?" continued the old man, suddenly turning his Napoleonic eye upon his son.

"Yes. He pulled me out of a tight place."

"That young man wouldn't thank me for undeserved promotion. He has the right stuff in him, and he wants to do things from the beginning—the only way! I often wish that you had had to start in the same fashion, Harry: there's nothing like it for making men. But your foolish old dad had been over the ground before you, and that made things easy. What that boy wants is work. I'll see he gets it, and I'll watch how he does it, and I'll take care that he is paid according to his merits."

Consequently Pip, much to his relief, was left in undisturbed possession of his self-sought limbo, and made the recipient of an ever-increasing load of work,—varied, strenuous, responsible work,—and for three sturdy years he lived a life

that hardened his muscles, broadened his views, taught him self-reliance, cheery contentment with his lot, and, in short, made a man of him.

He learned to live on a pound a week. He learned to drink four ale and smoke shag. He became an *habitué* of those establishments which are so ably administered by Lord Rowton and Mr. Lockhart. He obtained an insight into the workings of the proletariat mind. He learned the first lesson which all who desire to know their world must learn, namely, that mankind is not divided into three classes,—our own, another immediately above it, and another immediately below it,—but that a motor factory may contain as many grades and distinctions, as many social barriers and smart sets, as many cliques and cabals, as Mayfair—or Upper Tooting. He learned to distinguish the stupid, beer-swilling, illiterate, but mainly honest British workman of the old-fashioned type from the precocious, clerkly, unstable, rather weedy product of the board-school and music-hall. He discovered earnest young men in blue overalls who read Ruskin, and pulverised empires and withered up dynasties once a week in a debating society. He made the acquaintance of the paid agitator, with his stereotyped phrases and glib assertions of the right of man to a fair day's work and a fair day's wage, oblivious of the fact that he did not know the meaning of the first and would never have been content with the second. He rubbed shoulders with men who struggled, amid cylinders and accumulators, with religious doubts; men who had been "saved," and who insisted on leaving evidence to that effect, in pamphlet form, in their mates' coat-pockets; and men who, either through excess of intellect or from lack of adversity, had never had any need of God, and consequently did not believe in Him.

He saw other things, many of which made him sick. He saw child-wives of seventeen, tied to stunted youths of twenty, already inured and almost indifferent to a thrashing every Saturday night. He saw babies everywhere, chiefly in public-houses, where their sole diet appeared to consist of as much gin as they could lick off the fingers which accommodating parents from time to time dipped into their glasses and thrust into their wailing little mouths. He saw the beast that a woman can make of a man and the wreck that a man can make of a woman, and the horror that drink can make of both; and, being young and inexperienced, he grew depressed at these sights, and came to the conclusion that the world was very evil.

And then he began to notice other things—the goodness of the poor to the poor; game struggles with grinding poverty; incredible cheerfulness under drab surroundings and in face of imminent starvation; the loyalty of the wife to the

husband who ill-used her; the good-humoured resignation of the shrew's husband; the splendid family pride of the family who, though they lived in one room, considered very properly that one room (with rent paid punctually) constitutes a castle; the whip-round among a gang of workmen when a mate was laid by and his whole family rendered destitute; and finally the children, whom neither dingy courts, nor crowded alleys, nor want of food, nor occasional beatings, nor absence of any playthings save tiles, half-bricks, and dead kittens, could prevent from running, skipping, shouting, quarrelling, playing soldiers, keeping shop, and making believe generally, just as persistently and inconsequently as their more prosperous little brethren were doing, much more expensively, not many streets away. Pip saw all these things, and he began to realise, as we must all do if we wait long enough, that it takes all sorts to make a world, and that life is full of compensations.

In short, three years of close contact with the raw material of humanity gave Pip a deeper knowledge of man as God made him, than he could have acquired perhaps from a whole lifetime spent in contemplating the finished article in a more highly veneered and less transparent class of society.

Pip allowed himself certain relaxations. He had consented to keep fifty pounds out of Pipette's hundred and fifty a year, and once a month, on Saturday afternoons, after a preliminary scrub and change in his lodging, he departed to the West End, and indulged in the luxury of a Turkish bath. (He needed it, as the heated individual who operated upon him was wont, with some asperity, to remark.) Then he dined in state at one of those surprising two-shilling *tables d'hôte* in a Soho restaurant, and went on to the play—the pit. Sometimes he went to the Oval or Lord's, and with itching arm watched the cricket. Once he heard a bystander lament the absence, abroad, of one Wilmot, a celebrated "left-'ender" ("Terror, my boy! Mike this lot sit up if 'e was 'ere!"), and he glowed foolishly to think that he was not forgotten. Absence abroad was the official explanation of his non-appearance in first-class cricket during this period, and also served to satisfy the curiosity of those of his friends who wanted to know what had become of him.

Sometimes, as he sat in the shilling seats at Lord's, he wondered if he would ever be able to use his member's ticket again; and he smiled when he pictured to himself what the effect would be if a petrol-scented mechanic were to elbow his way in and claim a seat in the Old Blues' reservation!

He saw no friends but Hanbury, who occasionally looked him up in his

lodging, and with whom he once went clothed and *in propria persona* to a quiet golfing resort during one joyful Christmas week, when the works were closed from Friday night till Wednesday morning. He heard regularly from Pipette. At first she was obviously miserable, and Pip was at some pains to write her boisterously cheerful letters about the pleasantness of his new existence and the enormous saving of money to be derived from not keeping up appearances, knowing well that the knowledge that he was happy would be the first essential in producing the same condition in Pipette. After a little she wrote more cheerfully: then followed a regular year of light, irresponsible, thoroughly feminine correspondence, full of the joy of youth and lively appreciation of the scenes and people around her. Then came a period when unseeing Pip found her letters rather dull—a trifle perfunctory, in fact. Then came a fortnight during which there was no letter at all, and Pip grew anxious. Finally, just as he sat down to write to Mrs. Rossiter inquiring if his sister was ill, there came a letter, —a long, breathless, half-shy, half-rapturous screed,—containing the absolutely unprecedented piece of information that Providence had brought her into contact with the most splendid fellow—bracketed with Pip, of course—that the world had ever seen; that the said fellow—Jim Rossiter—incredible as it might appear, had told her that he loved her; whereupon Pipette had become suddenly conscious that she loved him; that everybody was very pleased and kind about it, and—did Pip mind?

Pip, who knew Jim Rossiter for a good fellow, wrote back soberly but heartily. He congratulated Pipette, gave his unconditional assent to the match, gratefully declined an invitation to come and take up his abode with the young couple after their marriage, and faithfully promised, whenever that joyful ceremony should take place, to have a bath and come and give the bride away. Which brings little Pipette's part in this narrative to a happy conclusion.

Of Elsie Pip heard little, and tried to think not at all. At present she was not for him, and probably never would be. His mind was quite clear on the subject. When, if ever, his ship came in, he would seek her out wherever she was, and—provided she had not married some one else, which was only too likely, Pip thought—ask her to marry him. Till then he was a member of the working classes, and must not cry for the moon. Still, though he conscientiously refrained from direct inquiries, he greedily hoarded every careless item of information on the subject that cropped up in Pipette's letters.

Elsie had no parents, and soon after Pip's disappearance "abroad" had gone for a trip round the world with Raven Innes and his wife. She spent some months in

India, and Pip, who knew that that bright jewel of the Empire's crown contains many men and few women, shuddered and ground his teeth. However, no bad news came, and presently he heard from Pipette that the travellers had left Colombo and were on their way to Australia. After that Pipette became engaged, and the curtain fell upon Elsie's movements, for Pipette's letters now harped upon a single string, and Pip was far too shy to ask for information outright. So he hardened his heart, hoped for the best, and went on with his day's work, as many a man has had to do before him, and been all the better for it.

One sentimental indulgence he allowed himself. Every Christmas he sent Elsie a present, together with his best wishes for the season. Only that, and nothing more. No long screed: above all, no address. He had his pride.

After two years' work his duties took a more varied and infinitely pleasanter form. He was by this time a thoroughly competent workman. He could take an engine to pieces and put it together again. He could diagnose every ill that a motor-car is heir to,—and a motor-car is more than human in this respect,—and he was a fearless and cool-headed driver. Consequently he was frequently sent out on trial trips, touring excursions, and the like; and owing to his excellent appearance and pleasant manner, was greatly in request as a teacher. More than one butterfly of fashion conceived a tenderness in her worldly and elastic little heart for the big silent chauffeur, who explained the whole art of motoring so clearly and quietly, and was never dirty to look at or familiar to speak to. He grew accustomed—though slowly—to receiving tips, even from his own former friends and acquaintances, more than one of whom sat by his side, and even conversed with him without recognition. His name was now John Armstrong,—he was holding back his own till a more prosperous time,—and he had shaved off a mustache of which, as an undergraduate, he had been secretly but inordinately proud. These changes, together with his leather livery and peaked cap, neutralised him down into one of a mere type, and he looked just like scores of other clean-shaven, hawk-eyed chauffeurs.

One day he drove down a roystering party of cricketers to play a match in the country. When the game began it was discovered that the visiting team was a man short. The captain, hard put to it to find a substitute, cast his eye upon the chauffeur, and straightway pressed him, a not unwilling victim, into the service. In black leather breeches and shirt-sleeves Pip fielded in the sun, "revolving many memories," as Tennyson says; and towards the end of the match, when runs were coming somewhat too freely and all the bowlers had been tried in vain, was given the ball; whereupon, throwing caution to the winds, he disposed of five wickets in exactly three overs. Fortunately the team had lunched generously, as teams that come down from the city for a day's sport not infrequently do, so the enthusiasm which Pip's feat evoked was too alcoholic to be discriminating.

One more experience Pip had, and as it marked the closing stages of his apprenticeship to manhood, and also introduced him to a character whose existence was foreshadowed in the second chapter of this book, it shall be set

down at length.

CHAPTER IX

THE PRINCIPAL BOY: AN INTERLUDE

I

CAPTAIN LOTTINGAR opened the door of the library and roared up the staircase —

"Lottie!"

Miss Lottie Lottingar came down. She was an exceedingly handsome young person,—what is usually known as "a fine figure of a woman,"—but there was nothing of the squire's daughter about her, as there should be about a youthful *châtelaine* who comes tripping down the shallow oak stairs of a great Elizabethan country house. There is usually something breezy, healthy, and eminently English about such a girl. Lottie, although her colour was good and her costume countrified enough, smacked of the town. She was undeniably attractive, but in her present surroundings she somehow suggested a bottle of champagne at a school-treat. She would have made an admirable "Principal Boy" in a pantomime. As a matter of fact, she had been one.

Her father led the way into the library, and having shut the door, lit a cigarette and leaned against the carved mantelpiece. Lottie sat on a table and swung her legs.

"Where's the Honourable?" inquired the captain.

"Out," said Lottie tersely.

"I know that. Where?"

"Plantations."

"What's he after?"

"Shrimps, I expect," said Miss Lottingar flippantly.

"That will do. We're talking business just now. Showing any signs yet?"

"Lots."

"When will he come to the scratch?"

"Pretty soon, if you and your pals don't mess things."

The gallant captain's brow lowered.

"None of your lip, my girl!" he remarked. "What do you mean—mess things?"

"I mean that you'll have to play carefully if you aren't going to scare him away."

"Scare him? How?"

"Well, you and the others are a bit out of your depth in this affair. I'll do you the justice, Dad, to admit that in the ordinary way of business you are a hard nut to crack; but coming the country gentleman over a man who, though he's a mug, *is* a country gentleman, is rather more of a job than your lot can manage comfortably. Look at Jerry!"

"What's wrong with Jerry?"

"Him? It's the first time he's played at being a gamekeeper, and he doesn't know the rules, that's all."

"How do you know?"

"The Honourable told me. Said it wasn't his business, of course, but he was afraid my father had got hold of a thoroughly incompetent keeper, and perhaps he ought to be told so—haw!"

The captain snorted.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"I advised him," replied his daughter, smiling indulgently, "not to mention it. I said you were rather fond of your own judgment in some things, and might be offended."

"Well, Jerry does his best," said Lottingar; "but you are right, Lottie, for all that. He'll muck things. You must keep the young fool out of his way. Can't you

take him out for walks, or something?"

"Walks? What excitement!" Miss Lottingar cast up her eyes pathetically.

"Well, you can go motoring with him as soon as we get a chauffeur. That's what I wanted to see you about."

"Who is the chauffeur? One of the—one of your friends?"

"No, worse luck! Every man I can trust is in this business already. We must make shift with some absolutely straight fool."

"That'll be a pleasant change," remarked Miss Lottingar.

"It will be all right in the long run," continued her father. "He need never suspect anything. We can keep him mowing the grass or something during his spare time. And if you can't bring off that proposal within a week, my girl," he concluded, throwing his cigarette into the grate, "you're not the sort I took you for."

"Give me the motor; I'll do the rest," said Miss Lottie, quite undisturbed by this direct reference to her virgin affections.

"And for the Lord's sake be quick about it! The expense of all this flummery is something cruel. There'll be nothing left to divide when it's all over if you can't —"

"There's somebody coming up the drive," said Lottie, who was gazing indifferently out of the window.

A few minutes later the door was opened by the captain's butler, an elderly gentleman of benevolent appearance. A student of physiognomy would have put him down as a rather eccentric and easily-imposed-upon philanthropist. (He had made his living almost exclusively out of this fact for the past thirty years.)

"Young feller to see you, Cap," he announced, having first satisfied himself that, saving the presence of the Principal Boy, his employer was alone.

"About the motor?"

"Yes."

"Show him in."

The butler retired, and presently returned, ushering a young man, squarely built and black of hair, with serious blue eyes and a healthy brown face.

"I came to see if you were still in want of a chauffeur, sir," he said in reply to the captain's interrogation. "I have been employed at the Gresley works."

"I do want a chauffeur" replied the warrior on the hearthrug; "but how am I to know that you will do, my man?"

"If you care to go and put any part of the machinery out of order, I will undertake to put it right again; and after that I could take you for a run in the car."

This sounded direct and business-like, and pleased the captain, and, incidentally, the captain's daughter.

"Well, that's fair enough. Go and have something to eat now, and after that you can take Miss Lottingar and myself for a spin. By the way, what's your name?"

"John Armstrong—sir!" said Pip. (He was always forgetting that word.)

"Have you any references?"

"No."

"Could you get any?"

"I might, but I'd rather not."

The captain regarded this blunt young man curiously. He possessed no references himself, and he moved in a class of society where such things were regarded with pious horror. Pip rather attracted him.

"Never mind them at present," he said, ringing the bell. "If you can handle the car you will suit me. If you can't, you are worth nothing, and you'll get nothing. Would you be willing to do odd jobs as well?"

"Certainly."

The butler appeared.

"Howard," said the captain, "take this man and give him something to eat in the steward's room, and let me see him again at three o'clock."

Mr. Howard, looking particularly benevolent, led Pip away, and Captain Lottingar was left alone with his daughter.

"He'll do, Lottie, I think," he said carelessly.

"M' yes—he'll do," said Lottie.

Her father turned round.

"You don't seem quite sure. What is it?"

"Nothing. I'm sure enough. Take him."

So the bargain was concluded, and Pip found himself engaged as chauffeur to Captain Cuthbert Lottingar (regiment unknown), of Broadoak Manor, Great Stileborough, Herts.

But Lottie was not sure. She had observed one fact which had escaped her usually astute parent, and that was that the new chauffeur was a gentleman—and, as such, a suspicious character. An ordinary mechanical mechanic would have been harmless; but a gentleman was a superfluity, and therefore a source of danger. But Lottie hesitated to comment on the fact. Wisdom said, "Take no risks"; feminine curiosity said, "Chance it!" Lottie chanced it, not for the first time in the history of womankind.

II

However dubious the impression which the new chauffeur had made upon Miss Lottingar, it is only fair to state that the impression made by Miss Lottingar and her gallant papa upon the new chauffeur was more dubious still. Pip, who was not an expert where women were concerned,—only an enthusiastic amateur,—made a mental note that Lottie "looked a good sort, and was a rare pretty girl." Being less biassed and more experienced in regard to his own sex, he was nearer the mark in his estimate of her father. The fact that Lottie's complexion was not entirely her own was unrevealed to him, but he did not fail to write down Captain Lottingar as a "bounder." He observed that his employer, though he carefully pronounced "here" "heah," not infrequently called "nothing" "nothink"; and Pip still possessed enough regard for the fetishes of his youth to be conscious of a thrill of positive horror at the spectacle of a man who wore brown boots with a top-hat on Sunday.

Various guests visited Broadoak,—gentlemen with waxed mustaches and loud garments,—most of whom appeared to be intimate friends of Lottie's. They shot Captain Lottingar's rabbits by day, with indifferent success, and played cards most of the night. Much the most interesting of the guests, however, was the gentleman heretofore referred to as "the Honourable." He was more than a guest at Broadoak,—he was almost one of the family. Captain Lottingar slapped him on the back and called him "my boy"; Captain Lottingar's friends addressed him with admiring deference and borrowed money from him; and Miss Lottingar behaved to him in a manner which left no doubt in the minds of casual observers as to the state of her affections.

The Honourable himself was a pleasant but dissipated-looking youth of about two-and-twenty. His stature was small, and his attainments, beyond those indigenous to every well-born and well-bred young Englishman, insignificant; but his appreciation of the pleasures of life was great. He was a good specimen of that type of young man but for whom chorus-girls would be compelled to pay for their own diamonds. Pending the arrival of the time when he would be called upon to assume the office of an hereditary legislator, he was engaged in what he called "seeing life." He did not see much, though he thought he did, for his field

of vision was limited; but what he saw he saw thoroughly. He entertained a great admiration for Captain Lottingar, whom he had encountered at a flashy club in town; and any fleeting doubts, derived from the hints of experienced and officious friends, which he might have entertained as to the genuineness of that warrior's pretensions to gentility were at once set at rest when he arrived, in response to a pressing invitation, on a visit to "my old place in Hertfordshire." A ripening friendship with the Principal Boy was now turning his admiration for the name of Lottingar into positive infatuation; and altogether the Honourable Reginald Fitznorton was in that condition usually described as "ready for plucking."

Pip, who did not as a rule concern himself overmuch with his neighbours' affairs, soon became conscious of a distinct feeling of curiosity in regard to his present surroundings. Captain Lottingar one day mentioned to the Honourable in his hearing that the family of Lottingar had inhabited Broadoak Manor, without intermission, from the days of Queen Elizabeth,—a statement which Pip found rather hard to reconcile with the fact that there lay in the garage at the back of the house a notice-board, showing every sign of having been recently uprooted from the grassplot by the front gate, inscribed with the simple legend "TO LET." Moreover, one afternoon, while exploring the numerous passages in the house in search of the Principal Boy's fox-terrier, which he had been bidden to catch and wash, Pip made the discovery that, with the exception of the dining-room, library, kitchens, hall and a few bedrooms, Broadoak Manor was a warren of empty rooms destitute of furniture, though a few of the more conspicuous windows were furnished with curtains.

His fellow-menials also were a curiosity-inspiring crew. The establishment, besides Howard, consisted of a not unattractive middle-aged female who cooked; a beetle-browed individual named Briggs, the keeper, who, though inclined to be reticent on matters connected with that exotic biped, the pheasant, was a mine of information on worldly topics, and a perfect encyclopædia of reference in regard to horse-racing; and a pretty but pert maid, who made eyes at Pip, and once, in a moment of inadvertence, addressed the saintly Howard as "Pa." All were on the best of terms, and sat down to poker in the evening with a regularity and cheerfulness which convinced the inexperienced Pip either that servants' halls were not what he had imagined them to be, or that adversity had landed him in a very shady establishment.

However, he discovered one refreshing and self-evident truth in this home of mystery. There was no doubting the fact that the Honourable's courtship of Miss

Lottingar (or Miss Lottingar's courtship of the Honourable, if you happened to live on the other side of the curtain) was fast maturing to a definite conclusion. On numerous motor excursions Pip found himself compelled to combine with his duties as chauffeur the highly necessary but embarrassing rôle of gooseberry. Occasionally Miss Lottingar attempted to drive the car herself, but as a rule Pip had entire charge, the young people sitting together in close companionship in the tonneau behind. Occasionally the car would be stopped, and Pip would be kindly bidden to smoke his pipe, what time the Honourable escorted Miss Lottingar into a neighbouring plantation, to watch hypothetical pheasants feeding; or Miss Lottingar took the Honourable up a by-path, to show him a view which had sprung into existence within the last five minutes.

Pip, simple soul, knew nothing and cared less about the gentle art of husband-hunting. He felt himself irresistibly drawn towards this young couple. He abandoned himself to sentimental sympathy, and drove his car or smoked his pipe with his eyes fixed resolutely before him, thinking of Elsie and wondering if his own turn would ever come.

One day, as they were returning from a long afternoon's spin, the car suddenly slowed down to a stop, and with the complete and maddening finality of its kind refused to move another inch. Pip divested himself of his coat and disappeared beneath the vehicle, emerging after a brief supine scrutiny to announce that the necessary repairs would involve the assistance of a blacksmith and take an hour and a half to execute. The couple received this announcement with marked composure, and left Pip to wrestle with the car, merely bidding him call for them at the "George" at Lindley, two miles ahead, on his way home.

It was dark by the time that the united efforts of Pip and the blacksmith restored the car to a state of kinetic energy, and it was more than two hours before Pip called at the "George" for his passengers. They climbed swiftly into the tonneau, and the car proceeded on its way. His charges were unusually silent, and Pip, turning suddenly to ask for a direction, surprised the Honourable in the act of kissing the Principal Boy's hands.

The Honourable departed next morning for London. In the afternoon the car was ordered round, and Miss Lottie announced her intention of receiving a driving-lesson. Pip instructed her to the best of his ability, and by constant vigilance and the occasional intervention of Providence succeeded in indefinitely prolonging the span of life of two old women, one cow, seven children, and innumerable cocks and hens.

Presently it began to rain.

"Never mind about putting up the hood, Armstrong," said Lottie. "It's a rotten affair—keeps no rain out. Let's run under those thick trees over there."

Pip took the wheel, and the car slid up a narrow lane and came to anchor under the thickest part of an arching grove of chestnuts.

"There," said the Principal Boy, removing her gloves, "I feel regularly done up. My hands are all of a shake after that beastly wheel. Am I improving?"

"You are a good deal steadier than you were—Miss," said Pip.

"That's all right. Much obliged for your help. You're a good sort, Armstrong."

"Armstrong" turned extremely pink.

"Look here," continued Lottie breezily, "I'm tired of calling you Armstrong. What's your name?"

"Er—John."

"Right-o! I shall call you Jack. And now, Jack, I want to ask you something. What are you doing driving a motor-car?"

"Jack" regarded his mistress with some apprehension.

"Why shouldn't I drive a motor-car?" he asked, rather defiantly.

"Why? Because you're a gentleman. Bless you, dear boy, do you think I didn't spot that long ago? What was it—debts?"

"Debts" seemed to meet the requirements of the situation without unduly straining the truth, so Pip nodded.

"Ah!" said Miss Lottingar sympathetically; "I know. We have been that way all our lives in our family."

Pip thought of Broadoak Manor and its present proprietor, and felt no surprise.

"Dad has lived on his wits ever since I can remember," continued Miss Lottingar. "I suppose you see what sort of a customer he is?" she added, in a sudden burst of candour.

Pip nodded again. "I think I do," he said.

"He's a game old chap, is Dad," continued the dutiful daughter, "but he's on the lowest peg at present. However, I landed the Honourable last night, so things ought to look up now."

Pip, who regarded the love of a man for a maid as something rather more sacred than honour itself, fairly gasped at this offhand remark.

"You mean—you are engaged to him?"

"Yes," said the Principal Boy in a matter-of-fact tone. "He asked me last night at the 'George,' when you were tinkering at the car."

"Oh! Congratulations!" said Pip awkwardly.

"Thanks. But all the hard work has to come yet."

"What do you mean?"

"We've landed him. Now we have to skin him!"

After this somewhat unfeeling reference to her intended, Miss Lottie sat silent, evidently wondering whether her sudden liking for the quiet chauffeur had not caused her to be a little indiscreet.

Presently Pip said—

"I suppose he has gone to London to tell his father?"

"The Earl? Not much. I made Fitz promise to avoid the old man till I gave him leave. He has gone up to town for the engagement ring. When he gets back to-morrow he is going to write and tell him everything. That will bring his lordship down here double-quick, and we'll settle everything in one fair, square, up-and-down scrap." Miss Lottingar almost smacked her lips.

"Will the Earl object, then?"

"Object? My dear boy, look at me!"

Pip looked. He saw a pair of bold black eyes, a very red and entrancing mouth, a *retroussé* nose, an alluringly dimpled chin, and a good deal of glinting coppery hair. Individually these features were distinctly attractive, but there was something about the *tout ensemble* that supplied an immediate answer to the owner's extremely frank question.

"You'll know me again," said Miss Lottingar, rather faintly.

"Beg your pardon," said Pip, ungluing his gaze with a jerk. "Bad habit I've got. Yes, perhaps he will object."

"I should think so. 'Fast girl—shady father—with all their goods in the shop window!' That's what the old man will see, if he's the least bit less of a fool than his son."

"But," said Pip, "won't he consent if he sees that you really—care for each other?"

"Afraid he won't see that," said Miss Lottingar composedly.

Pip stared.

"You mean you don't really care for Fitznorton at all?" he said.

"My dear boy, have you *seen* him?" inquired Lottie plaintively.

"Yes. But—why on earth are you going to marry him?"

"I'm not quite certain that I am," said the Principal Boy coolly.

"But you said you were."

"I said I was engaged to him."

"Sorry! I had an idea it was the same thing," said Pip.

Lottie gazed at him, not without a certain admiration.

"Not quite," she said. "You're a simple old chap, Jack, but I like you for it; so I'll tell you what we are going to do. When the Earl comes down here—the day after to-morrow, I expect—Dad and I will interview him. Fitz won't be there: I shall send him out into the woods to chase rabbits. Then we shall point out to the old dear that if the engagement is not permitted my heart will be broken."

"Oh!"

"You see?"

"I begin to. What will it cost to repair it?"

"A hundred thousand pounds."

"You value your heart at rather a high figure."

"He can afford the money: it's a mere fleabite to him. He is one of the richest men in England."

"Well?"

"If he agrees, I sign a paper renouncing all claim to Fitz. The Earl writes a cheque, takes Fitz home in a bandbox, and Dad is on his legs again. That's all."

"Suppose the Earl doesn't agree?"

"He will. It will be a pill for him, but he doesn't want the family name dragged through the law courts."

"But suppose?"

"Well, if he does, we are ready for him. If he ab-so-lute-ly refuses, I go to the front door, whistle up Fitz, pop him into this motor, skim off to Lindley, and get married by special licence. Fitz has agreed, and has the licence in his pocket now. Then I shall have an even stronger card to play—do you see?"

"Afraid not. Too deep for me."

"Well, once we're legally married, the old chap will find that as a real wife I am far more expensive to get rid of than before."

"Get rid of?"

"Yes. He wouldn't think of admitting *me* to his almighty family circle. He would have to ask now what I would take to live apart from Fitz."

"Live apart?"

"Yes."

"And you'd agree?"

"For two hundred thousand—yes."

"My word! You'd leave your husband?"

"Yes. You don't suppose I want to spend all my days with an image like Fitz, do you?"

Lottie threw herself back petulantly in her seat. Presently Pip laid his hand on her arm.

"Don't!" said he.

"Don't what?"

"Don't be drawn into this affair."

"Why not? Seems to me I'm in it pretty thick already."

"You could break it off—at once. It would be the kindest thing to do."

"It would be a blamed silly thing to do," said Miss Lottingar frankly.

"Do you care for him at all?"

"Fitz? Not a rap."

"But—do you like him?"

"Oh, yes! He's a decent little sort."

"Well, just think what it would mean to him if he married you, and then—found out."

"Um!" said Miss Lottie thoughtfully.

"Besides," continued Pip, following up his advantage, "think of yourself."

"I usually do," said Lottie.

"Women were never meant for that low-down sort of game," said Pip, getting to the heart of his subject.

Suddenly Lottie blazed out.

"There you go! Women, women, women! I wonder if there was ever a man in this world that could treat a woman sensibly. Some men—most men—look upon women as fair game, and treat them accordingly. The others—men like you—look on them as little pot angels, and shudder when they show they are made of flesh and blood. Women are human beings, no better and no worse than men, only they don't get the chances men do, Jack. That's all—human beings! Remember that."

"It's a hard world for women, I know," said Pip, rather staggered by this outburst. "But some good chap is bound to come along and—er—make you happy, and all that. Hasn't there ever been—anybody of that kind?"

"Lots."

"None you cared about, perhaps?"

"Not one. Well, there was one. Jim Lister is his name. He is assistant stage-manager at the Crown Theatre."

"Well?" said Pip hopefully.

"I—I liked him well enough, but we should always have been poor—awfully poor—and—"

"If a couple are really fond of each other, nothing else matters a damn," said Pip, with conviction. "Sorry! I mean you might do worse."

Lottie rounded on him.

"There you go again. 'Might do worse!' 'Be thankful for small mercies!' It's a rotten game being a woman, Jack. You are a man and can't understand. But if you'd had as hard a time as I have,—yes, and if you'd seen half as much of this world as I have,—you'd be gentler with me, Jack."

Certainly the conversation was taking an unexpected turn. Pip was completely out of his depth. Ten minutes ago he had been a respectful chauffeur, teaching a rather flamboyant young mistress how to drive a car. Now he was sitting by the selfsame young mistress, holding her arm in a friendly fashion, and talking to her as an elder brother might talk to a petulant child.

The irregularity of the situation apparently struck Miss Lottingar at the same moment, for, with one of those swift and characteristically feminine changes of mood which leave mere man toiling helplessly behind in the trammels of logical consistency, she abruptly released her arm, observed brightly that the rain had ceased, wondered if it wouldn't turn out a fine evening after all, and bade Armstrong drive home as fast as possible.

III

The Honourable Reginald Fitznorton was due back at four o'clock next afternoon. The motor was ordered round, and Pip drove Lottie to the station to meet him. Lottie, who was looking pale and not quite herself, declined to sit in the tonneau, and accompanied Pip on the front seat. In spite of the facilities for conversation afforded by this position she said little; and Pip, whose repertory of conversational openings was not extensive, said nothing at all. Besides, he was not certain whether he was to be treated to-day as a big brother or as a chauffeur.

Had he been a more observant big brother or a less diligent chauffeur he might have noticed that from time to time he was being favoured by his mistress with a sidelong scrutiny of some intensity. Being Pip, he saw nothing. One act of hers might have afforded him a good deal of information had he desired it. When the car, which had started late, rounded the last corner on the way to the station, there appeared in the offing no less a person than the Honourable himself, bag in hand, and diffusing happiness around him. Suddenly Pip became conscious of something. The girl at his side seemed to shrink up to him, and for a moment her hand travelled towards his as if for protection. An instant later she was leaning back in her seat, smilingly dipping an answering pennant to the frenzied signals of her rapidly approaching swain.

The car slowed down to a stop. Miss Lottingar stepped out, and was received by her enraptured lover, regardless of Pip's presence, with a smacking salute that fairly drowned the noise of the engine. After that the happy couple entered the tonneau, and Pip, with eyes rigidly turned to the front, heard little and saw nothing of them throughout the drive home.

As the Principal Boy had confidently predicted, the Right Honourable the Earl of Cartavon arrived at Broadoak Manor at lunch-time next day. The inmates of that venerable pile were ready for him. Howard, looking like a retired archbishop, received him at the door, and Captain Lottingar, in tweeds and gaiters, greeted him in the library. His lordship was affably informed that, in consequence of recent surprising and joyful disclosures by the young folk, his visit was not altogether unexpected; and that if he would join the house-party at luncheon, the business on which he had come down might be comfortably

discussed over a cigar in the library afterwards.

This much was retailed in the servants' hall by Howard, whose well-formed ears had missed little or nothing of the dialogue in the library, even in a filtered form. Mr. Briggs opined, amid general approval, that "the Captain and the gal between them could bleed the old toff proper."

After lunch the Honourable emerged from the front door, armed only with a walking-stick, and set out briskly, apparently on a country walk. At the same time word was sent to Pip that the motor would be required at three.

Punctually to time he ran the car up the broad avenue, passing the library windows on the way. He was conscious of a group of three round the fire,—it was a chilly day in late September,—and he wondered how the process of bleeding was getting on.

The car and its driver stood before the front door for more than an hour. It was after four when the front door suddenly opened, and Lottie, banging it behind her, hurriedly descended the steps. She slipped up beside Pip.

"Start off," she said—"quick!"

Pip got down and set the engine going.

"Where to?" he inquired.

"Anywhere!" said Lottie in a choking voice, "anywhere! But get started."

Pip sprang up into his place and took the wheel. The great car ceased vibrating and began to creep forward. Suddenly it gave a mighty plunge, and sped down the avenue.

At the same moment Captain Lottingar, looking anything but a country gentleman, and furiously angry, threw open the library window and bawled to Pip to stop. But the louder he bawled and the more thoroughly he blasphemed the faster the car shot down the drive.

Lord Cartavon sat stiffly in a high-backed chair by the fire.

"I shouldn't trouble if I were you, Captain—er—Lottingar," he said. "She won't come back."

Captain Lottingar banged down the window, and, returning to his favourite

position on the hearthrug, summed up his daughter's character in terms which would have been excessive if applied to Jezebel herself.

The Earl stood up.

"Sir," he said, "I am obliged to you for your hospitality. I will walk to the station now, and catch the five-thirty train back to town. I presume, after what has just happened, that we may regard this incident as closed. And let me tell you, Mr. Lottingar," the old gentleman added, turning on his heel as he opened the door, "that Miss Lottingar is a d——d sight too good a daughter for such a shark as yourself."

After he had gone, Captain Lottingar kicked a valuable Japanese fire-screen (for which he had not paid) round the room.

IV

On clearing the lodge-gates Pip turned the car to the left, and they spun down the London road. For an hour they travelled, sometimes slowing through a village or changing gear up a hill, but usually running at top speed, rolling up the miles like shavings under a jack-plane. Pip sat gripping his wheel, intent on his work. Lottie, rigid and upright beside him, looked straight before her, with her hands clasped tightly together under the rug. Occasionally she cast a sidelong glance at her silent companion.

At last, when they had covered nearly thirty miles, Lottie spoke.

"Jack, I want to talk to you. Stop this machine in some quiet place. That beastly engine makes too much noise for me."

Pip, who was getting used to these wayside halts, ran the car up the next opening and stopped.

Then the two turned and regarded each other. A glance apprised Pip of the fact that he was to be big brother again.

"Well?" he said.

"Jack, I've done it this time."

"Done what?"

"Upset the apple-cart. Poor old Dad! But I'd do it again!"

"How did you do it the first time?" said Pip patiently.

"Well, I'll tell you. After lunch, Dad and I and his lordship went into the library. We all sat down, the old gentleman very stiff and upright. He had hardly given me a glance so far, but now he turned and looked at me. I felt pretty small, Jack. I can hold my own in a staring match with most people, but that proud old man fairly beat me. He simply looked right through me at the cushion my head was leaning against. By the way, you can do that a bit, too, Jack. It's a trick some men have. That's what first made me think that you—where was I?"

"In the library."

"Oh, yes. Well, at last the old man turned to Dad, and looked at *him*. Dad didn't half like it, I could see. The old man said—

"'I understand that my son proposes to ally himself with—er,—this young lady?'

"'Yes,' said Dad, 'he does.'

"'And you have given your consent to the match?'

"'Yes', says Dad, as solemn as a judge; 'after due consideration, I have.'

"'Then I may as well tell you at once,' says his lordship, quite briskly, 'that I am utterly and entirely opposed to the match, and will never give my consent to it.'

"There was a little silence, and we all three settled down in our chairs as much as to say, 'Now we are really getting to business.' Presently Dad said,—

"'I am afraid, my lord, that solemn agreements of this kind are not so easily broken. Consider my daughter's feelings.'

"'I am perfectly willing to consider her feelings, sir,' says the old gentleman, with a little odd bow. Then he turned to me and said,—

"'May I ask a direct question? Are you genuinely attached to my son?'

"I wished he wouldn't keep on at me like that. However, I had to keep my end up, so I said, in a sort of soft voice, 'Yes.'

"'Ah,' said he, as if he was thinking. Then Dad, evidently considering we were wasting time, put in,—

"'If this match is broken off, my daughter's susceptibilities must be solaced in a very substantial manner.'

"Then the old gentleman turned and looked Dad through and through, and said, 'Ah!' again, as much as to say, 'I thought so.'

"'Well,' he said at last, 'how much do you want?'

"'*I*?' says Dad, still playing the game—'nothing. *I* am not the injured party. It is

for my poor girl to say.'

"The Earl looked at me. I took a big breath, and said, 'A hundred thousand pounds.'

"'You value your heart at rather a high figure, madam,' says he. (Do you remember, those were the very words *you* used to me, Jack?) Then he swings round to Dad, and says,—

"'Of course this is preposterous. I am willing to pay you five thousand pounds, to extricate my son from the trap, the carefully baited trap'—he looked all round the room, and I *knew* he knew everything in it had been got on the nod—'into which he has fallen. That is more than you would get out of the most impressionable jury, and I advise you to take it, Mr.—er—Lottingar.'

"'Quite true, my lord,' says Dad. 'But you know you'd give more than a hundred thousand to keep the family name out of the courts. You don't want the papers to get hold of it. "A Cabinet Minister's son sued for Breach-of-Promise"—you know the sort of stuff—and Lottie's portrait in "The Sketch."'

"'I am afraid we are wasting time, Mr. Lottingar,' says his lordship. 'If your daughter will sign a document, which I will draw up for her, renouncing all claims to my son, and undertaking not to molest him for the future, I will give her a cheque for five thousand pounds. If not, I must bid you good-afternoon.'

"'A hundred thousand!' says Dad.

"'I think you are acting foolishly,' says the old man, getting up. 'If you refuse my offer I shall go up to town now, and call on my solicitor to-morrow morning; and I think it highly probable, from what I see of your surroundings here, and from what I know of your antecedents already, that I shall be able to make it exceedingly risky for you to face the publicity of the law courts in any capacity whatsoever. In fact, I should not be surprised if you had to leave the country.'

"My word, Jack, he was fine! He dropped each word out of his mouth like a little lump of ice. But old Dad stood up to him. He simply chuckled.

"'No, no, my lord, it won't do,' he said. 'I have laid my plans farther ahead than you think. Now, look here. If you don't sign that little cheque I'm asking for, Lottie here will walk straight out of this house, take her motor, pick up your son, who is waiting for her at the roadside this minute, and drive straight to Lindley, where they will be married by special licence this very afternoon. Your son has

got that licence in his pocket now. And when the two are firmly tied up, you'll realise two things, my lord,—first, that it's hardly the thing to rake up the past life of your daughter-in-law's father; and secondly, that a wife is a deal more expensive to buy off than a *fiancée*.'

"After that there was a *very* long pause. Dad was top dog again, and the old Earl was thinking it out. Suddenly he turned to me. He said,—

"'You say my son has a special licence in his pocket?'

"'Yes,' I said.

"'And you have asked him to wait by the roadside for you this afternoon, in case of—contingencies?'

"'Yes.'

"'You must possess great influence over him.'

"'She does,' says Dad, before any one else could speak.

"The old man took not the slightest notice, but went on talking to me.

"'If you married my son you would demand a large sum—'

"'Two hundred thousand quid,' says Dad.

"'You would demand a large sum,' goes on the Earl, acting as if he and I were alone together, 'as a condition of your living apart from him and refraining from molesting him. Would you?'

"The words began to stick in my throat a bit, but I said, 'Yes.'

"'I think,' he went on, 'that you told me just now that you were deeply attached to my son?'

"This time I just nodded.

"'Then you mean to say,' he says, looking at me in a way that simply made me feel faint, 'that you would marry a young man whom you profess to love, and, having blackmailed him to the fullest possible extent, would readily consent to live apart from him, leaving him prevented by the law of the land from ever taking a wife of his own station and fulfilling his duty to society and posterity, so long as you remained alive? For the sake of a sum of money you would

deliberately wreck the life of a foolish but good-hearted young man, who has paid you the highest honour that a man can pay a woman; and with his life you would wreck the fortunes of an ancient and honourable house? Would you do that?"

"His face was like iron, Jack, but there were tears in his eyes. I sat gripping the arms of my chair. Suddenly Dad struck in,—

"'Come, come, my lord! you are simply wasting words. Which is it to be? Will you settle this matter, or must Lottie take the final step?'

"The old man said nothing, but looked at me. And then suddenly I found my voice. I boiled over, for I had realised at last what an awful thing I was going to do—awful for him, and awful for me. Somehow I didn't feel as if I could back Dad any longer. It flashed across me what I had been trying to do—sell myself! I'm not a great saint, Jack, but, thank God! I realised in time that there are things in this world that money can't buy. I just stood up and said,—

"'Dad, it's no good. I simply won't do this. I can't think why I ever consented. I'm sorry. I've always backed you up to now; but I'm a decent girl after all, and I *won't* do this—I *won't*, I *won't*.'

"Then I sat down and cried a bit. Dad looked perfectly flummoxed. In a minute I had dried my eyes, and I said to the old lord,—

"'Lord Cartavon, I wouldn't marry your son if you begged me on your knees. I won't marry a man I don't love, so I won't marry *him*. Keep your cheque-book in your pocket. I renounce all claims to him—there!'"

Lottie's voice broke at last.

"Oh, well done!" said Pip softly.

"That's just what the old lord said," exclaimed the girl, turning a surprised look upon him. "You both seem to have the same feelings."

"Well, what happened next?" inquired Pip.

"Things were a bit mixed after that," said Lottie, not without relish. "There was a great roar like thunder, and Dad dashed across the room at me. He was in an awful passion. He nearly killed me once, when he—never mind that. But the old Earl just stepped in front of him and said, 'Gently, sir, gently! there is a lady

present.' Then he went quickly to the door and opened it, and gave me a little nod to go. All the time he was holding Dad's arm with his other hand. I walked out, and the old man bowed to me as I passed, and said, very gently, 'God bless you, young lady!' He said that—to me!" she reiterated proudly, turning a pair of shining eyes on Pip. "Then he closed it behind me just as Dad broke into another roar. I rushed out of the house, hopped on to the car, and here we are!"

V

"And what are you going to do now?" inquired practical Pip.

"I don't know, I daren't go back. Dad would kill me."

The girl shuddered, and turned to Pip appealingly, as a woman, however strong her will may be, always turns to a man she knows she can trust.

Pip reflected in his deliberate fashion.

"You had better go to London," he said at last. "You know your way about there, I expect. I think you should go on the stage again. You like it, and it will make you independent. I suppose you can get an engagement?"

"Yes, I can manage that," said the Principal Boy. "Drive on now, Jack, and take me to Hunsford Station. It can't be more than a mile or two from here."

Once more the car sped through the gathering darkness.

"I'll go round to the 'Crown,'" continued Lottie more briskly, "first thing to-morrow morning. Jim Lister will get me a shop of some sort, if it's only in the chorus. That'll do to go on with."

"He must be a good chap," said Pip.

"He is," said Lottie warmly.

Presently they reached the little station. Inquiries elicited the news that there would be a train for London in half an hour.

"I'll stay with you till it starts," said Pip.

He ran the car under a wall out of the wind, and continued talking. He was in an unusually communicative mood, for him.

"I was wondering," he said, "why your feelings changed so suddenly in that interview, after you had quite made up your mind to—for the other thing."

"Don't know, I'm sure," said Lottie. "I can't think now what made me agree to

the idea, even for a moment. Jack, would you have thought *very* badly of me if —"

"I think I know what it was," continued Pip, who had been following his own train of thought; "you must have been kee—fond of somebody else all the time, fonder than you really knew, and when the critical moment came, the thought of —of him, though you didn't know it, prevented you from making yourself cheap. Is that it? Don't answer if it isn't a fair question."

"Yes, Jack, it's a fair question."

"And am I right?"

There was a silence. Pip saw a rather strange look settle on the girl's face. Presently she answered, in a low voice,—

"I believe you are."

"Then why not—go to him?"

"Perhaps—perhaps he doesn't want me."

"Are you sure? Is it Jim Lister?"

"No. He's a good boy, but it's not him."

"Ah! That's a pity."

Another pause. Lottie sat very still. She understood now why the idea of marrying the Honourable had become suddenly repugnant to her. The reason was sitting beside her, wondering what the reason could be. Lottie excelled in woman's favourite pastime—playing with fire—but this time she had burnt her fingers.

Pip talked to her a good deal during the next half-hour. Once he said,—

"I wonder what made you confide in me about all this. I expect it was because you spotted that I was a kindred spirit—in the same state as yourself."

"What state?"

"In love," said Pip simply.

"In love? Who with?" asked Lottie, ungrammatically but earnestly.

"I'll tell you if you like," said Pip. He launched into a description of Elsie, reciting his hopes and fears with all the complete *abandon* of the reticent man when once he lets himself go.

"It isn't often," he concluded, descending to earth again, "that I reveal my feelings to anybody. But I suppose things are rather out of the common to-day."

"Does she care for you?"

"I don't see how she possibly can," said Pip, with absolute sincerity. "But I'm going to ask her for all that."

"When?"

"As soon as I get on my legs again—financially."

"Ah, but when will that be? Debts are awful millstones, Jack."

"Debts? What? Oh, I forgot. Well, they are off."

"How?"

"This morning," said Pip, "I got a letter. It was from old Gresley, the head of the Motor Works where I am employed. His son used to be a friend of mine at Cambridge. The old man's letter is the most astonishing affair. He offers to take me into partnership! He seems to—to have taken a sort of liking for me," he added apologetically. "Isn't it like a fairy tale?"

(What old Gresley had said was this: "Partly because you have always been a good friend to my son, but chiefly because you combine first-class mechanical ability with sound common sense and the power of managing men, I write to ask if you will enter the firm as a partner, on equal terms with Harry. He has brains and you have ballast. Between you, you should sweep the board. I am getting old. Once the business is fairly gripped by you, I shall retire and leave you to run the show together. Give up your present post and come here at once, so that we may discuss matters more fully and settle details.")

"Then you'll be rich again?" said Lottie wonderingly.

"Well enough off, at any rate," said Pip, "to go and have it out—"

"With *her*?"

"Yes. Here's your train. I'll get your ticket."

Pip put the Principal Boy into an empty first-class carriage, and having shut the door conversed with her through the open window. The engine gave an impatient whistle, but the line was not clear, and the starting-signal remained obstinately red.

"Got any money?" said Pip awkwardly.

"Yes, thanks. Enough to keep me going."

The train still delayed, and Pip said,—

"I say, will you take my advice?"

"Depends on what it is."

"Go to Jim Lister."

"Well—I'll see," said the girl rather brokenly. She had borne up bravely till now, but the prospect of parting from her protector and the coming plunge into the unknown were telling their tale. Suddenly she looked up.

"Jack," she whispered, "come with me!"

The two gazed at each other steadily. Never was there a more direct invitation, and no man knows what thoughts passed through Pip's heart, or how great the battle that was fought and won during that brief minute. At length he spoke.

"I am still your father's paid servant, and until I have seen him and thrown up my billet I must stay here."

Lottie bowed her head submissively. She knew her man.

"But I'll tell you what," continued Pip. "To-morrow I shall be in town. If you *still* want help, send a line to me at the Oxford and Cambridge Club, and I'll come to you."

"You promise?"

"I promise. But *you* must promise not to write unless you really need me."

Lottie, a little mystified, agreed.

Suddenly the red signal-light turned to green. The guard at the rear of the train broke off an engrossing conversation with the only porter, and waved his lantern.

The engine gave a preliminary quiver.

Lottie and Pip shook hands. The girl's eyes were full of tears. Poor Principal Boy! Kindness which asked for nothing in return had been a rarity in her life. Suddenly she said,—

"Give us a kiss, Jack!"

Pip complied, with a satisfactory thoroughness that elicited a humorous expostulation from the only porter, who was passing by.

"Good-bye!" he said. "You'll be all right when you get to King's Cross."

Which cryptic remark was the last he ever addressed to the Principal Boy, for the train glided out of the station, and he never saw her again.

Before leaving the station Pip despatched the following telegram:—

Lister, Crown Theatre, Strand, London.

Arriving King's Cross 7.30. Can you meet me? Want help badly.

LOTTIE.

The following morning, having discarded his chauffeur's attire and departed from Broadoak Manor, after listening to an eloquent and most enjoyable valedictory address from its tenant, Pip returned to London. At the end of a highly satisfactory interview with the Gresleys he turned his steps in the direction of the Oxford and Cambridge Club, which he had not entered for three years.

He made himself known to those in authority, and announced that he had now returned from "abroad." He then asked if there was any letter for "Armstrong," which, he explained rather lamely, had been sent him under that name, "by mistake."

Yes, there was a note left by a messenger that afternoon. He opened it. It contained a single line—

All's well; and we thank you—*both* of us!

LOTTIE LISTER.

BOOK THREE

THE JOURNEY'S END

CHAPTER X

AN ANCIENT GAME

I

SOMEWHERE on the east coast of Scotland lie the famous Links of Eric. The district has not changed much, to all seeming, during the last thousand years—or ten thousand, for that matter. Then, as now, the links were a sandy waste, a wilderness of whin, sand, and bent, the home of countless scuttling rabbits and plaintive peewits. Later, perhaps, when William the Conqueror was creating a disturbance in the southern parts of remote England, a tiny fishing town began to grow up round the little harbour reluctantly yielded by the tall red cliffs to the eternal industry of the ocean, and the adjoining strip of low-lying sand-dunes acquired the title that it now bears, derived, it is said, from the name of the Norse king who once landed on this, the only piece of accessible shore for miles, and was there slain, after a bloody battle with the neighbouring lord and his retainers. The town itself will have none of these barbaric titles, but exists smugly and contentedly as Port Allan.

But it was through her little-valued links that Port Allan achieved fame. Two hundred years ago a new minister came from St. Andrew's, and introduced the men of Port Allan to a game called Golf. They took to it in their deliberate, methodical fashion, and laid out a little course on the hitherto neglected Links of Eric. Thither they repaired on fine summer evenings, carrying queer long-nosed wooden clubs and feather-stuffed balls. The golfing minister went the way of all flesh, and his compeers with him, but the golf endured. Generations of slow-moving fisher-folk, ecclesiastical luminaries, and holiday-making scholars—for the fame of the links brought visitors from so great a distance as a hundred miles—all played round the links in their day, recking nothing of Medal Scores, Colonel Bogey, the Schenectady putter, or other modern excrescences. They used their long-nosed wooden clubs to some purpose, and though they did not drive the feather-stuffed ball very far they drove it very straight. Once the great Allan Robertson visited Port Allan. He pronounced favourably on the course, and a word from Allan Robertson in those days was as good as a descriptive

article in "Golf Illustrated" in these. And so for many years the Links of Eric grew steadily in favour with golfers.

But one day—one momentous day—the men of England came to the conclusion that golf was the one and only game worth playing, and Scotland the one and only place to play it in. Accordingly, with that spontaneous readiness to suit the action to the word that has ever been the characteristic of an Empire-making race, they migrated with their wives and families across the Border, and proceeded to hew divots from the face of Scotland with an eagerness and *bonhomie* which was equalled only by the unanimity with which they forbore to replace them. Golf, which had existed for centuries as a sort of religious ceremony, to be cultivated by its votaries in reverent silence and at a strictly processional pace, suddenly became a species of bank-holiday picnic; and those ancient and highly respectable burghs which fostered the game in especial purity were converted into rather *recherché* editions of Hampstead Heath.

However unpleasant this foray might be for the Scottish golfer, it presented certain compensating features to the Scottish railways and hotel-proprietors. Of remote villages, which had formerly figured in the traffic returns as occasional yielders of a truck-load of fish, there now appeared highly-tinted pictures, with the Company's name at the top and a list of trains at the bottom. The hotel proprietors, on their part, quickly realising that to the average Englishman a golf-course consists of any tract of land in Scotland plentifully endowed with rabbit-holes, hastily staked out a claim on the nearest collection of sand-hills, and advertised to all and sundry that visitors to their hotel would be permitted, for a consideration, to play golf over the celebrated links of so-and-so, "adjoining the hotel."

Port Allan was one of the places which benefited by reason of the boom. The nearest railway station was seven miles away, but the Company quickly remedied that defect, and advertised through bookings from King's Cross. A special time-table was published, decorated at the top with a coloured view of the Links of Eric, in the foreground of which a golf-match was in progress between a gentleman in a sky-blue Norfolk suit and a red cap, and a lady in a red dress and a sky-blue hat. The lady was depicted in the act of driving off from the tee (with a blue putter); while the gentleman, rather ungallantly, had gone forward a few yards, and was engaged in playing out of the first bunker (with a red brassie).

The inhabitants of Port Allan soon realised that to play golf over their own

links in summer was out of the question. They accordingly accepted the situation, and, relegating their own golfing efforts to the autumn, turned to the equally congenial task of spoiling the Egyptians. Elderly seafaring men, who had hitherto extracted a precarious livelihood from the grudging ocean, abandoned their nets and took to carrying clubs, the fee of eighteenpence per round which they were permitted to charge being inclusive of a vast amount of caustic criticism, and priceless, if unintelligible, advice.

Behold, then, the Links of Eric one fine morning in early August. Observe the throng of golfers, male and female, young and old. Here you may see Youth, full of slashing drives and strange oaths, and Age, known for his sage counsel and long putts. Here is a schoolboy, with bare knees and head, and a supple swing that makes middle-aged golfers wriggle with envy. Here is a "golfing minister." His clubs are old-fashioned and his ball has been repainted; you will outdrive him over and over again, but unless you have at least a stroke in hand when it comes to approaching and putting, he will beat you. Those two men over there, playing in their shirt-sleeves, are Americans, of course. They are playing very keenly, but they are thinking, not of the game, but of some entirely new and original way of winning it. The fat gentleman is an Englishman. He originally took up golf by his doctor's orders, but by this time is badly bitten. He wears a red coat, adorned with the buttons of the Toadley-in-the-Hole Golf Club, and ekes out his want of skill by the help of patent clubs, an india-rubber tee,—ye gods!—and a wealth of technical phraseology. The couple in the middle of the course, with a highly profane throng waiting behind them, are a honeymoon, and as such ought not to be there at all. Their balls lie side by side in a rabbit-scrape; and they are disputing, not as to the right club to use, but whether Pussy can possibly love Sweetie more than Sweetie loves Pussy. Ah! an irascible couple have driven into them! Sweetie, at once putting a protecting arm round Pussy, turns and glares at them wrathfully, but Pussy, looking distinctly relieved, picks up both balls and impels her newly acquired lord over an adjacent sand-hill to a secluded spot that she knows of, where they can sit in peace till lunch-time.

But besides these anomalies and curiosities—common objects of all golf-links in summer—there are some real golfers to be seen. Here are two young men worth watching. Number One is addressing his ball for an approach shot. It will have to be a cunning stroke, for there is a yawning bunker in front of the green and a thick patch of whin beyond it. If he attempts to run the ball up, the bunker will catch it, and if he plays to carry the bunker, the chances are that he will overrun the green and find himself in the whins. He plays a fine lofted ball,

which drops on to the hard green six yards from the pin, and then, with that marvellous back-spin which only a master-hand can impart, gives a curious staggering rebound, and after trickling forward for a few yards lies almost dead.

"Good shot!" remarks Number Two, and turns to play his own ball. It is lying very badly in some bents, half buried in sand. Number Two—he is a left-hander—rejects the proffered niblick and selects a ponderous driving-mashie. Then, with an opening of the shoulders and an upward lift that betray the cricketer in every movement, he gives a mighty slog, and propels a confused cloud of sand, bents, and ball into the bunker guarding the green sixty yards away.

"Too good that time, Pip," remarks his companion.

"Didn't think I could get so far," replied Pip. "However, I get a stroke from you this hole, so wait a bit."

He descended into the bunker, but the ball was reposing in a heel-mark, and it required two even of Pip's earth-compelling niblick shots to remove it. Colquhoun, plus one at St. Andrew's, consequently took the hole in four.

Pip was staying at the Station Hotel, by himself. The motive which had brought him to a distant part of Scotland, to play a game at which he was far from being first-class, will appear in due course. Sufficient to say that it was a strong motive, and an exceedingly ancient one,—a motive which has brought about even more surprising events than the abandonment of first-class cricket, on the eve of a Test Match, by the finest amateur bowler in England.

They finished their match half an hour later, Pip, who was in receipt of a half, being one down. As they turned to leave the last green Pip found himself confronted by a large man in a Panama hat.

"Pip!" cried the stranger—"Pip! Bless my soul! What the blazes are you doing in Scotland in August?"

"Hallo, Raven," replied Pip. "Fancy meeting you, old man!"

They turned and walked up the road together.

"Why aren't you playing for the County?" inquired Pip severely.

"Missis," replied Raven Innes laconically. Then he added,—

"Said we must go away for August on account of the kiddies. I'm taking a

holiday from cricket in consequence: golf isn't a bad substitute. But what are you doing here, young man? Aren't you about due at Old Trafford for the Test Match?"

"No," replied Pip, beginning to fill his pipe; "I'm not."

Innes stopped short in his walk.

"You don't mean to tell me," he said, "that they have been such fools—"

"It's not that," said Pip.

"Oh! So you're chosen all right, then?"

"Yes, I'm chosen, but I'm not going to play."

"Great Cæsar! Why?"

"Well, I'm a bit stale, and I'm rather off cricket, and—and I want to play golf."

Now Raven Innes was a man of the world. Moreover, he was a married man,—married to a young and pretty wife,—and married men know things that are not revealed to the ordinary unobservant bachelor. Constant female society sharpens their wits. A woman has only one explanation for all male eccentricities, and Raven Innes had been married long enough to know that in nine cases out of ten this explanation is the correct one. He therefore pursued the conversation on the lines which he felt sure would have been adopted by Mrs. Raven had she been present.

"We have taken a cottage down the road—'Knocknaha,' it's called—so you must come and look us up. No time like the present, so come along now. By the way, my little sister is staying with us—Elsie. Have you seen her yet?"

The diplomat cocked an inquiring eye in the direction of his victim. Personally he had never noticed anything unusual in Pip's relations with Elsie, but in matters of this kind Raven was guided entirely by his wife, and as that female Hawkshaw, whose feminine instincts were infallible in these cases, had long since informed him that there was something in the wind, he was now embarking upon this elephantine effort of cross-examination.

"No, really?" said Pip, who was lighting his pipe at the moment. "No, I haven't seen her yet."

He threw away the match and walked on, his features as immobile as usual. But his old weakness betrayed him, and he turned a dusky red.

Raven Innes noted this portent, chuckled, and inwardly dug himself in the ribs, as we all do when we find that our natural acumen has unearthed a savoury secret.

Nearly a year had passed since Pip returned from "abroad," once more to take his place among his friends and in first-class cricket. During that time he had met Elsie only once—at Pipette's wedding; but he had gathered then, by dint of some artful cross-examination, that she would probably be the guest of the Ravens at Port Allan during August. Had Raven Innes realised that their chance meeting on the links that morning had been the result of a fortnight's planning, waiting, and scheming on the part of the enigmatical young man beside him; that the said young man had abandoned first-class cricket in the height of the season, and taken the precaution of arriving at Port Allan a full week before he knew Elsie was due there, in order to avoid all appearance of having followed her, and had even endeavoured to give a casual appearance to their prospective and greatly desired meeting by withholding his presence for another three days,—Raven Innes would have realised that a superficial blush may conceal a greater depth of guile than the ordinary male intellect can fathom.

II

There are many kinds of golfer, and there are many kinds of girl, but there are only two kinds of girl with whom it is possible to play golf. One is the beginner and the other is the expert.

The beginner is wholly irresponsible. Let us imagine that she is taken out in a "mixed" foursome. She refers to her clubs as "sticks," or even "poles." She declines the services of a caddie, with a little scream of apprehension at the very idea of such publicity. For the same reason she refuses to drive her ball from the tee if any one is "looking." Indeed, she has been known to implore her partner to turn even his sympathetic back during that performance. This excessive shyness is maintained all the way to the first hole, and, unless carefully watched, she will arrive at the green, ball in hand, having been unable to endure the critical gaze of two men at least a hundred and fifty yards away, who she feels convinced are laughing at her.

Presently she feels more comfortable. A long drive by her partner elicits a little shriek of astonished admiration, which flatters his manly vanity, and goes far to mitigate the handicap of her assistance. She at once begins to imitate his stance and swing, straddles well over the ball, shuts both eyes, gives a mighty swipe, and usually falls down, the necessity of "tackety shoon" being as yet unrevealed to her. On she goes, perfectly at her ease now, though a little hot and flustered, babbling incessantly during the stroke, regardless of the sinister frowns of the man who is endeavouring to play it. Should she miss the ball altogether, she is moved to unnecessary mirth; should she by any chance hit it out of sight, say over a sand-hill, she scampers up the slope after it at a run, and announces its discovery at the top of her voice, upsetting the nerves of all the old gentlemen within earshot. On the green her actions are as characteristic as ever. In running the ball up to the hole she either hits the ground behind it and sends it six inches, or plays a shot which necessitates the departure of her long-suffering partner, niblick in hand and scarlet in the face, to an adjacent bunker. Short putts she invariably holes out by an ingenious and unblushing push-stroke, which no one has the heart to question or the courage to criticise. So the game proceeds. It is not golf, but then you never expected it to be. It is another game, even older, and

even better.

After a few such rounds as this the dread seriousness of the game descends upon her, and she loses some of her charm. She never speaks, for she knows now that there is a rule on the subject. Her irresponsible gaiety is gone; she is actually nervous; and after missing an easy stroke (which she does quite as frequently as before), she looks piteously at her partner, and even sighs enviously as the lady on the other side, whom she has hitherto regarded as a mere example of how clothes should not be worn, plays a perfect approach out of a bad lie. In short, she has reverted to the status of the ordinary duffer, and as such she ceases to be anything but a common nuisance—unless, of course, sir, you take a special interest in her, in which case you will find her quite as attractive, and infinitely less exhausting, over a quiet game of croquet or spilikins.

But when—or rather if—she attains to the degree of a real golfer; if she can drive off before a crowd without giggling or blushing, and can be trusted not to shut her eyes when taking a full swing,—then she is indeed a pearl of price, for she is now a congenial companion, from the golfing as well as the other point of view. She is neither childishly frivolous nor grimly determined. She looks upon golf neither as a glorified form of croquet nor as woman's one mission in life. Behold her as she walks across the links to begin her morning round. She calls up her favourite caddie with a little nod of her head, and gives you a cheery good-morning when she finds you waiting at the first tee. (A pretty girl-golfer is about as nearly perfect as a woman can be, but even that cannot make her punctual.) She is neatly turned out: she has abandoned kid boots with high heels, and wears trim shoes with plenty of nails in them. Her head is usually bare, or perhaps she wears a motor-veil tied under her chin; at any rate, the unstable edifice of former days no longer flaps in the breeze and obscures her vision. She is independent too. She does not take the first club the caddie offers: she chooses her own, and rates the boy for not having cleaned it better. No longer does she put her ball in her pocket for fear of keeping back the green; on the contrary, she drives repeatedly (and I am afraid purposely) into a steady-going foursome in front. It is useless to remind her of a by-law which says that ladies must invariably give way to gentlemen and allow them to pass.

"Real gentlemen," she remarks, "would invariably give way to ladies and allow *them* to pass." And her iron-shot bumps past the head of an octogenarian who is trying to hole out a long putt on the distant green.

To look at her now you would never guess that she was once a shrinking

débutante, a hewer of turf, and a drawer of water from the eyes of the green-keeper. Her putting is still erratic, and she is rather helpless in heavy sand; but, given a clean lie and a fair stance, she will handle her light clubs to some purpose, and her swing is a "sicht for sair een." If you are at all off your game she will beat you; therefore it is advisable to offer her points before beginning the match, not so much because she needs them as to preserve your masculine self-respect in the event of a "regrettable incident."

Miss Elsie Innes combined all the virtues of the girl-golfer in her own graceful young body. Though she had "filled out" considerably since we last saw her, she was anything but a hobnailed, masculine woman. She was neither heavily built nor muscular; she looked almost too fragile to play at all. But she handled her light clubs with a suppleness and dexterity usually given only to a schoolboy of fourteen, and the length of her drive was amazing. She was always graceful, always cool, and, as Pip once noted to himself, "never got either hot or hairy."

After their first meeting at Raven's cottage Pip and Elsie saw each other constantly. They played a round of golf every day, usually between tea and dinner, the hour when the ardent male golfer relaxes from his noonday strenuousness and turns to thoughts of mixed foursomes. Usually Pip and Elsie played Mr. and Mrs. Raven. Raven was a far better golfer than Pip, but then Elsie was very much the superior of Mrs. Raven, which made matters even. Many were the battles that raged between the two couples. At first victory favoured the married pair. Raven, besides being a scratch golfer, was a good general, and his unruffled coolness and unerring advice made the most of his wife's limited powers. Pip and Elsie, on the other hand, did not "combine" well. Elsie, who (strictly between ourselves) fancied her golf not a little, insisted on dictating the line of action to be followed on each occasion, and more than once told Pip what club to use. Pip, though relatively her inferior, declined at first to be trampled upon by a female, even a high-spirited goddess with fair hair and a swing like an archangel. But few men in Pip's condition argue the point long: after a brief struggle to assert the predominance of man he subsided completely, and, as he thought, rather diplomatically. There he was wrong. The sage of antiquity who composed the uncomplimentary proverb about "a woman, a dog, and a walnut tree" knew something of life, and the course of Pip's true love might have run a good deal smoother if he had put down his masculine foot a little more frequently. However, there is no doubt that after his capitulation their golfing efforts reached a higher level than before. After a series of matches extending over a week, each side stood with three games to its credit, Pip and

Elsie just managing to draw level by winning a match on the last green on Saturday evening.

Sunday golf is not encouraged in Scotland. Consequently next morning Elsie accompanied her relatives to one of the numerous places of worship in Port Allan, which ancient township possessed its full complement of Auld Licht, Established, United, and Wee Free kirks, and other homes of religious controversy. Pip stayed on the hotel veranda and smoked, watching them pass but lacking nerve to join them. He summoned up sufficient courage, however, to put in an appearance at Knocknaha during the afternoon. He was even more silent than usual, though he made a hearty tea.

After that meal he invited Elsie to come for a walk with him. She consented, and they set off together, followed by the amused glances of Mr. and Mrs. Raven.

It was a glorious August afternoon. The North Sea, blue and placid, lapped gently against the red cliffs, or ran with a slow hiss up the slope of yellow sand which bordered the Links of Eric. There was hardly any wind—just enough, in fact, to keep the air clear; and Pip and Elsie, as they lounged luxuriously in a hollow at the top of a sand-hill,—their walk had been strictly limited to a Sabbath day's journey,—could see the smoke of a steam-trawler on the horizon though they could not see the ship herself.

"This is nice," murmured Elsie luxuriantly, as she arranged her holland skirt to cover up as much of her tan boots as possible—her Sunday frock had found its way back to her wardrobe soon after church. "Sunday really does feel like a day of rest if one plays golf all the week."

"Talking of golf," said Pip, "you haven't played me yet."

"I've played with you all the week," replied Elsie.

"With me, not against me," said Pip.

"Oh, I see. All right; I'll play with Raven to-morrow against you and Ethel. We shall beat you horribly, though."

Elsie was in a very perverse mood.

"Yes, but I want a single—a match," explained Pip.

"Oh!" said Elsie.

There was a pause. Pip lit his pipe, which had somehow gone out, and continued,—

"Shall we say to-morrow morning?"

"Afraid not," said Elsie. "I rather think I promised to play one of the men in the hotel."

This was not strictly true, but Elsie was in a curious frame of mind that evening. There was no reason why she should not have played Pip his match, nor was she particularly averse to doing so. But some flash of feminine intuition, infallible as ever, was unconsciously keeping her in the defensive attitude natural to women in such cases.

"Is it Anstruther?" inquired Pip.

"Yes," said Elsie rashly.

"In that case your match is off, for he has had a wire, and must go to-morrow morning."

"It's not Mr. Anstruther," said Elsie. "I had forgotten he was going away." (This was strictly true.)

"Is it Gaythorne?" asked Pip.

Elsie regarded him covertly, through conveniently long lashes. She suspected another trap.

"No," she said at last.

"That's queer," remarked Pip meditatively. "He was saying only last night that he expected to play you to-morrow morning."

Elsie, who had fallen into the not uncommon error of underrating her adversary, was for the moment quite flabbergasted by this bold stroke. Then, quickly noting the joint in her opponent's harness, she interposed swiftly,—

"Why did you ask me to play with *you*, then?"

"I didn't think you ought to play with him," said Pip coolly. "He's an utter outsider."

"I shall play with whom I like," said Elsie hotly.

"All right," said Pip; "I'll tell him. What time do you want him to be down at the tee?"

Elsie, though not inexperienced in the management of young men, fairly gasped for breath. This slow-speaking, serious youth would, unless she could speedily extricate herself, either compel her to acknowledge herself defeated or else force her into an unpremeditated golf-match with a comparative stranger.

"I—I tell you I don't want to play with Mr. Gaythorne," she said.

"Oh, sorry!" replied Pip; "I thought you said you did. Very well, I'll tell him not to come, and you can play me instead."

Now, it is obviously unwise to continue to assert to a second party that you have a previous engagement with a third party when you have not, especially when your knowledge is shared by the second party. So Elsie did the only possible thing, and laughed.

"All right, Pip," she said; "I'll play you. Be down at the tee early and we'll get off before the rush begins. As it is, I shall be driven into all the time, playing with a duffer!"

Pip, quite unmoved, parried this insult with another.

"Right-o," he said. "What shall I give you—a half?"

Elsie smiled indulgently.

"As a favour," she replied, "and to preserve your masculine pride, I will play you level. Otherwise——"

Pip interrupted. He was not looking quite so serene as usual, and he puffed almost nervously at his pipe.

"What shall we play for?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"In a match," he explained, "it is usual to play for some small stake—a ball, or a bottle of——"

"Nonsense!" said Elsie decidedly.

"Not a bit; it's often done," said Pip. "What shall we play for?"

"We shall play for love."

"Love? Right!"

There was an awkward pause. Technical terms lead one into such pitfalls. Elsie felt herself beginning to turn pink. Pip, who might have smoothed the situation over, made it worse by saying,—

"So it's to be a love-match?"

There was no mistaking Elsie's colour now. A blush ran flaming over her face in a great scarlet wave. But Pip proceeded quite calmly,—

"That's just what I want it to be. I'm glad you said that, though of course you didn't mean it in that way. You are a good golfer. On your day you can get round in, say, ninety. I am a rotter. I have only twice got round under a hundred. If I play you level to-morrow and beat you, will you—marry me?"

"*Pip!*"

Elsie was sincere enough now. She was genuinely astounded. She knew Pip for a man of blunt speech and direct methods, but she had hardly been prepared for this. She merely turned from red to white, and repeated her astonished cry,—

"*Pip!*"

Pip continued, quite coolly now,—

"Yes, I mean it. I have been in love with you from the first moment I saw you, the afternoon that I took you to the Blanes' garden-party. You remember?" The girl nodded gravely. "I was bowled over then, and I've worshipped you ever since. I suppose you knew that? Women are always said to know these things. Did you know?"

This was a long speech for Pip, but it drew no answer from Elsie.

"Did you know?" he repeated gently.

Elsie plucked a few bents from the sand around her and began to plait them with great care.

"Did you know?" asked Pip for the third time.

Elsie answered, without raising her eyes—

"Yes—at least, lately. But you never gave yourself away, Pip."

"I know that. I rather prided myself on it. I should have asked you long ago, only after the Governor's death I had to—work for a living. It's only recently I have become a man with money. Besides, I think these things ought to be kept sacred, just between—between the two, you know. I haven't a very high opinion of myself, but I do think I can keep a secret. I wasn't going to have you talked about, even by friends. However"—he brought his gaze back from the distant horizon with an effort—"we are wandering from the point. Will you play me a match, Elsie,—a love-match?"

Elsie raised her eyes for the first time.

"Pip, don't be absurd!"

"Absurd? Not a bit. I think it's a jolly sensible notion. I simply can't talk the sort of rot that men in love are supposed to talk—it isn't in me. All I can do is to make you a fair offer like this—a sort of challenge to single combat, you know. If I win, you give in to me; if you win, well, I shall have to chuck it, that's all."

"But Pip," said Elsie, "supposing I...."

Then she checked herself suddenly, leaving Pip to wonder what she had meant to say. He himself could see no flaw in the scheme. His own natural modesty prevented him from believing that Elsie, glorious creature, could ever desire to take him of her own free will, and consequently his simple mind had reverted to the primitive notion, inherent in most men, of marriage by conquest. His challenge to a golf-match struck him as an eminently sporting offer.

"I figured it out this way," he went on after a pause. "I said to myself, 'She will never marry me simply for the asking, of course'; so—what did you say?"

"Nothing." Elsie had suddenly ceased plaiting and parted her lips.

"So," continued Pip, "I said, 'The only way to make her give in will be to get the better of her in something—to show superiority over her in some way. It will be no use my trying to persuade her by arguments. I'm slow of speech, especially with women, and Elsie would simply talk me downstairs and into the street in about two minutes. A girl like her won't surrender without a struggle. Quite right too. I shall have to try something else. It mustn't be too one-sided either way, for

if it's in her favour I shall lose, and if it's in mine she won't accept. It must be a fair match.'"

And so he continued, simply, honestly, laying bare to her all the mighty scheme whereby he proposed to overcome her stubborn resistance. He had first thought, he told her, of a single-wicket cricket-match, but had abandoned the project as being too greatly in his favour. "You keep a very straight bat for a girl," he said, "but you can never resist my slow curly one, that looks as if it were going to pitch outside the off stump, and doesn't. I know your weaknesses, you see," he added with a friendly smile.

"Yes, Pip," said Elsie, in a rather subdued tone, "some of them."

Pip then proceeded to enumerate the other tests of skill that had occurred to him. "I thought of croquet," he said, "but really croquet is such d—Well, anyhow, I don't think croquet would have done. Billiards is too fluky. Chess is piffle. There are lots of other games, but you are so—so weak!" (Elsie's slight frame stiffened indignantly at this.) "Then I thought of the golf-match, and I saw at once that that was the ticket. So I packed up my bag and wired for rooms at the hotel here, and have been waiting for you to arrive ever since the first of August."

There was a pause—a long pause. Elsie was thinking—of what, she hardly knew. Pip was watching her, anxious to see how she received his great idea. Presently he continued,—

"Of course the golf-match is all in your favour. The chances are about three to one on your winning."

Suddenly Elsie flared up with a curious little spirit of anger. Her mind, highly trained though it was in these matters, could not quite appreciate Pip's Quixotic consideration for an opponent.

"Pip," she said, "I don't believe you *want* to win! The whole thing is simply a joke on your part—your idea of a joke. I don't think it's a very nice one: you know you can't beat me. If you really want to marry me you wouldn't—"

"I shall beat you all right," said Pip simply.

"Why?"

"I know I shall, that's all."

"Why?"

"Because I *know*."

A new idea occurred to Elsie.

"You dare to insinuate," she said, "that I would—would purposely let you—"

"Should I want to marry a girl of that sort?" asked Pip gravely.

Elsie softened again at this genuine compliment, but she still felt rather doubtful as to whether this extraordinary young man really and truly believed that she was to be won, and won only, by being beaten in a golf-match. In any case the situation was becoming difficult. She began to dust the sand from her skirt and to make other preparations for departure. Pip regarded her with some concern.

"You're not going yet, are you?" he said.

"Yes. It's getting late."

"Well, will you play me?"

"On those terms?"

"Yes."

"Of course not, Pip. You're not serious."

Pip leaned forward, and put his hand on her arm. She had half risen, but she now found herself sitting down again, rather astonished and rebellious, listening to what he was saying.

"Elsie, what is the date to-morrow?"

"I don't know," petulantly. "Girls never know dates."

"I forgot that. Well, it is the fourteenth of August. Do you know what is going to happen at Old Trafford to-morrow?"

"Why—the Australians! Fancy forgetting a Test Match! That comes of playing golf all day. But, Pip,"—she stared at him in dismayed surprise,—"why aren't you there? Surely you were chosen?"

"Yes, I was chosen."

"Then, why aren't you there?"

"Because I'm here."

"But, Pip, you ought to be playing cricket."

"I prefer to play golf."

"But it's a Test Match."

"I'm going to play in a Test Match of my own—here."

Elsie was silent again, and gazed at him, open-eyed. Pip saw that he had struck the right note.

"I gave up the cricket-match to play with you," he said. "Will you play with me?"

Elsie was defenceless against this appeal. She knew, better than most girls, perhaps, what it must cost a man to decline an invitation to play for England.

"All right, Pip," she said gently, getting up and shaking her skirt, "I'll play you. Nine o'clock to-morrow morning. I shall beat you, though," she added.

Pip said nothing. It is always politic to make a virtue of necessity. That is why one allows a woman the last word.

They were very silent as they walked home in the twilight. Pip, having achieved the object with which he had set out, had no further remarks to make. Elsie seemed less at ease, and kept shooting half-amused, half-angry glances at the obtuse young man beside her. She objected to being treated as something between a Prehistoric Peep and a Scratch Medal.

Presently they came to Raven Innes's cottage.

"Are you coming in, Pip?" inquired Elsie as she stood at the door.

"No, thanks. Raven would keep me up all hours, and I'm going to bed *very* early. Good-night."

"Pip—" began Elsie rather unsteadily.

Pip turned quickly, and beheld her standing on the step, framed by the open doorway. The setting sun glinted on her hair, and there was a curious and unfamiliar note in her voice as she addressed him.

"Pip," she said, "I don't like the idea of this match. It's—it's contrary to Nature, somehow. Golf wasn't intended to settle such questions."

Pip made no reply, but gazed upon her. In matters of this kind he was not very "quick in the uptake," as they say in Scotland. Elsie made a curious little grimace to herself, and continued—

"Pip, supposing you wanted, *very* much, to get something that lay across a stream which looked rather deep, would you make a jump and risk a ducking, or would you walk miles on the off-chance of finding a bridge?"

They looked at each other steadily for a minute, while Pip worked out the answer to this conundrum.

"I should probably jump," he replied,—"that is, if—"

And then at last light seemed to break upon him. The blood surged to his brain, and he stepped forward impetuously.

"Elsie!" he cried.

But the door was shut.

"Serve him right, too!" you say. Well, perhaps; but lack of presumption is a rare and not unmanly virtue.

CHAPTER XI

"*NATURAM FURCA EXPELLAS ...*"

ALAS!

When Pip slipped out of bed at six o'clock next morning the window-panes were blurred and wet, and the Links of Eric were shrouded in driving sheets of rain.

His pithy and apposite comments on the situation were, had he only known it, being reproduced (in an expurgated form) by a damsel in a kimono at a bedroom window not far down the road. Elsie surveyed the rain-washed links reflectively, and sighed.

"What a pity!" she said to herself. "I would have given him such a lesson! Now I suppose we shall both waste a day."

With which enigmatical conclusion she crept into bed again.

Pip arrived at Knocknaha after breakfast, but Elsie flatly refused to stir outside until the rain had ceased. This was no more than her swain had expected, and he returned resignedly to the hotel, where he passed an exceedingly unprofitable morning smoking and playing billiards.

After luncheon an ancient mariner in a blue jersey and a high-crowned bowler hat approached him on the hotel veranda and intimated that the day was a good one for deep-sea fishing. It was certainly no day for courting, and Pip, weary in spirit, was fain to accept the implied invitation.

They walked to the beach together, and began to haul down the old man's boat. This done, the oars and tackle were put in, and the expedition was on the point of departure when Pip suddenly realised that it had stopped raining.

"Hallo!" he said. "Rain over?"

"Aye," remarked the old man; "it will be a grand afternoon yet."

Pip turned upon him suddenly.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Aye."

"Certain?"

"'Deed aye," replied the old gentleman rather testily. "When the top of yon ben is uncovered like so, and the wind—"

"In that case," remarked his employer suddenly, "I can't come fishing, I'm afraid. I must go and—do something else. Another day, perhaps."

And handing the scandalised mariner half-a-crown, he departed over the sand-hills at a rate which would certainly have brought about his disqualification in any decently conducted walking-race.

An hour later two players approached the first tee. They were Elsie and Pip.

Now the nerves of both these young people, although neither of them would have admitted it, were tightly strung up by reason of the present situation. Each side (as they say in the election reports) was confident of success, but their reasons for confidence were widely dissimilar. Pip meant to win, because in his opinion the only way to gain a woman's affection is to show yourself her master at something. If he had moved in another class of society he would have subdued his beloved with a poker or a boot, and she on the whole would have respected him for it: being a sportsman, he preferred to use a golf-club.

Elsie meant to win for a different reason. To begin with, her spirit rebelled against the idea of becoming the captive of Pip's bow and spear. She might or she might not intend to marry him,—that was her own secret,—but she had not the slightest intention of marrying him because he beat her at golf. Obviously, the first thing to do was to beat *him*; then the situation would be in her hands and she could dictate her own terms. What those terms were to be she had not quite settled. All she knew was that Pip, if he were to have her at all, should have her as a favour and not as a right.

Consequently the lust of battle was upon them both; and it was with undisguised chagrin that they found three couples awaiting their turn at the first tee. To be kept back through the green is irritating enough under any circumstances, but when you are engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the

matrimonial stakes, absolute freedom of action is essential.

Instinctively Pip and Elsie turned and looked at each other in dismay. Then Pip said—

"Let's tramp out to the turn, and we'll play the last nine holes first. It will come to the same thing in the end."

Elsie agreed, and they set off together across the links in the direction of the ninth hole. They had no caddies, for each felt that on this occasion witnesses were impossible.

Pip, indeed, offered to carry Elsie's clubs as well as his own, but he was met with a very curt refusal.

"Nonsense! You would always be hammering your own ball a hundred yards away in a bunker, while I was waiting for my mashie."

The rain had ceased, and a watery sun shone down upon them. There was no wind, and the conditions for golf were almost perfect. The greens had become a trifle fiery during the recent drought, and the morning's rain had stiffened them finely.

Presently they found themselves on the tenth tee.

"You drive first," said Pip.

Elsie began to tee her ball.

"It's the last time you'll have the chance," he continued.

Elsie picked up her ball.

"For that," she remarked, "you shall drive first. I am not going to take any favours from a duffer."

Pip rose from the tee-box on which he was sitting and took her ball from her hand. Then he stooped down and teed it carefully.

"Ladies first," he remarked briefly.

Elsie, feeling curiously weak, said no more, but obeyed him. She made a pretty drive, the ball keeping low, but towering suddenly before it dropped. It lay, clean and white, in a good lie a hundred and fifty yards away.

"Good beat!" said Pip appreciatively, and began to address his own ball. His rigid stance and curious lifting swing were the exact opposite of Elsie's supple movements, but for all that he outdrove her by nearly a hundred yards. It was a Cyclopean effort, and the Haskell ball, as it bounded over the hard ground, which had been little affected by the rain, looked as if it would never stop.

"Lovely drive!" cried Elsie involuntarily.

"Yes, it was a hefty swipe," admitted Pip. "I get about two of those each round. The rest average five yards."

The hole was a simple one. A good drive usually left the ball in a nice lie, whence the green, which was guarded by a bunker, could be reached with an iron. Pip's ball was lying well up, and only a chip with his mashie was required to lay him dead. Elsie found herself faced by that difficulty which confronts all females who essay masculine golf-courses. Her ball, though well and truly struck, was farther from the hole than her iron could carry it. A brassie-shot would get her over the bunker, but would probably overrun the green, which lay immediately beyond; while anything in the shape of a run-up ball would be trapped. She decided to risk an iron shot. She did her best, but the distance was too great for her. The ball dropped into the bunker with a soft thud; she required two more to get out; and Pip, who had succeeded in clearing the bunker with his second and running down a long putt, won the hole in an unnecessarily perfect three.

"One down," said Elsie. "Too good a start, Pip. You'll lose now."

"Well begun is half done," retorted Pip sententiously, but he knew in his heart that she spoke with some truth.

The next hole was over four hundred yards long, and as such should have been a moral certainty for Pip. However, his tee-shot travelled exactly two feet, and his second, played perforce with an iron, not much farther. Elsie reached the green in three strokes and a pitch, and won the hole in six.

At the next hole Pip sliced his drive, the ball flying an immense distance and curling away out of sight to their left. (You must remember that he was a left-handed player.) Elsie, as usual, drove a picture of a ball, but just failed to reach the green with her second. Meanwhile Pip, tramping at large amid the whin-bushes, found his ball in a fairly good lie, and with a perfectly preposterous cleek-shot, which seemed to Elsie to travel about a quarter of a mile, lay on the

edge of the green. He holed out in two putts, and won the hole in four to her five.

They were warming to their work, and each was playing a characteristic game. The next two holes were short ones, across a high ridge of sand and back again. In each case the green could be reached from the tee. Pip, who had the honour, buried his ball in the face of the sand-hill, and as Elsie cleared the summit and lay on the green, he gave up the hole. Driving back again, Elsie carried the hill. Pip took his cleek this time, and his ball followed hers straight over the guide-post. When they reached the green they found the balls lying side by side ten yards or so from the pin. Pip putted first, and lay dead, six inches from the hole.

"This is the first half we'll have had," he said, as he stood over the hole waiting for Elsie to putt.

"Wait a little," said Elsie.

She took the line of her putt with great care, and allowing nicely for the undulations of the green, just found the hole, and again took the lead, having won the hole in two to Pip's three.

"Don't talk to me any more about flukes," remarked Pip severely as he replaced the flag.

"I won't," retorted Elsie, "if you won't talk to me about halves."

Pip made no mistake at the next two holes, the sixth and seventh. Both were long and straight, and, though Elsie drove as sturdily as ever, Pip's determined slogging brought him to the green before her each time, and at the seventh hole he stood one up.

The next hole was uneventful. The course here ran straight along the edge of the shore, with the sea on their right. Pip, unmindful of the necessity for straightness, hit out with his usual blind ferocity, and was rewarded by seeing his comparatively new Haskell fly off in a determined and ambitious effort to reach the coast of Norway.

"The sea," remarked Elsie calmly, "is out of bounds. You drop another and lose distance."

With the advantage derived from Pip's mishap, Elsie just won the hole. The next, the ninth (the eighteenth and last if they had started from the first tee), a dull and goose-greeny affair, as most home-holes are, was halved, and the match

stood "all square at the turn."

They sat down for a moment on a club-house seat on their way to the first tee proper, to begin the second half of their round.

"By gum, this is a game!" said Pip, smacking his lips.

"Rather!" said Elsie as heartily.

And, at that, a little chill of silence fell upon them. In the sheer joy of battle they had almost forgotten the great issues that hung on the result. They were absolutely alone on the links. The few players who had ventured out after the rain ceased were well on their way round—somewhere near the ninth hole, probably; and the green-keeper had taken advantage of slackness in business to go home to his tea. The sky was overcast, and promised more rain.

Suddenly Elsie sprang up.

"Come on," she said briskly. "My honour, I think?"

"Yes," replied Pip.

For the tenth time that afternoon Elsie drove the ball far and sure, straight for the green. Pip's heart smote him. Who was he that his crass and brutal masculine muscle should be permitted to annul the effects of Elsie's delicate precision and indomitable pluck?

"Elsie," he said suddenly, "if you don't win this match—you deserve to!"

Elsie looked up at him. For a moment her heart softened. She felt inclined to tell him something—that she did not want to win after all, that the game was his for the asking, that she would surrender unconditionally. But, even as she wavered, Pip unconsciously settled the matter by driving his ball just about twice the distance of hers. Without another word she picked up her clubs and set off to play her second. But her brassie-shot found a bunker, and as her skill lay in avoiding difficulties rather than in getting out of them, she soon found it necessary to give up the hole.

The stars in their courses now began to fight for Pip. His ball from the next tee, badly topped, ran merrily into a bunker, hopped out, and lay on fair turf five yards beyond. Upset, perhaps, by this fluke, Elsie for the first time bungled her tee-shot, sliced her second into a bad lie, and arrived at the green to find that Pip,

who had been playing a kind of glorified croquet-match against an invisible opponent, with his iron for a mallet and whin-bushes for hoops, was still a stroke to the good. She lost the hole.

Pip was now two up, with seven to play. But Elsie's cup was not yet full. Her next drive was caught most unfairly in an aggressively fresh rabbit-scrape, which lay right in the fairway to the hole. Pip offered to allow her to lift it, but she declined. Pip's good luck also continued, for though he pulled his drive over some sand-hills to the right, he found his ball lying teed up "on the only blade of grass for miles," as he explained on reappearing. He reached the green in two, Elsie taking three, and won the hole.

Three down, and six to play!

There was no question of giving in in Elsie's heart now. She had hesitated, and was lost, or at any rate committed to a life-and-death struggle. There can be no graceful concessions when one is three down. Under such circumstances a virtue is apt to be misconstrued into a necessity.

The next hole was the longest in the course, and Elsie felt that it was a gift for Pip. That erratic warrior, however, failed to carry the burn, distant about fifteen yards from the tee, and was ignominiously compelled to fish his ball out, drop, and lose a stroke. This gave Elsie some much-needed encouragement. Her tee-shot took her well on her way, and the ball lay so clean for her second that she was enabled to take her driver to it. One more slashing stroke, with her brassie this time, delivered with all the vigour and elasticity of which her lithe young body was capable, and she lay only ten yards from the green. Pip, despite some absolutely heroic work with his beloved cleek, was unable to overcome the handicap of the burn, and reached the green a stroke behind her. However, his luck stood by him once more, for he accomplished a five-yard putt, and halved the hole.

"Good putt!" said Elsie bravely.

"All putts of over three feet," remarked Pip, sententiously quoting one of his favourite golfing maxims, "are flukes."

Fluke or no fluke, Elsie was three down, with only five to play. Another hole lost, and Pip would be "dormy." Fortunately the next three holes were of the short and tricky variety, presenting difficulties more easily to be overcome by a real golfer than a human battering-ram. Elsie rose to the occasion. She set her

small white teeth, squared her slim shoulders, and applied herself to the task of reducing Pip's lead. And she succeeded. The first hole she took in a perfect three, Pip, who had encountered a whin-bush *en route*, requiring thirteen!

"One thing," he remarked philosophically as he mopped his brow, "I did the job thoroughly. That whin-bush will never bother anybody again."

The next hole was a real triumph for Elsie. She was weak with her approach, and arrived on the green in three to Pip's two. Pip played the like, hit the back of the hole hard, hopped over, and lay a foot beyond—dead.

"This for a half," said Elsie.

"This" was an exceedingly tricky putt of about eight yards over an undulating green. She carefully examined the lie of the ground in both directions, thrust her tongue out of one corner of her mouth—an unladylike habit which intruded itself at moments of extreme tension—and played. The ball left her putter sweetly, successfully negotiated the various hills and dales of the green, and dropped into the hole.

"Grand putt!" said Pip. "I mustn't miss this of mine."

He humped his shoulders, bent his knees, and addressed the ball with all the intense elaboration usual in a player suddenly called upon to hole a ball which, under ordinary circumstances, he would knock in with the back of his putter. Whether his impossible posture or his recent unequal encounter with the whin-bush was responsible will never be known, but the fact remains that he missed the hole by inches, and so lost it by one stroke.

Elsie stifled the scream of delight that rose to her lips.

"One down, and three to play," she remarked, in a voice that *would* tremble a little.

She made no mistake with the next hole. For her it was a full drive over a high bunker on to the green. Pip took his cleek, failed to carry the bunker, and after one or two abortive attempts to get out of the shifty sand with his niblick, gave up the hole, Elsie's drive having laid her a few yards from the pin.

"All square," announced Elsie. "Two to play."

"My word, Elsie, this is a match!" repeated Pip.

Elsie replied by an ecstatic sigh.

Both had entirely forgotten the stake for which they were playing. For the moment they were golfers pure and simple. They were no longer human beings, much less male and female, less still lover and lass. The whole soul of each was set on defeating the other.

But there are deeper passions than golf.

"*Naturam furca expellas, tamen usque recurret!*"

—which, being interpreted, means roughly that if a man and a maid set out to dislodge Human Nature from their systems with, say, a niblick, Human Nature will inevitably come home to roost. All of which is cold truth, as the event proved.

Both gave an exceedingly moderate exhibition at the seventeenth tee, Pip because he not infrequently did so, and Elsie because her nerve was going. Their second shots were better, though Pip as usual got farther with his cleek than Elsie with her brassie. Elsie therefore had to play the odd in approaching the green. This time she did herself justice. It was a perfect shot. The ball rose quickly, fell plump upon the green, checked itself with a little back-spin, and staggered uncertainly towards the hole. Finally it stopped, eighteen inches beyond the pin.

Elsie heaved a sigh of the most profound relief. In all human probability she was sure of a "half" now, and unless Pip laid his approach dead she would win the hole outright, and so make the match safe, safe, safe! She involuntarily clasped her hands together over her beating heart.

Pip, impassive as ever, said nothing, but took his mashie and succeeded in reaching the green. Since his ball lay a good ten yards short, his chances of a half looked meagre, but he grasped his putter with determination and "went for" the hole. The ball rolled smoothly over the green, but suddenly turned off a little and just rolled past the lip of the hole.

"Bad luck!" said Elsie, with ready sympathy.

Bad luck indeed, but not for Pip. The ball, as she spoke, suddenly slowed down and stopped dead, midway, to a hair's-breadth, between the ball and the hole. Elsie required only a short putt to win the hole and make herself "dormy," and Pip had laid her a dead stymie.

Involuntarily they looked at each other. Then Pip said quickly,—

"I'll pick up my ball while you putt. We aren't having any stymies in this match, of course."

All the sportswoman in Elsie revolted at this. "No, Pip," she said; "certainly not. We arranged nothing about stymies before we started, so stymies must stand. I must just play it."

She took her mashie, and made a gallant but unsuccessful effort to jump her ball over Pip's. Each holed the next putt, and the match remained square—with one to play. Ye gods!

They were very silent as they prepared to drive off for the last time. Absolutely alone, far out on the course, they were now approaching what was properly "the turn," more than a mile from the clubhouse.

"I shall put down a new ball here," said Pip, "just for luck."

"So shall I," said Elsie.

"We mustn't mix them on the green, then. What is yours?"

"A 'Haskell.'"

"Right. Mine's a 'Springvale Kite.'"

Elsie had the honour, and drove as good a ball as any that afternoon. Pip, determined to take as few risks as possible, used his cleek, and lay just beside her.

The ninth hole on the Links of Eric is known as "The Crater." The green lies in a curious hollow on the top of a conical hill. An average drive leaves your ball at the hill-foot in a good lie. After this only one stroke is of the slightest use. You take your farthest-laid-back mashie, commend your soul to Providence, and smite. The ball, if struck as desired, will rise up, tower, and drop into the basin at the top of the hill. Should you play too strongly you will fly over the oasis of green turf and fall into a howling wilderness of bents, sand, and whins on the far side; should you play short, your ball will bury itself in the slopes of shifting sand that guard the approach, and your doom is sealed. It is credibly reported that all four players in a four-ball match—scratch men, every one—once arrived upon the Crater green, ball in hand, each having given up the struggle under the

despairing impression that no opponent could possibly have played more strokes than himself.

On paper, this was just the sort of hole that Elsie should have won from Pip. But in practice the conditions were even. Pip's Herculean wrists made it possible for him to force the ball up to the necessary height with a half-mashie-shot, but for Elsie the task involved a full swing—and to keep your ball under absolute control in such circumstances is about the most difficult shot in golf. Pip's approaching was at its worst unspeakable, but on this occasion he was at his best. The ball sailed grandly into the air and dropped in a reassuringly perpendicular fashion into the Crater. Elsie's effort was almost as good, though her ball curled slightly to the left before dropping.

They tramped up the long flight of wooden steps which facilitated the ascent to the summit with bated breath. A glance at the green would decide the match.

Elsie reached the top first. Pip heard her give a little gasp.

One ball, new, white, and glistening, lay on the green ten or twelve yards from the hole. The other was nowhere to be seen.

"Whose ball, I wonder?" said Pip calmly.

They stooped together and examined the ball as it lay on the green. So close were they that Pip was conscious of a flutter that passed through Elsie's body.

The ball was a "Springvale Kite."

Pip maintained an absolutely unmoved countenance. The ball was his, and so, unless a miracle intervened, was the hole. And the match. And—Elsie!

But that mysterious quality which, for want of a better name, we call "sportsmanship," under whose benign influence we learn to win with equanimity and lose with cheerfulness, prevented him from so much as turning an eye upon his beaten opponent. He merely remarked briskly—

"We must find your pill, Elsie. It can't be far off."

Elsie made no reply, but took her niblick and began to search rather perfunctorily for the lost ball. She could not speak: the strain of the match had told upon her. After all she was a woman, and a girl at that. Pip's iron immobility made her feel worse. She was beginning to realise that he was stronger than she

was—a state of affairs which had never appeared possible to her before. She wanted to cry. She wanted to scream. She wanted to go home. She wanted to beat Pip, and now that feat appeared to be impossible. Half an hour ago she could have abandoned the match with good grace. She might have surrendered with all the honours of war. Now she would be dragged home at the wheels of Pip's chariot.

Meanwhile her opponent, that tender-hearted and unconscious ogre, was diligently poking about among the bents and whins for the missing Haskell. He was genuinely distressed that the match should end thus. Elsie had had cruel luck. She should have won the last hole, and at any rate halved this one. He took no pleasure in his prospective victory. He had wild thoughts of offering to play the hole again, but dismissed them at once. Elsie might be only a girl, but she had the right instincts, and would very properly regard such an offer as an insult. If only her ball could be found, though, Pip flattered himself that he could go on missing putts after Elsie had reached the green until she had pulled the match out of the fire. Happy thought! he would so manipulate the game as to halve the hole and the match. Then Box *and* Cox would be satisfied. Beat Elsie, plucky little Elsie? Perish the thought! Pip's sentimental heart overflowed. What a game she had played!

But, sentiment or no sentiment, a lost ball is a lost hole, and unless the ball could be found Pip would be a victor *malgré lui*.

Coming round the face of the hill, Pip suddenly found himself a few yards from Elsie. She stood with her back to him, unaware of his presence. What was she doing? Certainly not looking for her ball. Was she—could she—really—was Elsie, the proud, the scornful, the unbending, actually cr—? Certainly that flimsy article in her hand looked like a handkerchief. Perhaps it was only a fly in her eye, or something.

No. Pip watched Elsie for a moment longer. It was *not* a fly in her eye. His heart, already liquescent, melted entirely. He tiptoed away back to the green.

Once there, he took three balls from his pocket and examined them. One was an old and battered "guttie," the others were "Kites," with Pip's trade-mark indelibly stamped upon their long-suffering skins. None of these were suitable for his fell purpose. Nothing daunted, the conspirator stole across to Elsie's bag, which lay on the edge of the green, and selected from the pocket a new Haskell. Carefully fastening up the pocket again, he walked to the middle of the green, and after a furtive glance all round him—dropped the ball into the hole.

Then he uplifted his voice in a full-throated yell, and hurried towards the spot where he had last seen Elsie. As he emerged from the hollow green he met her face to face, coming slowly up to the ridge. Her cheeks were rather flushed and her eyes shone, but her handkerchief was resolutely tucked away in her blouse, and she greeted Pip with a ready smile.

"Elsie," said Pip excitedly, "I've found your ball."

"My ball? Nonsense! Why, I've—"

She checked herself suddenly and followed Pip. That well-meaning but misguided philanthropist, heedless of the danger-signals in Elsie's eyes, walked to the hole, and there, rather with the air of an amateur conjurer who is not quite certain whether his audience know "how it's done" or not, picked out the ball.

"There's your ball," he said. "Good hole, in two! Congratters!"

He handed her the ball with a clumsy gesture of good-will.

Elsie regarded the unoffending Haskell in a dazed manner for a moment, turned white and then red, and finally looked Pip squarely in the face without speaking. Then she flung the ball down upon the green, turned on her heel with a passionate whirl of her skirt, and stalked off, leaving Pip staring dejectedly after her.

CHAPTER XII

"... TAMEN USQUE RECURRET"

ELSIE walked on. Her face was set, and her blue-grey eyes had a steely look. In her hand she carried a golf-ball—not the one which poor Pip had "discovered" in the hole, but another, her own, the genuine article. She had spied it, lying in an absolutely unplayable position under a stone, almost immediately after Pip had left her to her handkerchief. She had picked it up, and was on her way back to the green to inform her opponent that the match was his, when she was startled by a mighty shout, and arrived in time to witness the whole of Pip's elaborate conjuring-trick. She grasped the situation at once, and all the woman in her blazed up at this monstrous piece of impertinence. Her anger caused her to overlook the fact that Pip, in his desire to save her from mortification, had deliberately sacrificed his chances and thrown away the spoils of victory. For the moment, all she realised was that he had "patronised" her, treated her like a spoiled child, and allowed her to win. Her blood boiled at the idea. She walked on quickly.

It was not until she had proceeded for a couple of hundred yards that she discovered that she was going in the wrong direction. The ninth hole was situated at the extreme end of the links, and as she had turned on her heel and swung off more with the idea of abandoning her present locality than of reaching another, she realised that, if she continued on her present course, every step would take her farther from the hotel. The discovery added to her wrath. She was making herself ridiculous now. Pip had probably noticed her mistake, and was in all likelihood still standing on the green laughing at her. Return and walk past him she would not. Only one thing remained to be done: she would turn in among the neighbouring sand-hills, make a détour, and walk home along the shore.

A friendly gap between two hillocks presented itself on her left, and she swung round and made for it. As she passed through the entrance she could not help looking back. Pip was sitting on the tee-box beside the now distant green. His chin was buried in his hands, and he was gazing out to sea, with his pipe

projecting from his mouth at a reflective angle.

Elsie knew that attitude.

"He's thinking the situation over," she said to herself. "Let him: it will do him good. Oh, dear! where have I got to now?"

She walked into a tiny amphitheatre. All round her rose walls of fine, shifting, running sand. They sloped up gradually, to where they had fallen away from the surrounding summit, leaving a crumbling precipice six or seven feet high, crowned with a projecting rim of treacherous turf,—a natural bunker if ever there was one, and almost as difficult of exit for a girl as for a golf-ball.

But Elsie made the attempt. She was determined not to go back through the gap into Pip's range of vision if she could help it. She struggled up the slope of yielding sand, which sank beneath her feet and trickled into her shoes: she reached the top, laid hold of the overhanging turf, and tried to pull herself up. But, just as she placed a triumphant knee on the summit, the crumbling fabric subsided beneath her weight, and she was projected in a highly indecorous fashion to the foot of the slope.

On this occasion Elsie had some cause to feel grateful that Pip (or indeed any other gentleman) was not present. But the idea did not occur to her. In fact, things had come to a crisis. She was tired out after her hard game, disappointed at the result,—as a matter of fact, she was not very clear as to whether she had won or lost,—and thoroughly demoralised and unstrung by the strain of recent events. She had planned out the present comedy with some care, assigning to herself the superior and congenial rôle of magnanimous conqueror, and to Pip that of humbled and grateful victim. Somehow everything had gone wrong. She was angry with herself and furious with Pip, and now she had fallen down several yards of slippery sand and twisted her foot. She was not sure if the comedy had turned out a tragedy or a farce; all she realised was that it had been a dismal failure. In short, Elsie had expelled Nature with a pitchfork, and now Nature was coming home to roost.

But, in spite of the pitchfork, Nature bore no malice. On the contrary, quite aghast at the havoc that her brief absence had created, she at once took her luckless daughter in hand. Consequently Elsie, poor, distracted, overwrought Elsie, threw herself down on the scanty grass, and found immediate relief in woman's priceless and ever-to-be-envied panacea for all ills—a good cry.

How long she lay sobbing she did not know. When she at length raised her head from the turf and began to dab her eyes with a damp and entirely inadequate pocket-handkerchief, she became aware, with a curious lack of surprise, that Pip was sitting a few yards from her. His pipe was no longer in his mouth, and he was regarding her intently with serious eyes.

"You left your clubs behind you," he said. "I brought them along."

"Thank you," said Elsie.

There was a pause. Finally Elsie completed operations with the handkerchief, and looked Pip squarely in the face. Her tears seemed in some mysterious way to have washed all feelings of anger, restraint, and false sentiment out of her head. For all that, she was not absolutely comfortable. Pip must, of course, be punished for having put that ball into the hole; but the performance of this duty demanded firmness and judicial dignity, and she felt guiltily conscious that her recent tears would detract somewhat from its effectiveness.

Pip, however, was the first to break the silence.

"I was wondering," he remarked, "why you raced off like that just now. Of course, there was one explanation,—that you *wanted* to lose the match, and were sick at having won it,—but I wasn't such a bounder as to think that. I smoked a pipe or two up there,"—Elsie started; she had not realised that her cry had lasted so long,—"and I thought it all over to see if I could come to a satisfactory solution of the mystery, and—"

Elsie unclosed her left hand, and displayed a golf-ball, which she tossed towards him.

"There's the solution, Pip," she said.

Pip picked up the ball and examined it. Then he took another from his pocket and compared the two.

"Ah!" he remarked. "Then you spotted me. I thought you had, but I couldn't see how. It never occurred to me that you had found your ball. I thought perhaps you had seen something wrong with the one I put—took out of the hole, but I see they are both identical. There's not a mark on either. It was a pity you found yours. If you hadn't, all would have ended happily, wouldn't it?"

"For me or for you?"

"For both of us."

"Then you wouldn't have minded losing?" This with a scornful little laugh.

"No, not in this case."

There was another silence. That Pip should not mind losing a match of which she was the prize struck Elsie as uncomplimentary, not to say rude.

But Pip was never rude to her. Obviously there was something more to come. She waited patiently. Pip gave no sign.

Presently feminine curiosity overcame pride, and she asked,—

"What do you mean by 'in this case'?"

"I mean this," said Pip. "I don't like losing matches at any time,—nobody does,—but in this case, *your* case, I was glad."

"Oh! Why?"

"At first it was because I couldn't bear to see you beaten after the plucky fight you made. I've often felt the same thing at cricket, when some chap is sticking in to keep the last wicket up, and I am put on to knock it down. Admiration for a gallant foe, and all that, you know. But now I am glad for quite another reason—jolly glad!" He gave the girl a look that was quite new to her.

"Why are you glad, Pip?" she asked, not unkindly.

"Well, I had a good long think just now, up on that green, and a lot of things were made plain to me that had never struck me before. First of all, I realised that you had been quite right."

"Right? About what?"

"About this golf-match being contrary to Nature. Love affairs aren't built that way. I had no right to try and force such terms on you. I see that now. I tried to drive you into a corner. It was a low-down trick, though I thought it a fair enough offer at the time. I was quite sincere."

"I know you were," said Elsie quickly.

Pip raised his eyes to hers for a moment.

"Thank you," he said; "it was decent of you to say that. Now, where I made my error was in this. I didn't think it mattered much whether I got you willing or unwilling, so long as I *got* you. It was *you* I wanted, you—Elsie—alive or dead, so to speak,—nothing else mattered. And then suddenly I saw what a fool I had been. I had forgotten that there were two sides to the question. When a man wins a race or a competition of any kind, he sticks the prize up on his mantelpiece and takes no further notice of it beyond looking at it occasionally and feeling glad he's got it. Once there, it ceases to have such an interest for him: he hasn't got to live with it or cart it about with him. I am afraid I was looking at you rather in that light. I was so taken up with the idea of winning you that I forgot about—about—"

"About having to 'cart me about with you'?" said Elsie.

"Yes, that's it. I forgot I couldn't put you on the mantelpiece and leave you there: I had to consider your point of view as well as my own. It was then I realised, all in a moment, that unless you came to me absolutely of your own free will, without terms or conditions, you couldn't come at all,—and what's more, I wouldn't want you to; and that's saying a good deal, as you know."

He paused suddenly, and darted a rather ashamed look at Elsie.

"I suppose all this seems fearfully obvious to you," he said. "Most men would have found it out for themselves from the beginning."

"Some men never find it out at all, Pip."

"Well, that's comforting. Anyhow, having reasoned it all out up there, I put my pipe in my pocket and came along here to tell you."

"To tell me what?"

"How sorry I was."

"What for?"

"For having behaved like a—"

"You don't look very sorry."

Pip's eyes gleamed.

"No, and I'm not either," he shouted. "I'm not, I'm not! I have seen something

since then that has driven all my sorriness out of my head. I came along here, fearfully glum, just to say I was sorry to have forced such a caddish scheme on you, and to ask if I might carry your clubs back to the house, and suddenly I came round the corner, and there I saw you—crying."

"And that's made you glad?" said Elsie coldly.

"Glad? I should think it did!" He stood up, and continued, "Don't you see, dear, it showed me that you *cared*? A girl doesn't lie sobbing on the sand if she's absolutely indifferent. Oh, I know now, right enough: half an hour ago I didn't. I came upon you then hunting for your ball and dabbing your eyes with your handkerchief; but that of course was different; I knew it wasn't the real thing. You were just tired then, and sick at losing the game; but this time"—his face glowed—"this time I knew it was the real thing, and that you cared, you really cared. Yes, you cared; you had cared all the time, and I had never known it!"

He stood over her, absolutely radiant: no one had ever seen Pip like this before. Then he dropped down on to the grass beside the girl, and put his arm inside hers.

"You do care, don't you, Elsie?" he said.

Elsie turned and looked him full in the face, without a trace of affectation or fear.

"Yes, Pip, I do," she answered.

It was long after six when they emerged from their retreat. The clouds were drifting up once more from the southwest, and everything promised a wet night. There was little wind, but already rain-drops were beginning to fall, unsteadily and fitfully. Presently this period of indecision ceased, and the rain came down in earnest. The two paused, and Pip surveyed Elsie's thin blouse disapprovingly.

"Isn't there some place where we can shelter?" said Elsie.

"There's a sort of tin place over there, but you would be soaked through before you got halfway to it. Besides, this rain means business; it'll go on all night now."

"Come along then," said Elsie; "we must hurry. I can change when we get home."

"Wait a minute," said Pip.

He began to divest himself of his tweed jacket.

"Put this on," he said.

"Nonsense, Pip; you'll get soaked."

Pip sighed, gently and patiently.

"Put it on," he repeated, holding it open for her.

Elsie glanced at him, and obeyed.

"You're an obstinate old pig, sometimes, Pip," she remarked.

And so they tramped home. They said little: there seemed to be nothing left in the world worth saying. Pip carried both sets of clubs under his left arm. Occasionally he sighed, long and gently, as one who has done his day's work and is at peace with all the world. Elsie marched beside him, with her arms buried to the elbows in the deep pockets of Pip's old jacket. (They were spacious pockets: one of them was sheltering two hands.) At intervals Elsie would look up at Pip, upon whose head and shoulders the rain was descending pitilessly. Once she said,—

"Pip, you're getting awfully wet."

Pip looked down upon her for a moment. Then he looked up again, and shook his glistening head defiantly at the weeping heavens.

"Who cares?" he roared.

THE END

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Transcriber's Notes:

Throughout this book are "misspelled" words in dialogues which are used to denote the sounds of words spoken by characters. Those "misspellings" are retained as in the original.

On page 4, "her pore head" was replaced with "her poor head".

On page 125, "êlite" was replaced with "élite".

On page 142, "was next the dormitory" was replaced with "was next to the dormitory".

On page 149, "coning up to" was replaced with "coming up to".

On page 201, "Squire's knee-pan" was replaced with "Squire's knee-pad".

On page 305, "tickling" was replaced with "trickling".

On the last page, "U. S. A" was replaced with "U. S. A."

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