

KALEIDOSCOPE TWO

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The Royal Game was translated from the German by B. W. Huebsch; the other stories were translated by Eden and Cedar Paul.

BUCHMENDEL

HAVING just got back to Vienna, after a visit to an out-of-the-way part of the country, I was walking home from the station when a heavy shower came on, such a deluge that the passers-by hastened to take shelter in doorways, and I myself felt it expedient to get out of the downpour. Luckily there is a cafe at almost every street corner in the metropolis, and I made for the nearest, though not before my hat was dripping wet and my shoulders were drenched to the skin. An old-fashioned suburban place, lacking the attractions (copied from Germany) of music and a dancing-floor to be found in the centre of the town; full of small shopkeepers and working folk who consumed more newspapers than coffee and rolls. Since it was already late in the evening, the air, which would have been stuffy anyhow, was thick with tobacco-smoke. Still, the place was clean and brightly decorated, had new satin-covered couches, and a shining cash-register, so that it looked thoroughly attractive. In my haste to get out of the rain I had not troubled to read its name - but what matter? There I rested, warm and comfortable, though looking rather impatiently through the blue-tinted window panes to see when the shower would be over, and I should be able to get on my way.

Thus I sat unoccupied, and began to succumb to that inertia which results from the narcotic atmosphere of the typical Viennese cafe. Out of this void, I scanned various individuals whose eyes, in the murky room, had a greyish look in the artificial light; I mechanically contemplated the young woman at the counter as, like an automaton, she dealt out sugar and a teaspoon to the waiter for each cup of coffee; with half an eye and a wandering attention I read the uninteresting advertisements on the walls - and there was something agreeable about these dull occupations. But suddenly, and in a peculiar fashion, I was aroused from what had become almost a doze. A vague internal movement had begun; much as a toothache sometimes begins, without one's being able to say whether it is on the right side or the left, in the upper jaw or the lower. All I became aware of was a numb tension, an obscure sentiment of spiritual unrest. Then, without knowing why, I grew fully conscious. I must have been in this cafe once before, years ago, and random associations had awakened memories of the walls, the tables, the chairs, the seemingly unfamiliar smoke-laden room.

The more I endeavoured to grasp this lost memory, the more obstinately did it elude me; a sort of jellyfish glistening in the abysses of consciousness, slippery and unseizable. Vainly did I scrutinize every object within the range of vision. Certainly when I had been here before the counter had had neither marble top nor cash register; the walls had not been panelled with imitation rosewood; these must be recent acquisitions. Yet I had indubitably been here, more than twenty years back. Within these four walls, as firmly fixed as a nail driven up to the head in a tree, there slung a part of my ego, long since overgrown. Vainly I explored, not only the room, but my own inner man, to grapple the lost links. Curse it all, I could not plumb the depths!

It will be seen that I was becoming vexed, as one is always out of humour when one's grip slips in this way, and reveals the inadequacy, the imperfections, of one's spiritual powers. Yet I still hoped to recover the clue. A slender thread would suffice, for my memory is of a peculiar type, both good and bad; on the one hand stubbornly untrustworthy, and on the other incredibly dependable. It swallows the most important details, whether in concrete happenings or in faces, and no voluntary exertion will induce it to regurgitate them from the gulf. Yet the most trifling indication - a picture postcard, the address on an envelope, a newspaper cutting - will suffice to hook up what is wanted as an angler who has made a strike and successfully imbedded his hook reels in a lively, struggling, and reluctant fish. Then I can recall the features of a man seen once only, the shape of his mouth and the gap to the left where he had an upper eye-tooth knocked out, the falsetto tone of his laugh, and the twitching of the moustache when he chooses to be merry, the entire change of expression which hilarity effects in him. Not only do these physical traits rise before my mind's eye, but I remember, years afterwards, every word the man said to me, and the tenor of my replies. But if I am to see and feel the past thus vividly, there must be some material link to start the current of associations. My memory will not work satisfactorily on the abstract plane.

I closed my eyes to think more strenuously, in the attempt to forge the hook which would catch my fish. In vain! In vain! There was no hook, or the fish would not bite. So fierce waxed my irritation with the inefficient and mulish thinking apparatus between my temples that I could have struck myself a violent blow on the forehead, much as an irascible man will shake and kick a penny-in-the-slot machine which when he has inserted his coin, refuses to render him his due.

So exasperated did I become at my failure, that I could no longer sit quiet, but rose to prowling about the room. The instant I moved, the glow of awakening memory began. To the right of the cash-register, I recalled, there must be a doorway leading into a windowless room, where the only light was artificial. Yes, the place actually existed. The decorative scheme was different, but the proportions were unchanged. A square box of a place, behind the bar - the card room. My nerves thrilled as I contemplated the furniture, for I was on the track, I had found the clue, and soon I should know all. There were two small billiard-tables, looking like silent ponds covered with green scum. In the corners, card-tables, at one of which two bearded men of professorial type were playing chess. Beside the iron stove, close to a door labelled "Telephone," was another small table. In a flash, I had it! That was Mendel's place, Jacob Mendel's. That was where Mendel used to hang out, Buchmendel. I was in the Cafe Gluck! How could I have forgotten Jacob Mendel. Was it possible that I had not thought about him for ages, a man so peculiar as well nigh to belong to the Land of Fable, the eighth wonder of the world, famous at the university and among a narrow circle of admirers, magician of book-fanciers, who had been wont to sit there from morning till night, an emblem of bookish lore, the glory of the Cafe Gluck? Why had I had so much difficulty in hooking my fish? How could I have forgotten Buchmendel?

I allowed my imagination to work. The man's face and form pictured themselves vividly before me. I saw him as he had been in the flesh, seated at the table with its grey marble top, on which books and manuscripts were piled. Motionless he sat, his spectacled eyes fixed upon the printed page. Yet not altogether motionless, for he had a habit (acquired at school in the Jewish quarter

of the Galician town from which he came) of rocking his shiny bald pate backwards and forwards and humming to himself as he read, There he studied catalogues and tomes, crooning and rocking, as Jewish boys are taught to do when reading the Talmud. The rabbis believe that, just as a child is rocked to sleep in its cradle, so are the pious ideas of the holy text better instilled by this rhythmical and hypnotizing movement of head and body. In fact, as if he had been in a trance, Jacob Mendel saw and heard nothing while thus occupied. He was oblivious to the click of billiard-balls, the coming and going of waiters, the ringing of the telephone bell; he paid no heed when the floor was scrubbed and when the stove was refilled. Once a red-hot coal fell out of the latter, and the flooring began to blaze a few inches from Mendel's feet; the room was full of smoke, and one of the guests ran for a pail of water to extinguish the fire. But neither the smoke, the bustle, nor the stench diverted his attention from the volume before him. He read as others pray, as gamblers follow the spinning of the roulette board, as drunkards stare into vacancy; he read with such profound absorption that ever since I first watched him the reading of ordinary mortals has seemed a pastime. This Galician second-hand book dealer, Jacob Mendel, was the first to reveal to me in my youth the mystery of absolute concentration which characterizes the artist and the scholar, the sage and the imbecile; the first to make me acquainted with the tragical happiness and unhappiness of complete absorption.

A senior student introduced me to him. I was studying the life and doings of a man who is even to-day too little known, Mesmer the magnetizer. My researches were bearing scant fruit, for the books I could lay my hands on conveyed sparse information, and when I applied to the university librarian for help he told me, uncivilly, that it was not his business to hunt up references for a freshman. Then my college friend suggested taking me to Mendel.

"He knows everything about books, and will tell you where to find the information you want. The ablest man in Vienna, and an original to boot. The man is a saurian of the book-world, an antediluvian survivor of an extinct species."

We went, therefore, to the Cafe Gluck, and found Buchmendel in his usual place, bespectacled, bearded, wearing a rusty black suit, and rocking as I have described. He did not notice our intrusion, but went on reading, looking like a nodding mandarin. On a hook behind him hung his ragged black overcoat, the pockets of which bulged with manuscripts, catalogues, and books. My friend coughed loudly, to attract his attention, but Mendel ignored the sign. At length Schmidt rapped on the table-top, as if knocking at a door, and at this Mendel glanced up, mechanically pushed his spectacles on to his forehead, and from beneath his thick and untidy ashen-grey brows there glared at us two dark, alert little eyes. My friend introduced me, and I explained my quandary, being careful (as Schmidt had advised) to express great annoyance at the librarian's unwillingness to assist me. Mendel leaned back, laughed scornfully, and answered with a strong Galician accent:

"Unwillingness, you think? Incompetence, that's what's the matter with him. He's a jackass. I've known him (for my sins) twenty years at least, and he's learned nothing in the whole of that time. Pocket their wages that's all such fellows can do. They should be mending the road, instead of sitting over books."

This outburst served to break the ice, and with a friendly wave of the hand the bookworm invited me to sit down at his table. I reiterated my object in consulting him; to get a list of all the early works on animal magnetism, and of contemporary and subsequent books and pamphlets for and against Mesmer. When I had said my say, Mendel closed his left eye for an instant, as if excluding a grain of dust. This was, with him, a sign of concentrated attention. Then, as though reading from an invisible catalogue, he reeled out the names of two or three dozen titles, giving in each case place and date of publication and approximate price. I was amazed, though Schmidt had warned me what to expect. His vanity was tickled by my surprise, for he went on to strum the keyboard of his marvellous memory, and to produce the most astounding bibliographical marginal notes. Did I want to know about sleepwalkers, Perkins's metallic tractors, early experiments in hypnotism, Braid, Gassner, attempts to conjure up the devil, Christian Science, theosophy, Madame Blavatsky? In connexion with each item there was a hailstorm of book-names, dates and appropriate details. I was beginning to understand that Jacob Mendel was a living lexicon, something like the general catalogue of the British Museum Reading Room, but able to walk about on two legs. I stared dumbfounded at this bibliographical phenomenon, which masqueraded in the sordid and rather unclean domino of a Galician second-hand book dealer, who after rattling off some eighty titles (with assumed indifference but really with the satisfaction of one who plays an unexpected trump), proceeded to wipe his spectacles with a handkerchief which might long before have been white.

Hoping to conceal my astonishment, I inquired:

"Which among these works do you think you could get for me without too much trouble?"

"Oh, I'll have a look round," he answered. "Come here to-morrow and I shall certainly have some of them. As for the others, it's only a question of time, and of knowing where to look."

"I'm greatly obliged to you," I said; and, then, wishing to be civil, I put my foot in it, proposing to give him a list of the books I wanted. Schmidt nudged me warningly, but too late. Mendel had already flashed a look at me - such a look, at once triumphant and affronted, scornful and overwhelmingly superior - the royal look with which Macbeth answers Macduff when summoned to yield without a blow. He laughed curtly. His Adam's apple moved excitedly. Obviously he had gulped down a choleric, an insulting epithet.

Indeed he had good reason to be angry. Only a stranger, an ignoramus, could have proposed to give him, Jacob Mendel, a memorandum, as if he had been a bookseller's assistant or an underling in a public library. Not until I knew him better did I fully understand how much my would-be politeness must have galled this aberrant genius - for the man had and knew himself to have, a titanic memory wherein, behind a dirty and undistinguished-looking forehead, was indelibly recorded a picture of the title-page of every book that had been printed. No matter whether it had issued from the press yesterday or hundreds of years ago, he knew its place of publication, its author's name and its price. From his mind, as if from the printed page, he could read off the contents, could reproduce the illustrations; could visualize, not only what he had actually held in his hands, but also what he had glanced at in a bookseller's window; could see it

with the same vividness as an artist sees the creations of fancy which he has not yet reproduced upon canvas. When a book was offered for six marks by a Regensburg dealer, he could remember that, two years before, a copy of the same work had changed hands for four crowns at a Viennese auction and he recalled the name of the purchaser. In a word: Jacob Mendel never forgot a title or a figure; he knew every plant, every infusorian, every star, in the continually revolving and incessantly changing cosmos of the book-universe. In each literary speciality, he knew more than the specialists; he knew the contents of the libraries better than the librarians; he knew the book-lists of most publishers better than the heads of the firms concerned - though he had nothing to guide him except the magical powers of his inexplicable but invariably accurate memory.

True this memory owed its infallibility to the man's limitations, to his extraordinary power of concentration. Apart from books, he knew nothing of the world. The phenomena of existence did not begin to become real for him until they had been set in type, arranged upon a composing stick, collected and, so to say, sterilized in a book. Nor did he read books for their meaning, to extract their spiritual or narrative substance. What aroused his passionate interest, what fixed his attention, was the name, the price, the format, the title-page. Though in the last analysis unproductive and uncreative, this specifically antiquarian memory of Jacob Mendel, since it was not a printed book-catalogue but was stamped upon the grey matter of a mammalian brain, was, in its unique perfection, no less remarkable a phenomenon than Napoleon's gift for physiognomy, Mezzofanti's talent for languages, Lasker's skill at chess-openings, Busoni's musical genius. Given a public position as teacher, this man with so marvellous a brain might have taught thousands and hundreds of thousands of students, have trained others to become men of great learning and of incalculable value to those communal treasure-houses we call libraries. But to him, a man of no account, a Galician Jew, a book-peddler whose only training had been received in a Talmudic school, this upper world of culture was a fenced precinct he could never enter; and his amazing faculties could only find application at the marble-topped table in the inner room of the Cafe Gluck. When, some day, there arises a great psychologist who shall classify the types of that magical power we term memory as effectively as Buffon classified the genera and species of animals, a man competent to give a detailed description of all the varieties, he will have to find a pigeon-hole for Jacob Mendel, forgotten master of the lore of book-prices and book-titles, the ambulatory catalogue alike of incunabula and the modern commonplace.

In the book-trade and among ordinary persons, Jacob Mendel was regarded as nothing more than a secondhand book dealer in a small way of business. Sunday after Sunday, his stereotyped advertisement appeared in the "Neue Freie Presse" and the "Neues Wiener Tagblatt." It ran as follows: "Best prices paid for old books, Mendel, Obere Alserstrasse." A telephone number followed, really that of the Cafe Gluck. He rummaged every available corner for his wares, and once a week, with the aid of a bearded porter, conveyed fresh booty to his headquarters, and got rid of old stock - for he had no proper bookshop. Thus he remained a petty trader, and his business was not lucrative. Students sold him their textbooks, which year by year passed through his hands from one "generation" to another; and for a small percentage on the price he would procure any additional book that was wanted. He charged little or nothing for advice. Money seemed to have no standing in his world. No one had ever seen him better dressed than in the threadbare black coat. For breakfast and supper he had a glass of milk and a couple of rolls,

while at midday a modest meal was brought him from a neighbouring restaurant. He did not smoke; he did not play cards; one might almost say he did not live, were it not that his eyes were alive behind his spectacles, and unceasingly fed his enigmatic brain with words, titles, names. The brain, like a fertile pasture, greedily sucked in this abundant irrigation. Human beings did not interest him, and of all human passions perhaps one only moved him, the most universal - vanity.

When someone, wearied by a futile hunt in countless other places, applied to him for information, and was instantly put on the track, his self-gratification was overwhelming; and it was unquestionably a delight to him that in Vienna and elsewhere there existed a few dozen persons who respected him for his knowledge and valued him for the services he could render. In every one of these monstrous aggregates we call towns, there are here and there facets which reflect one and the same universe in miniature - unseen by most, but highly prized by connoisseurs, by brethren of the same craft, by devotees of the same passion. The fans of the book-market knew Jacob Mendel. Just as anyone encountering a difficulty in deciphering a score would apply to Eusebius Mandyczewski of the Musical Society, who would be found wearing a grey skull-cap and seated among multifarious musical MSS., ready, with a friendly smile, to solve the most obstinate crux; and just as, to-day, anyone in search of information about the Viennese theatrical and cultural life of earlier times will unhesitatingly look up the polyhistor Father Glossy; so, with equal confidence did the bibliophiles of Vienna, when they had a particularly hard nut to crack, make a pilgrimage to the Cafe Gluck and lay their difficulty before Jacob Mendel.

To me, young and eager for new experiences, it became enthralling to watch such a consultation. Whereas ordinarily, when a would-be seller brought him some ordinary book, he would contemptuously clap the cover to and mutter, "Two crowns"; if shown a rare or unique volume, he would sit up and take notice, lay the treasure upon a clean sheet of paper; and, on one such occasion, he was obviously ashamed of his dirty, ink-stained fingers and mourning finger-nails. Tenderly, cautiously, respectfully, he would turn the pages of the treasure. One would have been as loath to disturb him at such a moment as to break in upon the devotions of a man at prayer; and in very truth there was a flavour of solemn ritual and religious observance about the way in which contemplation, palpation, smelling, and weighing in the hand followed one another in orderly succession. His rounded hack waggled while he was thus engaged, he muttered to himself, exclaimed "Ah" now and again to express wonder or admiration, or "Oh, dear" when a page was missing or another had been mutilated by the larva of a book-beetle. His weighing of the tome in his hand was as circumspect as if books were sold by the ounce, and his snuffling at it as sentimental as a girl's smelling of a rose. Of course it would have been the height of bad form for the owner to show impatience during this ritual of examination.

When it was over, he willingly, nay enthusiastically, tendered all the information at his disposal, not forgetting relevant anecdotes, and dramatized accounts of the prices which other specimens of the same work had fetched at auctions or in sales by private treaty. He looked brighter, younger, more lively at such times, and only one thing could put him seriously out of humour. This was when a novice offered him money for his expert opinion. Then he would draw back with an affronted air, looking for all the world like the skilled custodian of a museum gallery to

whom an American traveller has offered a tip - for to Jacob Mendel contact with a rare book was something sacred, as is contact with a woman to a young man who has not had the bloom rubbed off. Such moments were his platonic love-nights. Books exerted a spell on him, never money. Vainly, therefore, did great collectors (among them one of the notables of Princeton University) try to recruit Mendel as librarian or book-buyer. The offer was declined with thanks. He could not forsake his familiar headquarters at the Cafe Gluck. Thirty-three years before, an awkward youngster with black down sprouting on his chin and black ringlets hanging over his temples, he had come from Galicia to Vienna, intending to adopt the calling of rabbi; but ere long he forsook the worship of the harsh and jealous Jehovah to devote himself to the more lively and polytheistic cult of books. Then he happened upon the Cafe Gluck, by degrees making it his workshop, headquarters, post-office - his world. Just as an astronomer, alone in an observatory, watches night after night through a telescope the myriads of stars, their mysterious movements, their changeful medley, their extinction and their flaming-up anew, so did Jacob Mendel, seated at his table in the Cafe Gluck, look through his spectacles into the universe of books, a universe that lies above the world of our everyday life, and, like the stellar universe, is full of changing cycles.

It need hardly be said that he was highly esteemed in the Cafe Gluck, whose fame seemed to us to depend far more upon his unofficial professorship than upon the godfatherhood of the famous musician, Christoph Willibald Gluck, composer of *Alcestis* and *Iphigenia*. He belonged to the outfit quite as much as did the old cherry wood counter, the two billiard-tables with their cloth stitched in many places, and the copper coffee-urn. His table was guarded as a sanctuary. His numerous clients and customers were expected to take a drink "for the good of the house," so that most of the profit of his far-flung knowledge flowed into the big leathern pouch slung round the waist of Deubler, the waiter. In return for being a centre of attraction, Mendel enjoyed many privileges. The telephone was at his service for nothing. He could have his letters directed to the cafe, and his parcels were taken in there. The excellent old woman who looked after the toilet brushed his coat, sewed on buttons, and carried a small bundle of underlinen every week to the wash. He was the only guest who could have a meal sent in from the restaurant; and every morning Herr Standhartner, the proprietor of the cafe, made a point of coming to his table and saying "Good morning!" - though Jacob Mendel, immersed in his books, seldom noticed the greeting. Punctually at half-past seven he arrived, and did not leave till the lights were extinguished. He never spoke to the other guests, never read a newspaper, noticed no changes; and once, when Herr Standhartner civilly asked him whether he did not find the electric light more agreeable to read by than the malodorous and uncertain kerosene lamps they had replaced, he stared in astonishment at the new incandescent bulbs. Although the installation had necessitated several days' hammering and bustle, the introduction of the glow-lamps had escaped his notice. Only through the two round apertures of the spectacles, only through these two shining and sucking lenses, did the millions of black infusorians which were the letters filter into his brain. Whatever else happened in his vicinity was disregarded as unmeaning noise. He had spent more than thirty years of his waking life at this table, reading, comparing, calculating, in a continuous waking dream, interrupted only by intervals of sleep.

A sense of horror overcame me when, looking into the inner room behind the bar of the Cafe Gluck, I saw that the marble-top of the table where Jacob Mendel used to deliver his oracles was

now as bare as a tombstone. Grown older since those days, I understood how much disappears when such a man drops out of his place in the world, were it only because, amid the daily increase in hopeless monotony, the unique grows continually more precious. Besides, in my callow youth a profound intuition had made me exceedingly fond of Buchmendel. It was through the observation of him that I had first become aware of the enigmatic fact that supreme achievement and outstanding capacity are only rendered possible by mental concentration, by a sublime monomania that verges on lunacy. Through the living example of this obscure genius of a second-hand book dealer, far more than through the flashes of insight in the works of our poets and other imaginative writers, had been made plain to me the persistent possibility of a pure life of the spirit, of complete absorption in an idea, an ecstasy as absolute as that of an Indian yogi or a medieval monk; and I had learned that this was possible in an electric-lighted cafe and adjoining a telephone box. Yet I had forgotten him, during the war years, and through a kindred immersion in my own work. The sight of the empty table made me ashamed of myself, and at the same time curious about the man who used to sit there.

What had become of him? I called the waiter and inquired.

"No, Sir," he answered, "I'm sorry, but I never heard of Herr Mendel. There is no one of that name among the frequenters of the Cafe Gluck. Perhaps the head-waiter will know."

"Herr Mendel?" said the head-waiter dubiously, after a moment's reflection. "No, Sir, never heard of him. Unless you mean Herr Mandl, who has a hardware store in the Florianigasse?"

I had a bitter taste in the mouth, the taste of an irrecoverable past. What is the use of living, when the wind obliterates our footsteps in the sand directly we have gone by? Thirty years, perhaps forty, a man had breathed, read, thought, and spoken within this narrow room; three or four years had elapsed, and there had arisen a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. No one in the Cafe Gluck had ever heard of Jacob Mendel, of Buchmendel. Somewhat pettishly I asked the headwaiter whether I could have a word with Herr Standhartner, or with one of the old Staff.

"Herr Standhartner, who used to own the place? He sold it years ago, and has died since. . . . The former head-waiter? He saved up enough to retire, and lives upon a little property at Krems. No, Sir, all of the old lot are scattered. All except one, indeed, Frau Sporschil, who looks after the toilet. She's been worked under the late owner, I know. likely to remember your Herr Mendel. hardly know one guest from another."

I dissented in thought.

"One does not forget a Jacob Mendel so easily!"

What I said was:

"Still, I should like to have a word with Frau Sporschil, if she has a moment to spare."

The "Toilettenfrau" (known in the Viennese vernacular as the "Schocoladefrau") soon emerged from the basement, white-haired, run to seed, heavy-footed wiping her chapped hands upon a towel as she came. She had been called away from her task of cleaning up, and was obviously uneasy at being summoned into the strong light of the guest-rooms - for common folk in Vienna, where an authoritative tradition has lingered on after the revolution, always think it must be a police matter when their "superiors" want to question them. She eyed me suspiciously, though humbly. But as soon as I asked her about Jacob Mendel, she braced up, and at the same time her eyes filled with tears.

"Poor Herr Mendel ... so there's still someone who bears him in mind?"

Old people are commonly much moved by anything which recalls the days of their youth and revives the memory of past companionships. I asked if he was still alive.

"Good Lord, no. Poor Herr Mendel must have died five or six years ago. Indeed, I think it's fully seven since he passed away. Dear, good man that he was; and how long I knew him, more than twenty-five years; he was already sitting every day at his table when I began to work here. It was a shame, it was the way they let him die."

Growing more and more excited, she asked if I was a relative. Didn't I know what had happened to him?

"No," I replied, "and I want you to be good enough to tell me all about it."

She looked at me timidly, and continued to wipe her damp hands. It was plain to me that she found it embarrassing, with her dirty apron and her tousled white hair, to be standing in the full glare of the cafe. She kept looking round anxiously, to see if one of the waiters might be listening.

"Let's go into the card-room," I said, "Mendel's old room. You shall tell me your story there."

She nodded appreciatively, thankful that I understood and led the way to the inner room, a little shambling in her gait. As I followed, I noticed that the waiters and the guests were staring at us as a strangely assorted pair. We sat down opposite one another at the marble topped table, and there she told me the story of Jacob Mendel's ruin and death. I will give the tale as nearly as may be in her own words, supplemented here and there by what I learned afterwards from other sources.

"Down to the outbreak of war, and after the war had begun, he continued to come here every morning at half past seven, to sit at this table and study all day just as before. We had the feeling that the fact of a war going on had never entered his mind. Certainly didn't read the newspapers, and didn't talk to anyone except about books. He paid no attention when (in the early days of the war, before the authorities put a stop to such things) the newspaper-vendors ran through the streets shouting, 'Great Battle on the Eastern Front' (or wherever it might be), 'Horrible Slaughter,' and so on; when people gathered in knots to talk things over, he kept himself to

himself; he did not know that Fritz, the billiard-marker, who fell in one of the first battles, had vanished from this place; he did not know that Herr Standhartner's son had been taken prisoner by the Russians at Przemysl; never said a word when the bread grew more and more uneatable and when he was given bean-coffee to drink at breakfast and supper instead of hot milk. Once only did he express surprise at the changes, wondering why so few students came to the cafe. There was nothing in the world that mattered to him except his books.

"Then disaster befell him. At eleven one morning, two policemen came, one in uniform, and the other a plainclothes man. The latter showed the red rosette under the lapel of his coat and asked whether there was a man named Jacob Mendel in the house. They went straight to Herr Mendel's table. The poor man, in his innocence, supposed they had books to sell, or wanted some information; but they told him he was under arrest, and took him away at once. It was a scandal for the cafe. All the guests flocked round Herr Mendel, as he stood between the two police officers, his spectacles pushed up under his hair, staring from each to the other bewildered. Some ventured a protest, saying there must be a mistake - that Herr Mendel was a man who wouldn't hurt a fly; but the detective was furious, and told them to mind their own business. They took him away, and none of us at the Cafe Gluck saw him again for two years. I never found out what they had against him, but I would take my dying oath that they must have made a mistake. Herr Mendel could never have done anything wrong. It was a crime to treat an innocent man so harshly."

The excellent Frau Sporschil was right. Our friend Jacob Mendel had done nothing wrong. He had merely (as I subsequently learned) done something incredibly stupid, only explicable to those who knew the man's peculiarities. The military censorship board, whose function it was to supervise correspondence passing into and out of neutral lands, one day got its clutches upon a postcard written and signed by a certain Jacob Mendel, properly stamped for transmission abroad. This post-card was addressed to Monsieur Jean Labourdaire, Librairie, Quai de Grenelle, Paris - to an enemy country, therefore. The winter complained that the last eight issues of the monthly "Bulletin bibliographique de la France" had failed to reach him, although his annual subscription had been duly paid in advance. The jack-in-office who read this missive (a high-school teacher with a bent for the study of the Romance languages, called up for "war-service" and sent to employ his talents at the censorship board instead of wasting them in the trenches) was astonished by its tenor. "Must be a joke," he thought. He had to examine some two thousand letters and postcards every week, always on the alert to detect anything that might savour of espionage, but never yet had he chanced upon anything so absurd as that an Austrian subject should unconcernedly drop into one of the imperial and royal letter-boxes a postcard addressed to someone in an enemy land, regardless of the trifling detail that since August 1914 the Central Powers had been cut off from Russia on one side and from France on the other by barbed-wire entanglements and a network of ditches in which men armed with rifles and bayonets, machine-guns and artillery, were doing their utmost to exterminate one another like rats. Our schoolmaster enrolled in the Landsturm did not treat this first postcard seriously, but pigeon-holed it as a curiosity not worth talking about to his chief. But a few weeks later there turned up another card, again from Jacob Mendel, this time to John Aldridge, Bookseller, Golden Square, London, asking whether the addressee could send the last few numbers of the "Antiquarian" to an address in Vienna which was clearly stated on the card,

The censor in the blue uniform began to feel uneasy. Was his "class" trying to trick the schoolmaster? Were the cards written in cipher? Possible, anyhow; so the subordinate went over to the major's desk, clicked his heels together, saluted, and laid the suspicious documents before "properly constituted authority." A strange business, certainly. The police were instructed by telephone to see if there actually was a Jacob Mendel at the specified address, and, if so, to bring the fellow along. Within the hour, Mendel had been arrested, and (still stupefied by the shock) brought before the major, who showed him the postcards, and asked him with drill sergeant roughness whether he acknowledged their authorship. Angered at being spoken to so sharply, and still more annoyed because his perusal of an important catalogue had been interrupted, Mendel answered tartly:

"Of course I wrote the cards. That's my handwriting and signature. Surely one has a right to claim the delivery of a periodical to which one has subscribed?"

The major swung half-round in his swivel-chair and exchanged a meaning glance with the lieutenant seated at the adjoining desk.

"The man must be a double-distilled idiot," was what they mutely conveyed to one another.

Then the chief took counsel within himself whether he should discharge the offender with a caution, or whether he should treat the case more seriously. In all offices, when such doubts arise, the usual practice is, not to spin a coin, but to send in a report. Thus Pilate washes his hands of responsibility. Even if the report does no good, it can do no harm, and is merely one useless manuscript or typescript added to a million others.

In this instance, however, the decision to send in a report did much harm, alas, to an inoffensive man of genius, for it involved asking a series of questions, and the third of them brought suspicious circumstances to light.

"Your full name?"

"Jacob Mendel."

"Occupation?"

"Book-pedlar" (for, as already explained, Mendel had no shop, but only a pedlar's licence).

"Place of birth?"

Now came the disaster. Mendel's birthplace was not far from Petrikau. The major raised his eyebrows. Petrikau, or Piotrkov, was across the frontier, in Russian Poland.

"You were born a Russian subject. When did you acquire Austrian nationality? Show me your papers."

Mendel gazed at the officer uncomprehendingly through his spectacles.

"Papers? Identification papers? I have nothing but my hawker's licence."

"What's' your nationality, then? Was your father Austrian or Russian?"

Undismayed, Mendel answered:

"A Russian, of course."

"What about yourself?"

"Wishing to evade Russian military service, I slipped across the frontier thirty-three years ago, and ever since I have lived in Vienna."

The matter seemed to the major to be growing worse and worse.

"But didn't you take steps to become an Austrian subject?"

"Why should I?" countered Mendel. "I never troubled my head about such things."

"Then you are still a Russian subject?"

Mendel, who was bored by this endless questioning, answered simply:

"Yes, I suppose I am."

The startled and indignant major threw himself back in his chair with such violence that the wood cracked protestingly. So this was what it had come to! In Vienna, the Austrian capital, at the end of 1915, after Tarnow, when the war was in full blast, after the great offensive, a Russian could walk about unmolested, could write letters to France and England, while the police ignored his machinations. And then the fools who wrote in the newspapers wondered why Conrad von Hotzendorf had not advanced in seven-leagued boots to Warsaw, and the general staff was puzzled because every movement of the troops was immediately blabbed to the Russians.

The lieutenant had sprung to his feet and crossed the room to his chief's table. What had been an almost friendly conversation took a new turn, and degenerated into a trial.

"Why didn't you report as an enemy alien directly the war began?"

Mendel, still failing to realize the gravity of his position, answered in his singing Jewish jargon:

"Why should I report? I don't understand."

The major regarded this inquiry as a challenge, and asked threateningly:

"Didn't you read the notices that were posted up everywhere?"

"No."

"Didn't you read the newspapers?"

"No."

The two officers stared at Jacob Mendel (now sweating with uneasiness) as if the moon had fallen from the sky into their office. Then the telephone buzzed, the typewriters clacked, orderlies ran hither and thither, and Mendel was sent under guard to the nearest barracks, where he was to await transfer to a concentration camp. When he was ordered to follow the two soldiers, he was frankly puzzled, but not seriously perturbed. What could the man with the gold-lace collar and the rough voice have against him? In the upper world of books, where Mendel lived and breathed and his being, there was no warfare, there were no misunderstandings, only an ever-increasing knowledge of words and figures, of book-titles and authors' names. He walked good-humouredly enough downstairs between the soldiers, whose first charge was to take him to the police station. Not until, there, the books were taken out of his overcoat pockets, and the police impounded the portfolio containing a hundred important memoranda and customers' addresses, did he lose his temper, and begin to resist and strike blows. They had to tie his hands. In the struggle, his spectacles fell off, and those magical telescopes, without which he could not see into the wonder world of books, were smashed into a thousand pieces. Two days later, insufficiently clad (for his only wrap was a light summer cloak), he was sent to the internment camp for Russian civilians at Komorn.

I have no information as to what Jacob Mendel suffered during these two years of internment, cut off from his beloved books, penniless, among roughly nurtured men, few of whom could read or write, in a huge human dunghill. This must be left to the imagination of those who can grasp the torments of a caged eagle. By degrees, however, our world, grown sober after its fit of drunkenness, has become aware that, of all the cruelties and wanton abuses of power during the war, the most needless and therefore the most inexcusable was this herding together behind barbed-wire fences of thousands upon thousands of persons who had outgrown the age of military service, who had made homes for themselves in a foreign land, and who (believing in the good faith of their hosts) had refrained from exercising the sacred right of hospitality granted even by the Tunguses and Araucanians - the right to flee while time permits. This crime against civilization was committed with the same unthinking hardihood in France, Germany, and Britain, in every belligerent country of our crazy Europe.

Probably Jacob Mendel would, like thousands as innocent as he, have perished in this cattle-pen, have gone stark mad, have succumbed to dysentery, asthenia, softening of the brain, had it not been that, before the worst happened, a chance (typically Austrian) recalled him to the world in which a spiritual life became again possible. Several times after his disappearance, letters from distinguished customers were delivered for him at the Cafe Gluck. Count Schonberg, sometime

lord lieutenant of Styria, an enthusiastic collector of works on heraldry; Siegenfeld, the former dean of the theological faculty, who was writing a commentary on the works of St. Augustine; Edler von Pisek, an octogenarian admiral on the retired list, engaged in writing his memoirs - these and other persons of note, wanting information from Buchmendel, had repeatedly addressed communications to him at his familiar haunt, and some of these were duly forwarded to the concentration camp at Komorn. There they fell into the hands of the commanding officer, who happened to be a man of humane disposition, and was astonished to find what notables were among the correspondents of this dirty little Russian Jew, who, half-blind now that his spectacles were broken and he had no money to buy new ones, crouched in a corner like a mole, grey, eyeless, and dumb. A man who had such patrons must be a person of importance, whatever he looked like. The C.O. therefore read the letters to the short-sighted Mendel, and penned answers for him to sign - answers which were mainly requests that influence should be exercised on his behalf. The spell worked, for these correspondents had the solidarity of collectors. Joining forces and pulling strings they were able (giving guarantees for the "enemy alien's" good behaviour) to secure leave for Buchmendel's return to Vienna in 1917, after more than two years at Komorn - on the condition that he should report daily to the police. The proviso mattered little. He was a free man once more, free to take up his quarters in his old attic, free to handle books again, free (above all) to return to his table in the Cafe Gluck. I can describe the return from the underworld of the camp in the good Frau Sporschil's own words:

"One day - Jesus, Mary, Joseph; I could hardly believe my eyes - the door opened (you remember the way he had) little wider than a crack, and through this opening he sidled, poor Herr Mendel. He was wearing a tattered and much-darned military cloak, and his head was covered by what had perhaps once been a hat thrown away by the owner as past use. No collar. His face looked like a death's head, so haggard it was, and his hair was pitifully thin. But he came in as if nothing had happened, went straight to his table, and took off his cloak, not briskly as of old, for he panted with the exertion. Nor had he any books with him. He just sat there without a word, staring straight in front of him with hollow, expressionless eyes. Only by degrees, after we had brought him the big bundle of printed matter which had arrived for him from Germany, did he begin to read again: But he was never the same man."

No, he was never the same man, not now the *miraculum mundi*, the magical walking book-catalogue. All who saw him in those days told me the same pitiful story. Something had gone irrecoverably wrong; he was broken; the blood-red comet of the war had burst into the remote, calm atmosphere of his bookish world. His eyes, accustomed for decades to look at nothing but print, must have seen terrible sights in the wire-fenced human stockyard, for the eyes that had formerly been so alert and full of ironical gleams were now almost completely veiled by the inert lids, and looked sleepy and red-bordered behind the carefully repaired spectacle-frames. Worse still, a cog must have broken somewhere in the marvellous machinery of his memory, so that the working of the whole was impaired; for so delicate is the structure of the brain (a sort of switchboard made of the most fragile substances, and as easily jarred as are all instruments of precision) that a blocked arteriole, a congested bundle of nerve-fibres, a fatigued group of cells, even a displaced molecule, may put the apparatus out of gear and make harmonious working impossible. In Mendel's memory, the keyboard of knowledge, the keys were stiff, or - to use psychological terminology - the associations were impaired. When, now and again, someone

came to ask for information, Jacob stared blankly at the inquirer, failing to understand the question, and even forgetting it before he had found the answer. Mendel was no longer Buchmendel, just as the world was no longer the world. He could not now become wholly absorbed in his reading, did not rock as of old when he read, but sat bolt upright, his glasses turned mechanically towards the printed page, but perhaps not reading at all, and only sunk in a reverie. Often, said Frau Sporschil, his head would drop on to his book and he would fall asleep in the daytime, or he would gaze hour after hour at the stinking acetylene lamp which (in the days of the coal famine) had replaced the electric lighting. No, Mendel was no longer Buchmendel, no longer the eighth wonder of the world, but a weary, worn-out, though still breathing, useless bundle of beard and ragged garments, which sat, as futile as a potato-bogle, where of old the Pythian oracle had sat; no longer the glory of the Cafe Gluck, but a shameful scarecrow, evil-smelling, a parasite.

That was the impression he produced upon the new proprietor, Florian Gurtner from Retz, who (a successful profiteer in flour and butter) had cajoled Standhartner into selling him the Cafe Gluck for eighty thousand rapidly depreciating paper crowns. He took everything into his hard peasant grip, hastily arranged to have the old place redecorated, bought fine-looking satin-covered seats, installed a marble porch, and was in negotiation with his next-door neighbour to buy a place where he could extend the cafe into a dancing-hall. Naturally while he was making these embellishments, he was not best pleased by the parasitic encumbrance of Jacob Mendel, a filthy old Galician Jew, who had been in trouble with the authorities during the war, was still to be regarded as an "enemy alien," and, while occupying a table from morning till night, consumed no more than two cups of coffee and four or five rolls. Standhartner, indeed, had put in a word for this guest of long standing, had explained that Mendel was a person of note, and, in the stock-taking, had handed him over as having a permanent lien upon the establishment, but as an asset rather than a liability. Florian Gurtner, however, had brought into the cafe, not only new furniture, and an up-to-date cash register, but also the profit-making and hard temper of the post-war era, and awaited the first pretext for ejecting from his smart coffee-house the last troublesome vestige of suburban shabbiness.

A good excuse was not slow to present itself. Jacob Mendel was impoverished to the last degree. Such banknotes as had been left to him had crumbled away to nothing during the inflation period; his regular clientele had been killed, ruined, or dispersed. When he tried to resume his early trade of book-pedlar, calling from door to door to buy and to sell, he found that he lacked strength to carry books up and down stairs. A hundred little signs showed him to be a pauper. Seldom, now, did he have a midday meal sent in from the restaurant, and he began to run up a score at the Cafe Gluck for his modest breakfast and supper. Once his payments were as much as three weeks overdue. Were it only for this reason, the head-waiter wanted Gurtner to "give Mendel the sack." But Frau Sporschil intervened, and stood surety for the debtor. What was due could be stopped out of her wages!

This staved off disaster for a while, but worse was to come. For some time the head-waiter had noticed that rolls were disappearing faster than the tally would account for. Naturally suspicion fell upon Mendel, who was known to be six months in debt to the tottering old porter whose services he still needed. The head-waiter, hidden behind the stove, was able, two days later, to

catch Mendel red-handed. The unwelcome guest had stolen from his seat in the card-room, crept behind the counter in the front room, taken two rolls from the bread basket, returned to the card-room, and hungrily devoured them. When settling-up at the end of the day, he said he had only had coffee; no rolls. The source of wastage had been traced, and the waiter reported his discovery to the proprietor. Herr Gurtner, delighted to have so good an excuse for getting rid of Mendel, made a scene, openly accused him of theft, and declared that nothing but the goodness of his own heart prevented his sending for the police.

"But after this," said Florian, "you'll kindly take yourself off for good and all. We don't want to see your face again at the Cafe Gluck."

Jacob Mendel trembled, but made no reply. Abandoning his poor belongings, he departed without a word.

"It was ghastly," said Frau Sporschil. "Never shall I forget the sight. He stood up, his spectacles pushed on to his forehead, and his face white as a sheet. He did not even stop to put on his cloak, although it was January, and very cold. You'll remember that severe winter, just after the war. In his fright, he left the book he was reading open upon the table. I did not notice it at first, and then, when I wanted to pick it up and take it after him, he had already stumbled out through the doorway. I was afraid to follow him into the street, for Herr Gurtner was standing at the door and shouting at him, so that a crowd had gathered. Yet I felt ashamed to the depths of my soul. Such a thing would never have happened under the old master. Herr Standhartner would not have driven Herr Mendel away for pinching one or two rolls when he was hungry, but would have let him have as many as he wanted for nothing, to the end of his days. Since the war, people seem to have grown heartless. Drive away a man who had been a guest daily for so many, many years. Shameful! I should not like to have to answer before God for such cruelty!"

The good woman had grown excited, and, with the passionate garrulousness of old age, she kept on repeating how shameful it was, and that nothing of the sort would have happened if Herr Standhartner had not sold the business. In the end I tried to stop the flow by asking her what had happened to Mendel, and whether she had ever seen him again. These questions excited her yet more.

"Day after day, when I passed his table, it gave me the creeps, as you will easily understand. Each time I thought to myself: 'Where can he have got to, poor Herr Mendel?' Had I known where he lived, I would have called and taken him something nice and hot to eat - for where could he get the money to cook food and warm his room? As far as I knew, he had no kinsfolk in the wide world. When, after a long time, I had heard nothing about him, I began to believe that it must be all up with him, and that I should never see him again. I had made up my mind to have a mass said for the peace of his soul, knowing him to be a good man, after twenty-five years' acquaintance.

"At length one day in February, at half-past seven in the morning, when I was cleaning the windows, the door opened, and in came Herr Mendel. Generally, as you know, he sidled in, looking confused, and not 'quite all there'; but this time, somehow, it was different. I noticed at

once the strange look in his eyes; they were sparkling, and he rolled them this way and that, as if to see everything at once; as for his appearance, he seemed nothing but beard and skin and bone. Instantly it crossed my mind: 'He's forgotten all that happened last time he was here; it's his way to go about like a sleepwalker noticing nothing; he doesn't remember about the rolls, and how shamefully Herr Gurtner ordered him out of the place, half in mind to set the police on him.' Thank goodness, Herr Gurtner hadn't come yet, and the head-waiter was drinking coffee. I ran up to Herr Mendel, meaning to tell him he'd better make himself scarce, for otherwise that ruffian" [she looked round timidly to see if we were overheard, and hastily amended her phrase], "Herr Gurtner, I mean, would only have him thrown into the street once more. 'Herr Mendel,' I began. He started, and looked at me. In that very moment (it was dreadful), he must have remembered the whole thing, for he almost collapsed, and began to tremble, not his fingers only, but to shiver and shake from head to foot. Hastily he stepped back into the street, and fell in a heap on the pavement as soon as he was outside the door. We telephoned for the ambulance, and they carried him off to hospital, the nurse who came saying he had high fever directly she touched him. He died that evening. 'Double pneumonia,' the doctor said, and that he never recovered consciousness - could not have been fully conscious when he came to the Cafe Gluck. As I said, he had entered like a man walking in his sleep. The table where he had sat day after day for thirty-six years drew him back to it like a home."

Frau Sporschil and I went on talking about him for a long time, the two last persons to remember this strange creature, Buchmendel: I to whom in youth the book-pedlar from Galicia had given the first revelation of a life wholly devoted to the things of the spirit; she, the poor old woman who was caretaker of a cafe-toilet, who had never read a book in her life, and whose only tie with this strangely matched comrade in her subordinate, poverty-stricken world had been that for twenty-five years she had brushed his overcoat and had sewn on buttons for him. We, too, might have been considered strangely assorted, but Frau Sporschil and I got on very well together, linked, as we sat at the forsaken marble topped table, by our common memories of the shade our talk had conjured up - for joint memories, and above all loving memories, always establish a tie. Suddenly, while in the full stream of talk, she exclaimed:

"Lord Jesus, how forgetful I am. I still have the book he left on the table the evening Herr Gurtner gave him the key of the street. I didn't know where to take it. Afterwards, when no one appeared to claim it, I ventured to keep it as a souvenir. You don't think it wrong of me, Sir?"

She went to a locker where she stored some of the requisites for her job: and produced the volume for my inspection. I found it hard to repress a smile, for I was face to face with one of life's little ironies. It was the second volume of Hayn's *Bibliotheca Germanorum erotica et curiosa*, a compendium of gallant literature known to every book-collector. "Habent sua fata libelli!" This scabrous publication, as legacy of the vanished magician had fallen into toil worn hands which had perhaps never held any other printed work than a prayer-book. Maybe I was not wholly successful in controlling my mirth, for the expression on my race seemed to perplex the worthy soul, and once more she said:

"You don't think it wrong of me to keep it, Sir?"

I shook her cordially by the hand.

"Keep it, and welcome," I said. "I am absolutely sure that our old friend Mendel would be only too delighted to know that someone among the many thousands he has provided with books, cherishes his memory."

Then I took my departure, feeling a trifle ashamed when I compared myself with this excellent old woman, who, so simply and so humanely, had fostered the memory of the dead scholar. For she, uncultured though she was, had at least preserved a book as a memento; whereas I, a man of education and a writer, had completely forgotten Buchmendel for years - I, who at least should have known that one only makes books in order to keep in touch with one's fellows after one has ceased to breathe, and thus to defend oneself against the inexorable fate of all that lives - transitoriness and oblivion.

LEPORELLA

CRESCENTIA ANNA ALOISIA FINKENHUBER was thirty-nine years of age, and had been born (an illegitimate child) in a mountain hamlet not far from Innsbruck. Under the rubric "Special Peculiarities" in her identity paper as servant-maid was drawn a line signifying "none"; but if the officials who fill in such documents were obliged to enter characterological details, there would certainly have been written here: "Looks like an over-driven, bony, lean mountain nag." Beyond question there was something horse-like in the aspect of the cumbrous lower lip; in the elongated and sharply bounded oval of the brownish visage; in the dull eyes almost denuded of lashes; and, above all, in the coarse hair, plastered on to the forehead with pomade. Her gait, too, was as stiff and reluctant as that of a mule, one of those unhappy beasts which winter after summer and summer after winter, have to carry loads of wood up and down the same rough and stony or muddy track way. When freed from the halter of toil, Crescenz, clasping her bony fingers and sticking out her elbows in ungainly fashion, would usually sit down and fall into a doze, no more lightened by intelligence than that of one of the aforesaid mules standing patiently in its stable when the day's work was done. Everything about her was hard, wooden and heavy. Thought, with her, was a slow process. A new idea made its way into her mind with much difficulty, as if it had to traverse the meshes of a choked sieve; but, once she had grasped it, she retained it as a miser clings to a coin. She never read, not even the newspaper or her prayer-book. Writing was a great labour to her, and the awkwardly-formed letters in her marketing-book reminded one of her own clumsy and angular figure, which was utterly lacking in feminine charm. As hard as her bones, her forehead, her hips, and her knuckles, was her voice, which, despite the guttural Tyrolese accent, creaked like the hinges of a rusty iron gate. Nor was this rustiness surprising, for Crescenz never uttered a superfluous word. No one had seen her laugh. In this respect, likewise, she resembled the lower animals; for more cruel even than the denial of speech to those we term "dumb beasts" is the denial of laughter, that free and joyful vent to the emotions.

Being a bastard, she had been brought up at the charge of the community, and at the age of twelve had been sent out to service, at first as maid-of-all-work in a restaurant; but then, having gained a good character by her indomitable and almost bestial diligence, as cook-general to a second-rate hotel on one of the main routes of travel. Rising daily at five, Crescenz slaved, swept, scrubbed, did the rooms, lighted fires, cooked, kneaded and baked, washed and ironed, till late at night. She never asked for a day out; never went into the street, except to church and back. The kitchen-fire was her sun, and her only acquaintance with the forest came from splitting thousands upon thousands of billets every year in order to feed the flames.

Men did not trouble her: maybe because, as previously explained, twenty-five years spent as a robot had rubbed off the very inadequate feminine graces which Mother Nature had bestowed on her; maybe because she so fiercely repelled any amorous advances. Her only pleasure was found in the amassing of money, for she had the magpie hoarding-instincts of the peasant, and dreaded lest, when she grew old, she would once more be forced to accept the unwelcome lot of being dependent upon the community. The bitter bread of public charity would have choked her.

Nothing but the lust for gain had, when she was thirty-seven lured this dull being from her Tyrolese homeland. The manageress of an employment agency, spending a summer holiday in the Tyrol, was amazed by Crescenz's berserker rage for work, and told her that in Vienna she could get twice her present earnings.

On the railway journey, Crescenz maintained her usual taciturnity, seated in solemn silence while holding in her lap the wicker basket which contained all her worldly possessions, though her knees ached beneath its weight. Some of her fellow-travellers, friendly and companionable, offered to put it in the rack, but the dour woman snapped a refusal, for, in her peasant mind, cheating and theft were the only associations with the great city to which she was journeying. In Vienna it was some days before she could make her way alone to market, for at first the traffic frightened her almost out of her poor wits. But once she had grown familiar with the four streets she had to traverse, she became independent, and trotted safely to the market and back carrying a basket on her arm. In her new place, she swept, scrubbed, lighted the fires, and did the rooms, just as before. At nine, the customary hour in the Tyrol, she went to bed, and slept like an animal with her mouth wide open, until she was called in the morning. No one could tell whether she liked her new situation; perhaps she herself did not know. Her reserve was unbroken. She acknowledged orders with a monosyllabic "Right" ; or, if in a refractory mood with a shrug of the shoulders. She ignored her fellow-servants, being, as a rule absolutely indifferent to their inclination to tease and to make fun of her. Once only, when another maid, a cheerful Viennese girl, persistently mocked her Tyrolese accent, Crescenz lost patience. In a fury she snatched a burning log from the stove, and, brandishing this dangerous weapon, rushed at her tormentress, who fled shrieking with dismay. Thenceforward no one ventured to gibe.

Every Sunday morning, dressed in her voluminous skirt and wearing a Tyrolese head-dress, she went to Mass. Once only, being given a day off, she tried a walk through Vienna. She would not take a tram, and her peregrinations in the bewildering streets brought her, at length, to the Danube. After staring at the current as if it were a familiar friend, she turned about and retraced her steps, sedulously avoiding the busier highways. This first excursion must have been a disappointment, for it was never repeated. She preferred to spend her free Sundays doing needlework, or sitting idly at a window. Thus her coming to the metropolis wrought no change in the treadmill of her life, except that at the end of each month four blue bank notes instead of two were put into her toilworn, withered, and calloused hands. These notes were always suspiciously scrutinized. Each was separately folded and smoothed out, before being stacked with the others and laid to rest in the yellow box of carved wood which she had brought with her from the village. This clumsy little treasure-chest contained the innermost purpose of her life. At night she always had the key under her pillow. No one in the house knew where it was kept in the daytime.

Such were the characteristics of this weird human being (for "human being" we must call her, although the human attributes were queerly obscured); and perhaps a more normal woman could not have long endured to stay as a servant in the remarkable household of young Baron von Ledersheim. The atmosphere was so quarrelsome that in general the domestics were quick to give notice. The hysterical scoldings of their mistress were more than they could bear. The elderly daughter of an more extremely rich manufacturer, she had made the baron's acquaintance

at a health-resort. Though he was many years younger than herself, and his birth was nothing to boast of, while he was up to his ears in debt he was a handsome fellow, with distinguished manners and willing enough to marry money. Things were speedily arranged between the pair, notwithstanding the strenuous opposition of the lady's parents, who were on the look-out for more solid advantages than Baron von Ledersheim could offer. Before the honeymoon was over, Baroness von Ledersheim was to learn that her father and mother had been right. The young husband had by no means finished sowing his wild oats, and was more interested in this form of agriculture than in the fulfillment of his conjugal duties. Nor had he even made a clean breast of it as to the amount of his debts.

Good-natured in a way, a pleasant companion like most libertines, he had no principles, and considered any attempt to regulate his expenditure to be the outcome of plebeian prejudices. The husband wanted to remain a dissolute spendthrift, after marriage as before; the wife wanted an orderly domestic life such as she had been used to in her parental home at Essen. This bourgeoisdom jarred on his aristocratic nerves. Since, wealthy though she was, she tried to draw the purse-strings tight, and refused to finance his pet scheme of building and running a racing-stable, his response to her "meanness" was, as far as husbandly relations went, to ignore his North-German bride, whose dictatorial ways and harsh voice became increasingly offensive to him. As the saying goes, he "shelved" her, without obvious brutality, but in a way which caused her grievous disappointment. When she reproached him he listened courteously and with apparent sympathy, but as soon as the sermon was over he blew away her exhortations as unconcerned as the smoke of his cigarette, and continued to follow his own bent. This seeming amiability was more galling than open resistance. Since she was disarmed by his unflinching civility, her suppressed wrath found vent in other directions, and, above all, in railing at the servants, with reason or without. In less than two years, she had changed her domestic staff no less than sixteen times, having once used violence, and had to pay heavy compensation in order to avoid a lawsuit and public scandal.

Crescenz was the only one of the servants who could endure these storms of scolding unmoved, and stood stolidly while they raged, looking like a cab-horse in the rain. She never took sides, was unaffected by the frequent changes in the staff, hardly seemed to notice that her associates in the servants' hall varied continually in name, aspect, and character. For she never passed the time of day with her workmates, was indifferent to the passionate slamming of doors, the frequent interruptions at mealtimes, her mistress's fainting-fits and hysterical outbursts. She went on with her daily marketing expeditions and her work in the kitchen, unconcerned as to anything that happened outside the daily round of toil. Hard and insensitive as a flail, she threshed on as day followed day, and two years of her life in the metropolis passed by without effecting the slightest change in her mentality. As far as externals were concerned, the only difference to be noticed was that the pile of blue banknotes in her cash box had grown thicker by an inch; and that, when (licking her finger to facilitate the process) she counted them at the second year's end, she found she was very close to the aim of her desire, the magical figure of a thousand.

But chance works with diamond-drills; and fate, cunning of hand, often produces strange modifications even in the rockiest of natures. In Crescenz's case the manifest cause of change was as commonplace as she herself seemed. At the close of a ten-year cycle, the government was

taking a new census and a complicated census-paper had to be filled in every dwelling-home. The baron, who had good reason to know that most of his domestics were unskilled in the use of the pen, decided to tabulate the information himself, and, in due course, Crescenz was summoned to his writing-table. When he asked her full name, age, and birthplace, the first item and the third proved of unexpected interest to the master of the house. A keen sportsman, he had often stayed with an old college-friend who was the owner of a Tyrolese shooting; and he had once done a fortnight's mountaineering in pursuit of chamois, accompanied by a guide, Finkenhuber by name, who turned out to have been Crescenz's uncle. Ledersheim had taken a fancy to the man. This fact, and his knowledge of the cook's native village, led to a conversation between master and maid, with the resulting further disclosure that, in the inn where she had formerly worked, the baron had once partaken of an extraordinarily good haunch of venison. Trifling matters, no doubt; but the long arm of coincidence handles such trifles, and to Crescenz who for the first time encountered in Vienna a person acquainted with her home, they seemed wonderful. Her face flushed with unwonted excitement, she stood in front of the baron, curtsying in ungainly fashion, and highly flattered when he proceeded to crack jokes with her, asking her with an assumed Tyrolese accent, whether she knew how to yodel - and the like. At length entering into the spirit of the game, he spanked her with peasant familiarity on her hard behind, saying: "Be off with you now, my good Cenzi, and let me get on with my job; but take these two extra crowns with you because you hail from the Zillertal."

The master had not shown any deep feeling. Nothing, one might have thought, to stir the old maid to the depths. But on her dull and unimpressionable nature those few minutes' talk had the effect of a stone thrown into a stagnant pool, forming circular waves which moved, slowly widening, to lap upon the margin of consciousness. Not for years upon years had the taciturn creature had any sort of personal relations with one of her fellows; and it seemed to her almost uncanny that the first to show a friendly interest in her, from among the millions who lived in this wilderness of bricks and mortar, should be a man who knew her own mountains, and had actually eaten venison cooked there by her own hands. Super added came the clout upon the backside, which, to her peasant mind was a laconic invitation to the woman in her. Even though Crescenz did not make so bold as to fancy that the elegantly dressed and distinguished gentleman actually coveted her wizened body, still the physical familiarity stirred her slumbering senses.

Thus, thanks to this encounter, there began in the woman's inmost being a transformation, obscure at the outset, but growing continually more definite - and culminating in a new feeling, akin to that sudden recognition which leads a dog to single out one from among the innumerable bipeds that surround it, and to look upon him thenceforward as master, nay as god. The dog thus transformed follows its master everywhere, wriggles with delight and wags a friendly tail when meeting him again after an absence, obeys, fetches, and carries with slavish subservience. Into the narrow chambers of Crescenz's mind, which had hitherto been completely filled with a bare half-dozen of ideas - money, marketing, kitchen-fire, church, and bed - there had suddenly been thrust a new element, which demanded accommodation, and roughly elbowed the previous occupants aside. With the "havingness" that makes the peasant so reluctant to surrender anything that has once been gripped, she interpolated this new element sedulously into the confused world of her lethargic impulses. It was a little while, of course, before the change in her habits became fully manifest, and the initial signs of the transformation were obscure. For instance, she brushed

the baron's clothes and cleaned his shoes with meticulous care, while leaving the baroness's dresses and footgear to the lady's maid to look after. Then she would often scurry forth into the hall the instant she heard the baron's latch-key in the lock, eager to relieve him of hat, coat, and stick. In the kitchen, she worked harder than ever, and would sometimes laboriously ask her way to the big market, in search of a haunch of venison. She also began to pay more attention to the niceties of dress.

A week or two elapsed before this first shoot of her new feelings showed its leaves plainly above the ground. Several more weeks were needed until a second shoot pushed up from the seedling, and assumed a definite tint. The second feeling was the obvious complement of the first, hatred for the baroness, for the wife who could live with the baron, sleep with him, speak to him whenever she pleased, but nevertheless did not revere the master as she herself, Cenzi, did. It may have been because (having now learned to take notice) she had been shocked by one of the scenes in which the infuriated wife "slanged" her husband unmercifully, or it may have been because she had become aware how painfully the cold and arrogant manners of the North German mistress contrasted with the geniality of the Viennese master of the house - in any case Crescenz began, in manifold ways, to show that she had conceived a spite against the baroness. Brigitta von Ledersheim had always to ring twice, at least, before Crescenz would deign to answer the bell; and then the maid came with irritating slowness and obvious reluctance. Her raised shoulders produced the same impression as the turning back of its ears by a stubborn and vicious horse, a conviction of insuperable antagonism. She said nothing in response to her mistress's orders, so that the baroness never knew whether she had been understood and would be obeyed. A repetition produced only a contemptuous nod, or a "I heard you all right," in her broad peasant accent. Again, just before a visit to the theater, when the mistress was dressing, the key of a drawer containing some indispensable trinket would have gone astray - to be discovered in a corner of the room after half an hour's frantic search. Crescenz made a point of failing to deliver telephone messages to the baroness, and when scolded for the omission would perty reply "I just forgot." She never looked her mistress squarely in the face, perhaps, from fear lest her loathing should peep out.

Meanwhile these domestic discomforts led to continually more violent scenes between husband and wife - for there can be little doubt that the maid's state of mind and uncivil manners reacted on the mistress to increase the latter's uncontrol. Brigitta's nerves had been overstrained by too long a period of spinsterhood; she had been further embittered by her husband's neglect and by her failure to hit it off even with her servants; so that she now grew more and more unbalanced. The bromides and the veronal she took to relieve insomnia made matters worse; but no one sympathized with the poor woman in her nervous crises, or tried to help her to live more hygienically and to regain self-mastery. A neurologist whom she consulted advised a couple of months' stay in a sanatorium, and her husband endorsed the proposal with such injudicious enthusiasm that the baroness at first refused to consider it. In the end, however, she gave way. She would take the lady's maid with her, while Crescenz would be left alone to look after the baron in the roomy flat.

The news that the care of her beloved master was to be left wholly in her hands had an electrifying effect on Crescenz. She seemed to have been given the contents of a magic phial - a

philtre which stirred the lees of her undischarged passions and modified her behaviour. Her limbs were no longer stiff and ungainly; she moved lightly, easily, and swiftly. When the time came for the baroness's journey, the maid ran from room to room, packed the trunks without waiting to be told, shouldered them like a porter, and carried them down to the cab. When, late in the evening, the baron returned from seeing his wife off at the station, handed hat and overcoat to the expectant Crescenz, and, with a sigh of relief, said: "Well, I've got her safely away!" - a remarkable thing happened. Crescenz, as already explained, resembled the lower animals, in that she never laughed. But now her lips were animated by an unfamiliar phenomenon. Her mouth broadened into a grin so unrestrained that Ledersheim, to whom the awkward servant maid's expression of countenance came as a painful surprise, felt ashamed of having been so open with a menial, and went into his bedroom without saying another word.

The discomfort lasted for a fleeting moment, and during the next few days master and maidservant were united in the enjoyment of a precious sense of quietude and agreeable ease. The wife's exit from the scene had cleared the atmosphere. Rudolf freed from the burden of responsibility, and from the perpetual risk of being called to account for his movements came home late next evening, and Crescenz's silent adoration was a welcome contrast to the loquacious inquisitiveness with which Brigitta was wont to receive him. Crescenz devoted herself to her work with more than customary zeal, got up earlier than usual, polished the furniture till you could see your face in it, was never satisfied with the brightness of the door-handles, provided exceptionally tasty meals - and, greatly to the baron's surprise, served them on a dinner-set which was supposed to be kept for great occasions. Though as a rule he was blind to such matters, he could not but notice the peculiar and delicate attentions of this strange maidservant, and, being a good-natured fellow at bottom, he expressed his gratification. He praised her culinary skill, and, in a day or two, when his birthday came round and Crescenz had made him a jam tart in which the pastry was decorated with his initials and the family coat-of-arms, he said with a smile: "You are spoiling me, Cenzi. But what the devil shall I do when the mistress comes home again?"

To the inhabitants of other lands, such free-and easy ways, such want of reserve in the remarks of a master to a servant, may seem incredible, but there was nothing out of the ordinary in them as far as pre-war Austria was concerned. They were, in fact, manifestations of the boundless contempt of the aristocracy for the mob, a contempt in witness whereof the gentry rode with a loose rein. Just as an archduke, stationed in some out-of-the-way Galician town, would send his orderly to the brothel to fetch him a bedfellow, and having satisfied his desires, would hand the girl over to the underling - regardless of the salacious gossip that would ensue when the cits got wind of the affair - so a man of title who was out shooting would be more inclined to hobnob over luncheon with his loader or his groom, than to be friendly with a university professor or a wealthy man of business. But these ostensibly democratic relationships, easy-going though they seemed, must not be taken at their face value; the master remained the master, and knew how to keep his distance once more, the instant he rose from his meal. Since, however, the minor gentry were always inclined to ape the manners of the feudal aristocracy, the baron made no bones about speaking derogatorily of his wife to a country wench who was in her service, assured that she would never give him away but failing to realize what a profound impression his words were

producing in her simple mind.

All the same, he imposed some vestiges of restraint upon his tongue and his general behaviour for a few days. Then feeling confident that he could trust her, he began, unheeding dangerous possibilities, to resume bachelor habits. This was his own house, his wife was away, and he could amuse himself as he pleased. One day towards the close of the first week he spent as a grasswidower, he rang for Crescenz, and, as if the matter were of no moment, told her that that evening she was to lay a cold supper for two, and to go to bed without waiting up for his return. He would himself see to everything when he came in.

"Very good, Sir," answered Crescenz, without the smallest change of expression to show that she understood what lay behind. But that she was sharper of wit than she seemed was plain to the amused Rudolf when, returning towards midnight accompanied by one of the young ladies of the opera, he found the supper-table decked with flowers; and, on going into his bedroom, discovered, not only that his own bed had been made ready as usual, but that the adjoining bed had been invitingly turned down, and that one of his wife's silk nightgowns and her slippers were laid out ready for use. The husband whose marriage vows sat so lightly on his conscience could not but laugh at the length to which this extraordinary abigail was prepared to go in her attentions. Thenceforward she was his acknowledged confederate, and next morning he had no hesitation in ringing for Crescenz to act as lady's maid to his light-of-love.

It was at this juncture that Crescenz was rechristened. The budding diva was understudy for the role of Donna Elvira, and found it congenial to call her lover Don Juan. On her next visit to the flat, she said merrily:

"Don Juan, I wish you'd send for that Leporella of yours."

The name took his fancy, were it only for the reason that it was too grotesquely misapplicable to the withered Tyrolese peasantwoman, and from that time on he always addressed her as Leporella. Crescenz, though startled at first by her new appellation, accepted it as a compliment. She knew nothing of its Don Giovannesque associations, but it was euphonious to her untutored ears and her vanity was tickled that her master should give her a pet-name. Whenever she heard the impudent call "Leporella!" her thin lips parted in a smile that showed her horse-like teeth; and, obsequiously, she hastened to fulfil the commands of her liege lord.

The name had been lightly chosen, and I have called it misapplicable. Nevertheless, it hit the mark, for "Leporella," like her namesake Leporello, was a sympathetic accomplice. An old maid who had known nothing of love, she took a vicarious pride in her lusty young master's adventures. No matter whether the delight came from knowing that the detested baroness's bed was dishonoured almost every night by some new illicit occupant, or from an imaginary participation in these sensuous pleasures - there could be no question as to its existence. Her bony frame, wasted and wizened by decades of arduous toil until it had been almost completely desexualized, thrilled with bawdy pleasure at sight of a second and then a third fleeting occupant of Baroness von Ledersheim's rightful couch. Her confederateship and the unfamiliar erotic atmosphere were powerful stimulants to her slumbering senses. Crescenz became really and truly

Leporella, became, like Leporello in Da Ponte's libretto, vigorous and sprightly. Un-accustomed qualities, stirred up from the depths by this ardent co-partnership came to the surface, petty wiles and artifices, an inclination to spy and eavesdrop. She listened at the door, squinted through the keyhole, buzzed eagerly hither and thither, until her curiosity and alertness transformed what had been little better than an automaton into living flesh and blood. To the astonishment of the neighbours, Crescenz became sociable; she gossiped with the servants, cracked jokes with the postman, began to talk of miscellaneous subjects with the market-women. Then, one evening, when the lights in the attic (where the servants' quarters were) had been extinguished, the maids in the rooms on the opposite side of the court heard a remarkable humming from her window usually so silent. Clumsily, *mezzo voce*, she was singing one of those folk-songs which dairymaids sing in Alpine pastures. Monotonously she produced the air, with untrained lips and vocal cords, like a child fingering the keys of a neglected piano - the effect being simultaneously touching and repulsive. Not since early youth had she tried to sing, but now something that came from the darkness of forgotten years seemed to be struggling towards the light.

This extraordinary transformation was least obvious to the man who had brought it about - for who troubles to notice his own shadow? We see, of course, with half an eye, how it dogs our footsteps, or sometimes runs in advance (like a wish of which we are not yet fully aware); but how rarely do we heed its parody of our form, or recognize in it a caricature of our personality. All that Ledersheim noticed in Crescenz was that she seemed ever ready to serve him diligently, silently, and self-sacrificingly. Her mute worship was agreeable to him. From time to time, as if patting a dog, he said a friendly word or two; sometimes he jested with her, took her good-naturedly by the ear, gave her a banknote or a theatre ticket - trifles he extracted from his waistcoat-pocket, but, for her, treasures of inestimable value, which she hoarded as relics in her cashbox. Gradually it became a habit with him to think aloud in her presence, and even to entrust her with difficult commissions; and the more marked these signs of his confidence, the more slavish became her devotion. She tried to anticipate his desires; to enter into his being as the executant of his will; to see with his eyes, hear with his ears; to enjoy his pleasures and share in his conquests. She beamed when a new bedfellow accompanied him on his return, and was visibly disappointed if he came back alone. Her brain now worked as unceasingly as aforesaid her hands had done, and a new light of understanding sparkled in her eyes. The overdriven beast of burden had developed into a human being; though still reserved, tight-lipped, crafty, and dangerous, meditative and much occupied, restless and rancorous.

Once, when the baron came home earlier than usual, he was amazed on entering the hall to hear from behind the door of the kitchen, where inviolable silence usually prevailed, the noise of sniggering. The door was half-open, and in the aperture Leporella showed herself, rubbing her hands on her apron, simultaneously cheeky and embarrassed.

"Beg pardon, Sir, for being so free," she said, with downcast eyes; "but I've got the pastrycook's daughter in there; she's such a pretty girl, and she'd be main glad to make your acquaintance."

Ledersheim stared at Crescenz, not knowing whether to reject these impudent advances forthwith, or whether to grasp at the skirts of happy chance and accept the impromptu bawd's offer. In the end, desire stirred within him, and got the upper hand.

"Let's have a look at the beauty," he replied.

The girl, a fair-haired hussy of sixteen, whom Leporella had limed with flattering tales, emerged from the kitchen, blushing and giggling, and, revolving awkwardly showed off her charms to the stylish gentleman whom she had often furtively admired from the shop across the way. The baron was pleased with her looks, and invited her to drink tea with him in his room. She glanced towards Crescenz for a pointer, but Crescenz had vanished, and the pastrycook's daughter, thus inveigled into an adventure, inquisitive and excited (for all her blushes and embarrassment), felt she had no option out to accept the invitation. "Will you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly!

But nature makes no leaps. Although, under stress of a warped passion, a measure of spiritual mobility had resulted in this ossified personality, the new but limited thought-processes did not enable Crescenz to look ahead. She remained as unimaginative as the lower animals, whose actions are guided by short-sighted instincts. Concerned only with the longing to serve the master whom she loved with the fidelity of a dog, she completely forgot the absent wife. It came, therefore, like a bolt from the blue when, one morning the baron with knitted brows and holding a letter in his hand entered the kitchen and told her to devote the day to a general house-cleaning, for next afternoon his wife would be back from the sanatorium. Crescenz turned livid at the news, standing open-mouthed with the horrified aspect of one who has been stabbed. She stared dumbly at her master, until the baron, wishing her to pull herself together, said:

"You don't look best pleased Cenzi; but there's nothing we can do about the matter!"

At this her rigid countenance began to stir, as though something were at work in the depths. A wave seemed to rise from her inwards, and her pale cheeks flushed dark red. Her throat twitched, and, with immense difficulty she got out the words:

"After all ... one might . . . one might . . . surely ... "

She choked, and did not finish the sentence. Her face was contorted with malice, and so sinister was her expression, that it was Ledersheim's turn to be frightened, and he shrank back in alarm. But Crescenz had resumed her work, and was scouring a copper saucepan with a violence that threatened to take the skin off her fingers.

With the return of the mistress, the sense of comfort that had prevailed during her absence was dispelled. Once more began the regime of banging doors and causeless scoldings. Maybe some of the neighbours had sent her anonymous letters to inform her of her husband's "goings-on" during her absence, or maybe the lack of warmth in his welcome had been enough to disclose the state of his feelings; in any case, she seemed worse instead of better for her two months' treatment, since outbursts of weeping alternated with menaces and hysterical scenes. The relations between the couple grew more intolerable day by day. For a few weeks the baron

confronted the storm of reproaches, answering evasively and consolingly, with his habitual civility, when she threatened to sue for a divorce or to write to her parents. But this indifferent attitude had an evil effect upon her. She was beginning to believe herself surrounded by secret enemies, and her nervous excitement verged upon persecution mania.

Crescenz had put on her old armour of silence. But now this silence became aggressive and menacing. When her mistress returned, she remained in the kitchen, from which she would not emerge even when summoned to welcome the baroness home. She stood like a figure carved out of wood, her shoulders raised stubbornly, giving such curt answers to questions that the impatient mistress soon ceased asking any and turned away, while Crescenz glared at her unsuspecting back with venom and hatred. Her avarice made her feel that she had been robbed by this return of the mistress of the house, had been deprived of the joys of companionable service and thrust back to toil in the kitchen, while her pet-name of Leporella had been stolen from her. For the baron was careful, in his wife's presence, to avoid showing any marks of sympathy for Crescenz. Now and again, however, exhausted by the scenes the baroness made, and wanting to draw a breath of relief, he would steal into the kitchen, plump down on one of the hard wooden stools, and exclaim with a groan:

"I can't stand it any longer!"

These moments in which her idolized master sought refuge in her sympathy were the happiest known to Leporella. She never dared to answer or to attempt consolation, but remained dumb, while looking compassionately at her enslaved god. This soundless sympathy did Ledersheim good for a time. But as soon as he left the kitchen, his worries came back to him with a rush, while Crescenz wrung her hands in impotent fury, or tried to work off her rage by a vengeful scouring of pots and pans and a polishing of silver.

At length the sultry atmosphere of the baroness's return broke in a terrible storm. During one of the scenes, the baron lost patience, and, abandoning his customary attitude of courteous indifference (that of a schoolboy who is being scolded), he flung out of the room, and, before banging the door so that every window in the flat rattled, he yelled:

"I'm absolutely fed up."

His face blue with wrath, he burst into the kitchen and shouted to the trembling Crescenz:

"Pack my portmanteau at once and take down my gun-case. I shall go for a week's shooting. The devil himself could not stick it in such a hell as this."

Crescenz looked up at him, her eyes shining with enthusiasm. He was master once more, had asserted himself! With a hoarse laugh she said:

"Quite right, Sir. Time and more to put a stop to this!"

Quivering with zeal, she hastened from room to room and got together all he could possibly want for the expedition. She carried portmanteau and gun-case to the cab. But when he was about to say a word of thanks, he was startled by her aspect. Her pinched lips were parted in the malicious smile which always alarmed him, reminding him as it did of what a beast of prey looks like when about to spring. But she curtsied becomingly, and, as he drove off, whispered with an air that was only impertinent because of the intimacy it implied:

"Have a good time, Sir, while you're away. I'll tend to everything."

Three days later the baron was recalled by a laconic wire:

"Essential return home instantly."

The cousin who had sent it met him at the station, and Ernst's face was enough to show Rudolf that something terrible had happened. After a futile attempt to "break the news," he told the baron that Baroness von Ledersheim had been found dead in bed that morning, with the room full of gas from the unlighted gas-heater. Accident was out of the question. The death must have been intentional, for the gas-heater had not been used throughout the summer, and the weather was still warm. Besides, overnight the dead woman had taken a dozen or more tablets of veronal. Furthermore, Crescenz, the cook, who had been alone in the house with her mistress, testified to having heard the latter go into the dressing-room presumably in order to turn on the master-tap of the gas-stove which for safety was placed there instead of in the bedroom. In view of these facts, the police surgeon had certified the death to be suicidal.

The baron's hands trembled. When his cousin mentioned Crescenz's report, his flesh crept, for a distressing thought flashed into his mind. But he repressed the tormenting idea and silently accompanied Ernst to the flat. The corpse had already been removed. His relatives hostile of mien, were awaiting him in the drawing-room, and their condolences were icy. As if accusingly, they "felt it their duty" to inform him that there would be no possibility of hushing up the scandal, for in the morning the servantmaid had rushed out on to the public staircase screaming, "The missus has killed herself!" They had arranged for a quiet funeral, but already "society folk" were saying ill-natured things. Rudolf listened confusedly, raised his eyes involuntarily towards the door leading from sitting-room into bedroom, and then quickly looked back at the floor. There was that haunting thought he wanted to think out to its logical conclusion - but this idle and hostile chatter made connected thinking impossible. For half an hour his relatives stayed, black-a-vised and reproachful; then, one after another, they bade farewell, leaving Rudolf alone in the darkening chamber stricken by the unexpected blow; with aching head and weary limbs. He still stood, too listless even to sit down.

Someone knocked at the door.

"Come in!" he cried.

The door behind him opened, and there was a sound of hesitating, shuffling footsteps - footsteps he recognized. He was horrified, had a feeling of strangulation in his throat and of goose-flesh all over his body and limbs. He tried to turn round, but his muscles would not obey his will. Thus he remained standing in the middle of the room, tremulous, silent, hands clenched, while fully aware how contemptible must be the aspect of this guilty silence. Then, still from behind, came in a dry, indifferent, matter-of-fact tone, the words:

"I only come to ask whether the master will dine at home or out."

The baron trembled even more violently, and the icy chill gripped him at the heart. He made three attempts before he could answer:

"Thanks, I want nothing to eat."

The shuffling footsteps receded before he found courage to look round. Then his immobility was broken. He shook like an aspen leaf, but had strength to leap towards the door and turn the key in the lock, resolved to hinder the re-entry of those detestable and ghostly footsteps. Then he flung himself on the sofa, and vainly tried to strangle the loathsome thought which obtruded itself into his reluctant mind. It was an obsession which kept him awake the livelong night, and would not leave him even when day returned, nor when, clad in the customary suit of solemn black, he stood as chief mourner at the head of his deceased wife's coffin.

Directly the funeral was over the baron fled from the capital. He could not bear the way in which his friends and relatives looked at him. Their sympathy was tinged with an inquisitorial demeanour - or did he only fancy this to be so? Fancied or real, it was insupportable. Even inanimate objects looked at him accusingly. Every piece of furniture in the flat, and especially those in the bedroom (where the sickly-sweet odour of gas lingered), repelled him whenever he entered the place. But the insufferable hag-riding, whether by night or by day, was the imperturbability of his sometime confidante, who went about her business in the empty dwelling as if nothing untoward had happened. Since that moment at the station when his cousin had mentioned her name, he dreaded contact with her. Whenever he heard her step, it was difficult for him to control the impulse to run away. He was nauseated by the thought of her: her harsh voice; her greasy hair; her dull, bestial pitilessness. Rage over-mastered him because he lacked strength to rid himself of the incubus, to tear the stranglehold of her fingers from his throat. His only resource was flight. He packed his trunk secretly, without saying a word to her; and stole away, having scribbled a note to the effect that he was going to stay with friends in Carinthia.

He did not return till the summer was over, except for one brief visit necessitated by matters connected with his late wife's property. Then he stayed at a hotel, to avoid, having to set eyes upon the bird of evil omen at the flat. Crescenz, who kept herself to herself, never knew that he had been in Vienna. Unoccupied, gloomy as an owl, she spent her days in the kitchen, but went twice to Mass (instead of once only, as previously). The baron's solicitor provided her with funds and checked her accounts. Of her master she heard not a word, for he neither wrote to her nor sent a message. During this time of silent waiting, her face grew harsher and leaner, her

movements became wooden as of old. Thus the months passed for her in a strange condition of rigid apathy.

In the autumn, however, the baron was recalled to the flat by urgent business. He stood hesitant on the threshold. Many weeks spent with intimate friends had enabled him to forget a good deal; but now that he was about to see again in the flesh the woman who had perhaps been his accomplice, he was agitated and near to vomiting, as he had been the day after his wife's death. Step by step, as he mounted the stairs, it seemed to him that an invisible hand was gripping his throat. He moved slower and slower and had to summon all his forces before he could bring himself to turn his latch-key in the lock.

At the sound, Crescenz rushed out of the kitchen in astonishment. When she saw her master, she turned pale and then, as if making an obeisance, stooped to pick up the hand-valise he had put down in the entry. She forgot to say a word of welcome, and the baron was equally remiss. No "Good day" passed his lips. Silently she carried the valise into his bedroom, and silently he followed. In silence he waited, looking out of the window, till she had left the room. Then he hurriedly locked the door.

That was their only greeting after his long absence.

Crescenz waited. The baron waited too, in the hope that these paroxysms of horror at sight of her would cease to trouble him. But there was no improvement. Even before he saw her, when he merely heard her shuffling footsteps in the passage, he became giddy and had a sensation of nausea. He could not eat a morsel of the breakfast she prepared for him. Morning after morning, he slipped from the house as soon as he was dressed, and did not return till late at night, his object being to avoid a glimpse of her, and to be out of hearing of her movements. The few orders he was obliged to give were given without looking at her. He was choked by the air she breathed.

Crescenz, for her part, spent her days sitting mumchance upon her stool in the kitchen. She did not trouble to prepare food for herself, having no appetite; and she would not say a word to anyone. She sat, timidly awaiting the master's whistle, like a whipped cur that recognizes it has done wrong. How, precisely, she could have been at fault, she was too stupid to guess. All she knew was that her master, her god, had turned his face away from her, and that his displeasure was agony.

Th days after the baron's return, the door-bell rang. A grey-haired man, with a quiet demeanour, clean-shaven, carrying a hand-bag, stood on the landing. Crescenz waved him away, but the newcomer explained that he was the valet, that the Herr Baron had ordered him to come at ten, and that Crescenz must announce him. She turned as white as chalk, and stood stock-still for a moment, hand raised and fingers outspread. Then this hand dropped like a winged bird.

"Go and announce yourself," she said snappishly to the astonished valet, turned on her heel, and retreated into the kitchen, slamming the door behind her.

The manservant stayed on. Thenceforward Rudolf had no need to say a word to Crescenz, giving his orders through the instrumentality of this quiet fellow, who was elderly, and accustomed to service in the best families. Crescenz no longer knew what went on in the flat outside the kitchen, the life of the place flowing over her head like deep water over a stone.

This distressing state of affairs lasted a fortnight, and had upon Crescenz the effect of a wasting disease. Her face fell away, and the hair on her temples turned grey. If her movements had before been wooden, now she seemed turned into stone. She sat motionless as an idol, staring vacantly out of the window; but when she had work to do, she did it in furious, quasi-maniacal out-bursts.

When the fortnight was up, the manservant came one morning unsummoned into the master's study, and waited discreetly to indicate that he had a communication to make. Once before he had ventured to complain about the offensive manners of the "Tyrolese baggage," as he disdainfully called her, and had advised her being given notice. On that occasion, however, the baron, feeling sorry for Crescenz, had refused to act on the suggestion. The valet did not dare to press the point. This time, however, the man was more urgent in his representations. When Rudolf said that Crescenz had been a long time in his service, and he saw no adequate ground for dismissing her, the valet, instead of taking no for an answer, looked perplexedly at the baron, reiterated his request, and then, with considerable embarrassment, said:

"Sir, I'm afraid you'll think me a fool, but the fact is . . . I'm afraid of the woman. . . . She's furtive, malicious. . . . The Herr Baron really does not realize how dangerous a person he has as member of his household."

Ledersheim was alarmed in spite of himself. But the information was too vague.

"Anton," he said, you must speak more plainly, if I'm to do what you want."

"Well, Herr Baron, I really can't say anything definite. What I feel is that Crescenz is like a wild beast, or a beast only half-tamed; and that at any moment she might do me, or you, Sir, a mischief. Yesterday, when I was giving her your orders, she looked at me . . . it was something more than a look . . . she glared at me as if about to spring upon me and fix her teeth in my throat. I'm really afraid, Sir, to eat the food she cooks. She might poison me, or you, Sir, any day. The Herr Baron really doesn't know how dangerous she is. It's not what she says. She says nothing. But I'm positive she's ripe for committing a murder."

Rudolf looked at the accuser in alarm. Had the man heard some gossip? Had he conceived any definite suspicion? Rudolf became aware that his fingers were trembling, and he laid his cigar on the ash-tray, lest this tremor should betray him. But Anton's face was impassive, and conveyed no sign of unuttered knowledge. The baron hesitated. The valet's advice marched with his own wishes. He would like to get rid of Crescenz.

"I don't want to be precipitate," he said. "Perhaps you are right, but wait a little longer. If she is rude to you again, you can give her notice without consulting me, saying, of course, that you do so on my orders."

"Very good, Sir," answered Anton, and the baron went out with a sense of relief - though anything that reminded him of this enigmatical creature poisoned the day for him. The best thing would be, he thought, if Crescenz could be cleared out of the house while he was away - at Christmas, perhaps. The thought of being freed from the incubus did him a lot of good. Christmas would be most suitable. He was going to spend Christmas with friends.

The very next morning, however, immediately after breakfast, when he had seated himself in his study, there came a knock at the door. Unthinkingly he looked up from his newspaper, and called:

"Come in!"

Thereupon, with the hard yet shuffling step he had come to loathe, she entered, the figure that haunted his dreams. He was startled at the change in her. Always ill-favoured, her bony, wasted visage now looked like a death's-head above her black garments. His detestation was tinged with compassion when he noticed how the down-trodden woman stopped short at the edge of the carpet, too humble to advance nearer. To hide his own emotion, he spoke as unconcernedly as possible:

"What is it, Crescenz?"

Yet, for all he could do, his tone, instead of being cordial, was repellent and angry.

Crescenz did not move, but stared gloomily at the carpet. After a long pause, she managed (like one kicking, something out of the way) to eject the words:

"Anton ... Anton says that the Herr Baron gives me notice."

Genuinely distressed, Rudolf von Ledersheim rose to his feet. He had never intended matters to take so swift a course. Stammeringly he explained that Anton had been too precipitate. Everything could be smoothed over if she could manage to be a little less cross-grained towards the valet. Servants must behave decently to one another; and so on.

Crescenz stood unheeding, her eyes boring into the carpet, her shoulders stubbornly raised, her head hanging disconsolately. She was awaiting a word that did not come. When at last, out of humour at having to assume an apologetic role towards a domestic, he stayed the flow of his eloquence, she still had no answer but mutinous silence.

After this awkward pause had lasted two or three minutes, she said:

"What I want to know is, whether the master himself told Anton to give me notice."

She flung the words at him, fiercely, morosely. Was there an implied threat? A challenge? Both his cowardice and his sympathy took wings and vanished. Hatred for this woman, which had been accumulating for weeks and months, burst the dams and overflowed. His one desire was to see the last of her. With an abrupt change of tone, he assumed the cutting and circumstantial manner he had learned to use on occasions when he had been an under-secretary of State, and replied:

"Yes, Crescenz, such is the fact. To save trouble, I have put Anton in charge of household affairs. If he has given you notice, you must go. Unless, indeed, you can bring yourself to behave decently to him. Then I might say a word for you, and ask him to overlook your past boorishness. Otherwise, you'll have to leave; and the sooner the better."

If she meant to threaten him, she should get as good as she gave! He would stand no nonsense!

But the look which Crescenz now raised from the carpet had no menace in it. Merely that of a hunted beast, which sees the pack break from the coppice where it is about to take refuge.

"Thank you, Sir," she said in a broken voice. "I'll leave at once. I don't want to be a trouble to you."

Slowly turning, she shuffled out of the room.

That evening when, having returned from the opera, the baron went into his study to look at the letters delivered during the afternoon, he saw on the table an unfamiliar object - an oblong box of peasant workmanship. It was not locked. The contents, carefully arranged, were the trifles Crescenz had received from him: a few postcards sent when he had been away shooting, two theatre tickets, a silver ring. Besides these there was a pile of banknotes (the savings of a lifetime), and a snapshot taken in Tyrol twenty years before. In it her eyes, dazzled by the flashlight, had the distressful and whippedcur expression with which she had received his confirmation of her dismissal.

Much perplexed, the baron rang for Anton to ask why on earth Crescenz had placed her belongings on his study-table. The valet went to call his enemy to account. But Crescenz was not to be found in the kitchen, in her attic bedroom, or anywhere else in the building. Not until next day, when they read a news-item in the paper to the effect that a woman about forty years of age had drowned herself in the Danube, did master and man know what had become of Leporella.

THE RUNAWAY

ONE night during the summer of 1918, a fisherman, in his boat on Lake Geneva, not far from the little Swiss town of Villeneuve, caught sight of something unusual on the surface of the water. Drawing nearer to this object he perceived it to be a raft made of beams roughly tied together, which a naked man was awkwardly trying to paddle forward by means of a plank. The paddler was cold and exhausted, and the amazed fisherman was touched to pity. He helped the shivering voyager on board his own boat, wrapped him in some nets which were the only available covering, and tried to open up a conversation. But the rescued stranger, cowering in the bottom of the boat, answered in a tongue of which the fisherman could not recognize a syllable. Giving up the attempt as a bad job, the latter hauled in the net he had come to examine, and rowed with steady strokes towards the land.

When the outline of the shore grew plain in the gathering light of dawn, the naked man began to look more cheerful. A smile played about the large mouth half hidden in an exuberant and disorderly growth of moustache and beard. Pointing shoreward, he repeatedly exclaimed - half questioningly and half exultantly - a word which sounded like "Rossiya." His tone grew ever more confident and more joyful as the boat came nearer to the land. At length the keel grated on the beach. The fisherman's womenfolk, who ran down to help in the landing of the night's catch, dispersed with cries of alarm, like Nausicaa's maidens of old when they caught sight of the naked Ulysses. At the strange tidings of what the fisherman had found in the lake, the other men of the village flocked to the strand, among them the mayor of the little place. This worthy fellow, self-important and full of the dignity of office, called to mind all the instructions that had come from headquarters during the four years of the war. Convinced that the newcomer must be a deserter from the French shore of the lake, he promptly endeavoured to make a formal inquiry, but was soon baffled by an impenetrable obstacle - they could not understand one another. To all questions the stranger (rigged out by now in an old pair of trousers and a coat found for him by one of the villagers) made no other answer than his own query, "Rossiya? Rossiya?" uttered in imploring but ever more faltering tones. A trifle annoyed at his failure, the mayor strode off towards the court-house, signing imperatively to the refugee to follow. Amid the babble of the youngsters; who had by now assembled, the bare-footed man, his borrowed habiliments flapping loose about him, did as he was bid, and thus came to the court-house, where he was placed in safe custody. He made no protest; uttered no word; but his face was once more overcast with gloom, and he stooped timidly as if in expectation of a blow.

The news of the fisherman's remarkable haul soon spread to the neighbouring hotels. Well-to-do visitors, delighted to hear of something which would help them to while away an hour, came in great numbers to inspect the wild man. A lady offered him some sweets, but with monkey-like suspicion he refused to touch them. A visitor with a camera took a snapshot. Crowding round the raree-show they all chattered merrily. At length there arrived upon the scene the manager of one of the largest hotels in the vicinity, a man who had lived in many lands and was a good linguist. He tried the stranger, who was by now bewildered and even frightened, in one tongue after another - German, Italian, English, and finally Russian. At the first word of Russian, the poor

fellow started, and instantly plucked up heart. His homely but good-natured countenance was split by a smile reaching from ear to ear. Instantly, and with confident mien he began to pour out his history. It was long and confused and was not in all points intelligible to the chance interpreter. But substantially the story ran as follows.

He had fought in Russia. One day he and a thousand others had been packed into railway carriages, and had travelled a vast distance by train. Then they had all embarked on a ship, and had made a yet longer journey, a voyage across seas on which it was so hot that - as he phrased it - his very bones had been grilled. At length they had landed. Another railway journey, and immediately after leaving the train they had been sent to storm a hill. Of this fight he could say little, for at the very outset he had gone down with a bullet in the leg.

To the auditors, taking up the story as interpreted sentence after sentence by the hotel manager, it was at once obvious that this refugee had belonged to one of the Russian divisions sent across Siberia and shipped to France from Vladivostock. Curiosity mingled with compassion, and everyone wanted to know what had induced the man to start on the remarkable journey that had led him to the lake.

With a smile that was frank, and yet not free from cunning, the Russian explained that while in hospital with his wound he had asked where Russia was, and the general direction of his home had been pointed out to him. As soon as he was able to walk, he had deserted, and had guided his homeward course by sun and stars. He had walked by night; and by day, to elude the patrols, he had hidden in haystacks. For food, he had gathered fruit, and had begged a loaf of bread here and there. At length, after ten nights march, he had reached this lake. Now his tale grew confused. He was a Siberian peasant; his home was close to Lake Baikal; he could make out the other shore of Lake Geneva, and fancied that it must be Russia. He had stolen two beams from hut, and, lying face downwards on these and using board as a paddle, he had made his way far across the lake when the fisherman had found him. He finished his story with the eager question:

"Shall I be able to reach home to-morrow?"

The translation of this inquiry provoked an outburst of laughter from those whose first thought was "Poor simpleton!" But their second thought was tinged with sympathy, and everyone contributed a trifle when a collection was made for the timid and almost tearful deserter.

But now a police official of high rank, summoned by telephone from Montreux, put in an appearance, and with no small difficulty drew up a formal report. Not only was the chance-found interpreter often out of his depth, but the Siberian's complete lack of culture imposed a barrier between his mind and that of these westerners. He knew little more of himself than that his name was Boris; he could give no surname. He had lived with his wife and three children fifty versts from the great lake. They were the serfs of Prince Metchersky (he used the word "serfs," although it is more than half a century since serfdom was abolished in Russia).

A discussion concerning his fate now ensued, while, with bowed shoulders and depressed visage, he stood among the disputants. Some considered that he ought to be sent to the Russian embassy

in Berne, but others objected that this could only lead to his being shepherded back to France. The police official explained how difficult it was to decide whether he was to be treated as a deserter, or simply as a foreigner without identification papers. The relieving officer of the district was prompt to explain that this wanderer had certainly no claim to food and lodging at the cost of the local community. A Frenchman excitedly intervened, saying that the case of this wretched absconder was plain that enough: let him be put to work, or sent back across the frontier. Two women protested that the poor man was not to blame for his misfortunes; it was a crime to tear people away from their homes, and to convey them into foreign land. Political quarrels were imminent when an old gentleman, a Dane, suddenly declared his willingness to pay for the stranger's keep throughout the ensuing week; meanwhile the local authorities could discuss matters with the Russian embassy. This unexpected solution put an end to the official perplexities, and made the lay controversialists forget their differences.

While the argument had been waxing hot, the timid eyes of the runaway had been riveted on the lips of the hotel manager, as the only person in the medley who could make his fate known to him. In a dull fashion, he seemed to understand the complications his coming had aroused. Now, when the tumult of voices ceased, he raised his clasped hands beseechingly towards the manager's face, like a woman praying before a holy image. All were touched by the gesture. The manager cordially assured him that he could be quite easy in his mind. He would be allowed to stay here for a time. No one would harm him, and his wants would be supplied in the village hostelry. The Russian wanted to kiss the manager's hand, but the latter would not permit the unfamiliar form of thanksgiving. He took the refugee to the inn where bed and board were to be provided, gave the man reiterated assurances that all was well, and, with a final nod of friendly leave-taking, made his way back to the hotel.

The runaway stared after the manager's retreating form, and his face clouded over once more at the loss of the only person who could understand him. Regardless of those who were watching his strange demeanour with amusement, he followed the manager with his eyes until his friend vanished into the hotel some way up the hill. Now one of the onlookers touched the Russian compassionately on the shoulder, and pointed to the door of the inn. With hanging head the runaway entered his temporary abode. He was shown into the tap-room, and seated himself at the table, where the maid in welcome, served him with a glass of brandy. Here, overcast with gloom, he spent the rest of the morning. The village children were continually peeping at him through the window; they laughed, and they shouted to him from time to time, but he paid no heed. Customers looked at him inquisitively; but all the time he sat with his eyes fixed on the table, shame-faced and shy. When dinner was served, the room was filled with merry talkative people; but the Russian could not understand a word of their conversation. Painfully aware that he was a stranger among strangers, he was practically deaf and dumb amid folk who could all exchange ideas in lively fashion. His hands were so tremulous that he could hardly eat his soup. A tear coursed down over his cheek, and dropped heavily on to the table. He glanced timidly round. The other guests noticed his distress, and a silence fell upon the company. He was overwhelmed with shame; his unkempt head drooped nearer and nearer to the black wooden table.

He stayed in the tap-room till evening. People came and went, but he was no longer aware of them nor they of him. He continued to sit in the shadow of the stove, resting his hands on the

table. Everyone had forgotten his presence. When, in the gloaming, he suddenly rose and went out, nobody marked his going. Like a dumb beast, he walked heavily up the hill to the hotel, and stationed himself humbly, cap in hand just outside the main door. For a whole hour he stood there without claiming notice from anyone. But at length this strange figure, stiff and black like a tree-trunk rooted in front of the brightly lit entrance to the hotel, attracted the attention of one of the porters, who went to fetch the manager. A flicker of cheerfulness came once more into the Siberian's face at the latter's first words.

"What do you want, Boris?" asked the manager kindly.

"Beg pardon, Sir," said the runaway haltingly. "All I want to know is ... whether I may go home."

"Yes, Boris, of course you may go home," said the manager with a smile.

"To-morrow?"

The other grew serious. The word was said so imploringly that the smile vanished.

"No, Boris, not yet Not till the war is over."

"How soon? When will the war be over?"

"God knows! No man can say."

"Must I wait all that time? Can't I go sooner?"

"No, Boris."

"Is my home so far away?"

"Yes."

"Many days' journey?"

"Many, many days."

"But I can walk there. I'm a strong man. I shan't get tired."

"You can't do that, Boris. There's another frontier to cross before you can get home."

"A frontier?" He looked perplexed. The word had no meaning for him.

Then, with his marvellous persistency he went on:

"I can swim across."

The manager could hardly restrain a smile. But he was grieved at the other's plight, and he said gently:

"No, Boris, you won't be able to do that. A frontier means a foreign country. The people who live there won't let you through."

"But I shan't do them any harm. I've thrown away my rifle. Why should they refuse to allow me to go back to my wife, when I beg them to let me pass for Christ' sake?"

The manager's face became still graver. Bitterness filled his soul.

"No," he said, "they will not let you pass, Boris, not even for Christ's sake. Men no longer hearken to Christ' words."

"But what am I to do, Sir? I cannot stay here. No one understands what I say, and I do not understand anyone."

"You'll learn to understand them in time."

"No, Sir." He shook his head. "I shall never be able to learn. I can only till the ground, nothing more. What can I do here? I want to go home! Show me the way!"

"There isn't any way, Boris."

"But, Sir, they can't forbid my going back to my wife and children! I'm not a soldier any more!"

"Yes, Boris, they can forbid you."

"But the Tsar? Surely he will help me?" This was a sudden thought. The runaway trembled with hope, and mentioned the Tsar with intense veneration.

"There is no Tsar now, Boris. He has been deposed."

"No Tsar now?" He stared vacantly at the manager. The last gleam of hope was extinguished, and the spark faded from his eyes. He said wearily: "So I can't go home?"

"Not yet. You must wait, Boris."

"Will it be long?"

"I don't know."

The face in the darkness grew ever more despondent.

"I have waited so long! How can I wait any longer? Show me the way. I will try."

"There is no way, Boris. They will arrest you at the frontier. Stay here, and we will find you something to do."

"They don't understand me here, and I can't understand them," he faltered. "I can't live here! Help me, Sir!"

"I cannot, Boris."

"Help me, Sir, for Christ's sake! Help me, for otherwise I have no hope."

"I cannot help you, Boris. Men can no longer help one another."

The two stood gazing into each other's eyes. Boris twisted his cap between his fingers.

"Why did they take me away from home? They said I had to fight for Russia and the Tsar. But Russia is a long way off, and the Tsar . . . what did you say they had done to the Tsar?"

"They have deposed him."

"Deposed?" He repeated the word vaguely. "What am I to do, Sir? I must get home. My children are crying for me. I cannot live here. Help me, Sir, please help me!"

"I cannot, Boris."

"Can no one help me?"

"No one, now."

The Russian hung his head still more sadly. Suddenly he spoke in a dull tone:

"Thank you, Sir," and therewith turned on his heel and departed.

Slowly he walked away down the hill. The manager watched him as he went, and wondered why he did not enter the inn, but passed onwards down the steps leading to the lake. With a sigh, the kindhearted interpreter went back to his work in the hotel.

As chance would have it, the very same fisherman who had rescued the living Siberian from the lake found the drowned man's naked body in the morning. The runaway had carefully folded the borrowed coat and trousers, had laid them on the shore with the borrowed cap, and had marched down into the water, nude as he had come forth from it. Since the foreigner's name was unknown, no memorial but a nameless wooden cross could be erected over his grave.

THE INVISIBLE COLLECTION

AN EPISODE OF THE INFLATION PERIOD IN GERMANY

AT the first junction beyond Dresden, an elderly gentleman entered our compartment, smiled genially to the company, and gave me a special nod, as if to an old acquaintance. Seeing that I was at a loss, he mentioned his name. Of course I knew him! He was one of the most famous connoisseurs and art-dealers in Berlin. Before the war, I had often purchased autographs and rare books at his place. He took the vacant seat opposite me, and for a while we talked of matters not worth relating. Then, changing the conversation, he explained the object of the journey from which he was returning. It had, he said, been one of the strangest of his experiences in the thirty-seven years he had devoted to the occupation of art-pedlar. Enough introduction. I will let him tell the story in his own words, without using quote-marks - to avoid the complication of wheels within wheels.

You know [he said] what has been going on in my trade since the value of money began to diffuse into the void like gas. War-profiteers have developed a taste for old masters (Madonnas and so on), for incunabula, for ancient tapestries. It is difficult to satisfy their craving; and a man like myself, who prefers to keep the best for his own use and enjoyment, is hard put to it not to have his house stripped bare. If I let them, they would buy the cuff-links from my shirt and the lamp from my writing-table. Harder and harder to find wares to sell. I'm afraid the term "wares" may grate upon you in this connexion, but you must excuse me. I have picked it up from customers of the new sort. Evil communications. . . . Through use and wont I have come to look upon an invaluable book from one of the early Venetian presses much as the philistine looks upon an overcoat that cost so or so many hundred dollars, and upon a sketch by Guercino as animated by nothing more worthy of reverence than the transmigrated soul of a banknote for a few thousand francs.

Impossible to resist the greed of these fellows with money to burn. As I looked round my place the other night, it seemed to me that there was so little left of any real value that I might as well put up the shutters. Here was a fine business which had come down to me from my father and my grandfather; but the shop was stocked with rubbish which, before 1914, a street-trader would have been ashamed to hawk upon a hand-cart.

In this dilemma, it occurred to me to flutter the pages of our old ledgers. Perhaps I should be put on the track of former customers who might be willing to resell what they had bought in prosperous days. True, such a list of sometime purchasers has considerable resemblance to a battlefield laden with the corpses of the slain; and in fact I soon realized that most of those who had purchased from the firm when the sun was shining were dead or would be in such low water that it was probable they must have sold anything of value among their possessions. However, I came across a bundle of letters from a man who was presumably the oldest yet alive - if he was alive. But he was so old that I had forgotten him, since he had bought nothing after the great explosion in the summer of 1914. Yes, very, very old. The earliest letters were dated more than

half a century back, when my grandfather was head of the business. Yet I could not recall having had any personal relationships with him during the thirty-seven years in which I had been an active worker in the establishment.

All indications showed that he must have been one of those antediluvian eccentrics, a few of whom survive in those German provincial towns. His writing was copperplate, and every item in his orders was underlined in red ink. Each price was given in words as well as figures, so that there could be no mistake. These peculiarities, and his use of torn-out fly-leaves as writing paper, enclosed in a scratch assortment of envelopes, hinted at the penuriousness of a confirmed backwoodsman. His signature was always followed by his style and title in full: "Forest Ranger and Economic Councillor, Retired; Lieutenant, Retired; Holder of the Iron Cross First Class." Since he was obviously a veteran of the war of 1870-71, he must by now be close on eighty.

For all his cheese-paring and for all his eccentricities, he had manifested exceptional shrewdness, knowledge, and taste as collector of prints and engravings. A careful study of his orders, which had at first totalled very small sums indeed, disclosed that in the days when a thaler could still pay for a pile of lovely German woodcuts, this country bumpkin had got together a collection of etchings and the like outrivalling the widely trumpeted acquisitions of war profiteers. Merely those which, in the course of decades, he had brought from us for trifling sums should be worth a large amount of money to-day; and I had no reason to suppose that he had failed to pick up similar bargains elsewhere. Was his collection dispersed? I was too familiar with what had been going on in the art trade since the date of his last purchase not to feel confident that such a collection could scarcely have changed hands entire without my getting wind of the event. If he was dead, his treasures had probably remained intact in the hands of his heirs.

The affair seemed so interesting that I set forth next day (yesterday evening) on a journey to one of the most out-of-the-way towns in Saxony. When I left the tiny railway station and strolled along the main street, it seemed to me impossible that anyone inhabiting one of these gimcrack houses, furnished in a way with which you are doubtless familiar, could possibly own a full of magnificent Rembrandt etchings together with an precedented number of Durer wood cuts and a complete collection of Mantegnas. However, I went to the post office to inquire, and was astonished to learn that sometime Forest Ranger and Economic Councillor of name I mentioned was still living. They told me how to find his house, and I will admit that my heart beat fast than usual as I made my way thither. It was well before noon.

The connoisseur of whom I was in search lived on the second floor of one of those jerry-built houses which were run up in such numbers by speculators during the sixties of the last century. The first floor was occupied by master tailor. On the second landing to the left was the name-plate of the manager of the local post-office while the porcelain shield on the right-hand door bore the name of my quarry. I had run him to earth! My ring was promptly answered by a very old, white-haired woman wearing a black lace cap. I handed her my card and asked whether the master was at home. With air of suspicion she glanced at me, at the card, and then back at my face once more. In this God-forsaken little town a visit from an inhabitant of the metropolis was a disturbing event. However, in as friendly a tone as she could muster, she asked me to be good enough to wait a minute or two in the hall, and vanished through doorway. I heard whispering,

and then a loud, hearty, masculine voice: "Herr Rackner from Berlin, you say, the famous dealer in antiquities? Of course I shall be delighted to see him. "Thereupon the old woman reappeared and invited me to enter.

I took off my overcoat, and followed her. In the middle of the cheaply furnished room was a man standing up to receive me. Old but hale, he had a bushy moustache and was wearing a semi-military frogged smoking-jacket. In the most cordial way, he held out both hands towards me. But though this gesture was spontaneous and in no wise forced, it was in strange contrast with the stiffness of his attitude. He did not advance to meet me, so that I was compelled (I must confess I was a trifle piqued) to walk right up to him before I could shake. Then I noticed that his hand, too, did not seek mine, but was waiting for mine to clasp it. At length I guessed what was amiss. He was blind.

Ever since I was a child I have been uncomfortable in presence of the blind. It embarrasses me, produces in me a sense of bewilderment and shame to encounter anyone who is thoroughly alive, and yet has not the full use of his senses. I feel as if I were taking an unfair advantage, and I was keenly conscious of this sensation as I glanced into the fixed and sightless orbs beneath the bristling white eyebrows. The blind man, however, did not leave me time to dwell upon this discomfort. He exclaimed, laughing with boisterous delight:

"A red-letter day, indeed! Seems almost a miracle that one of the big men of Berlin should drop in as you have done. There's need for us provincials to be careful, you know, when a noted dealer such as yourself is on the war-path. We've a saying in this part of the world: 'Shut your doors and button up your pockets if there are gipsies about!' I can guess why you've taken the trouble to call. Business doesn't thrive, I've gathered. No buyers or very few, so people are looking up their old customers. I'm afraid you'll draw a blank. We pensioners are glad enough to find there's still some bread for dinner. I've been a collector in my time, but now I'm out of the game. My buying days are over."

I hastened to tell him he was under a misapprehension, that I had not called with any thought of effecting sales. Happening to be in the neighbourhood I felt loath to miss the chance of paying my respects to a long standing customer who was at the same time one of the most famous among German collectors. Hardly had the phrase passed my lips when a remarkable change took place in the old man's expression. He stood stiffly in the middle of the room, but his face lighted up and his whole aspect was suffused with pride. He turned in the direction where he fancied his wife to be, and nodded as if to say, "D'you hear that?" Then, turning back to me, he resumed - having dropped the brusque, drill-sergeant tone he had previously used, and speaking in a gentle, nay, almost tender voice:

"How charming of you. . . . I should be sorry, however, if your visit were to result in nothing more than your making the personal acquaintanceship of an old buffer like myself. At any rate I've something worth while for you to see - more worth while than you could find in Berlin in the Albertina at Vienna, or even in the Louvre (God's curse on Paris!) A man who has been a diligent collector for fifty years, with taste to guide him, gets hold of treasures that are not to be picked up at every street-corner. Lisbeth, give me the key of the cupboard, please."

Now a strange thing happened. His wife, who had been listening with a pleasant smile, was startled. She raised her hands towards me, clasped them imploringly, and shook her head. What these gestures signified was a puzzle to me. Next she went up to her husband and touched his shoulder, saying:

"Franz, dear, you have forgotten to ask our visitor whether he may not have another appointment; and, anyhow, it is almost dinner-time. - I am sorry," she went on, looking at me, "that we have not enough in the house for an unexpected guest. No doubt you will dine at the inn. If you will take a cup of coffee with us afterwards, my daughter Anna Maria will be here, and she much better acquainted than I am with the contents of the portfolios."

Once more she glanced piteously at me. It was plain that she wanted me to refuse the proposal to examine the collection there and then. Taking my cue, I said that in fact I had a dinner engagement at the Golden Stag, but should be only too delighted to return at three, when there would be plenty of time to examine anything Herr Kronfeld wanted to show me. I was not leaving before six o'clock.

The veteran was as pettish as a child deprived of a favourite toy.

"Of course," he growled, "I know you mandarins from Berlin have extensive claims on your time. Still, I really think you will do well to spare me a few hours. It is not merely two or three prints I want to show you, but the contents of twenty-seven portfolios, one for each master, and all of them full to bursting. However, if you come at three sharp, I dare say we can get through by six."

The wife saw me out. In the entrance hall, before she opened the front door, she whispered:

"Do you mind if Anna Maria comes to see you at the hotel before you return? It will be better for various reasons which I cannot explain just now."

"Of Course, of course, a great pleasure. Really, I am dining alone, and your daughter can come along directly you have finished your own meal."

An hour later, when I had removed from the dining-room to the parlour of the Golden Stag, Anna Maria Kronfeld arrived. An old maid, wizened and diffident, plainly dressed, she contemplated me with embarrassment. I did my best to put her at her ease, and express my readiness to go back with her at once, if her father was impatient, though it was short of the appointed hour. At this she reddened, grew even more confused and then stammered a request for a little talk before we set out.

"Please sit down," I answered. "I am entirely at your service."

She found it difficult to begin. Her hands and her lips trembled. At length:

"My mother sent me. We have to ask a favour of you. Directly you get back, Father will want to show you his collection; and the collection ... the collection. Well, there's very little of it left."

She panted, almost sobbed, and went on breathlessly:

"I must be frank. . ." You know what troublous times we are passing through, and I am sure you will understand. Soon after the war broke out, my father became completely blind. His sight had already been failing. Agitation, perhaps, contributed. Though he was over seventy, he wanted to go to the front, remembering the fight in which he had taken part so long ago. Naturally there was no use for his services. Then, when the advance of our armies was checked, he took the matter very much to heart, and the doctor thought that may have precipitated the oncoming of blindness. In other respects, as you will have noticed, he is vigorous. Down to 1914 he could take long walks, and go out shooting. Since the failure of his eyes, his only pleasure is in his collection. He looks at it every day. 'Looks at it,' I say, though he sees nothing. Each afternoon he has the portfolios on the table, and fingers the prints one by one, in the order which many years have rendered so familiar. Nothing else interests him. He makes me read reports of auctions; and the higher the prices, the more enthusiastic does he become.

"There's the dreadful feature of the situation. Father knows nothing about the inflation; that we are ruined; that his monthly pension would not provide us with a day's food. Then we have others to support. My sister's husband was killed at Verdun, and there are four children. These money troubles have been kept from him. We cut down expenses as much as we can, but it is impossible to make ends meet. We began to sell things, trinkets and so on, without interfering with his beloved collection. There was very little to sell, since Father had always spent whatever he could scrape together upon woodcuts, copperplate engravings, and the like. The collector's mania! Well, at length it was a question whether we were to touch the collection or to let him starve. We didn't ask permission. What would have been the use? He hasn't the ghost of a notion how hard food is to come by, at any price; has never heard that Germany was defeated and surrendered Alsace- Lorraine. We don't read him items of that sort from the newspapers!

"The first piece we sold was a very valuable one, a Rembrandt etching, and the dealer paid us a long price, a good many thousand marks. We thought it would last us for years. But you know how money was melting away in 1922 and 1923. After we had provided for our immediate needs, we put the rest in a bank. In two months it was gone! We had to sell another engraving, and then another. That was during the worst days of inflation and each time the dealer delayed settlement until the price was not worth a tenth or a hundredth of what he had promised to pay. We tried auction-rooms, and were cheated there too, though the bids were raised by millions. The million- or milliard-mark notes were waste-paper by the time we got them. The collection was scattered to provide daily bread, and little of that.

"That was why Mother was so much alarmed when you turned up to-day. Directly the portfolios are opened, our pious fraud will be disclosed. He knows each item by touch. You see, every print we disposed of was immediately replaced by a sheet of blank cartridge-paper of the same size and thickness, so that he would notice no difference when he handled it. Feeling them one by one, and counting them, he derives almost much pleasure as if he could actually see them. He

never tries to show them to anyone here, where there is no connoisseur, no one worthy to look at them; but he loves each of them so ardently that I think his heart would break if he knew they had been dispersed. The last time he asked someone to look at them, it was the curator of the copper-plate engravings in Dresden, who died years ago.

"I beseech you" - her voice broke - "not to shatter his illusion, not to undermine his faith, that the treasures he will describe to you are there for the seeing. He would not survive the knowledge of their loss. Perhaps we have wronged him; yet what could we do? One must live. Orphaned children are more valuable than old prints. Besides, it has been life and happiness to him to spend three hours every afternoon going through his imaginary collection, and talking to each specimen as if it were a friend. To-day may be the most enthralling experience since his sight failed. How he has longed for the chance of exhibiting his treasures to an expert! If you will lend yourself to the deception . . ."

In my cold recital, I cannot convey to you how poignant was this appeal. I have seen many a sordid transaction in my business career, have had to look on supinely while persons ruined by inflation have been diddled out of cherished heirlooms which they were compelled to sacrifice for a crust. But my heart has not been utter calloused, and this tale touched me to the quick. I need hardly tell you that I promised to play up.

We went to her house together. On the way I was grieved (though not surprised) to learn for what preposterously small amounts these ignorant though kind-hearted women had parted with prints many of which were extremely valuable and some of them unique. This confirmed my resolve to give all the help in my power. As we mounted the stairs we heard a jovial shout: "Come in! Come in!" With the keen hearing of the blind he had recognized the footsteps for which he had been eagerly waiting.

"Franz usually takes a siesta after dinner, but excitement kept him awake to-day," said the old woman, with a smile as she let us in. A glance at her daughter showed her that all was well. The stack of portfolios was on the table. The blind collector seized me by the arm and thrust me into a chair which was placed ready for me.

"Let's begin at once. There's a lot to see, and time presses. The first portfolio contains Durers. Nearly a full set, and you'll think each cut finer than the others. Magnificent specimens. Judge for yourself."

He opened the portfolio as he spoke saying:

"We start with the Apocalypse series, of course." Then, tenderly, delicately (as one handles fragile and precious objects), he picked up the first of the blank sheets of cartridge-paper and held it admiringly before my sighted eyes and his blind ones. So enthusiastic was his gaze that it was difficult to believe he could not see. Though I knew it to be fancy, I found it difficult to doubt that there was a glow of recognition in the wrinkled visage.

"Have you ever come across a finer print? How sharp the impression. Every detail crystal-clear. I compared mine with the one at Dresden; a good one, no doubt, but 'fuzzy' in contrast with the specimen you are looking at. Then I have the whole pedigree."

He turned the sheet over and pointed at the back so convincingly that involuntarily I leaned forward to read the non-existent inscriptions.

"The stamp of the Nagler collection, followed by those of Remy and Esdaille. My famous predecessors never thought that their treasure would come to roost in this little room."

I shuddered as the unsuspecting enthusiast extolled the blank sheet of paper; my flesh crept when he placed a finger-nail on the exact spot where the alleged imprints had been made by long-dead collectors. It was as ghostly as if the disembodied spirits of the men he named had risen from the tomb. My tongue clave to the roof of my mouth - until once more I caught sight of distraught countenances of Kronfelds' wife and daughter. Then I pulled myself together and resumed my role. With forced heartiness, I exclaimed:

"Certainly you are right. This specimen is peerless."

He swelled with triumph.

"But that's nothing," he went on. "Look at these two the *Melancholia*, and the illuminated print of the *Passion*. The latter, beyond question, has no equal. The freshness of the tints! Your colleagues in Berlin and the custodians of the public galleries would turn green with envy at the sight."

I will not bore you with details. Thus it went on, a paean, for more than two hours, as he ransacked portfolio after portfolio. An eerie business to watch handling of these two or three hundred blanks, to chime in at appropriate moments with praise of merits which for the blind collector were so eminently real that again and again (this was my salvation) his faith kindled my own.

Once only did disaster loom. He was "showing" me first proof of Rembrandt's *Antiope*, which must have been of inestimable value and which had doubtless been sold for a song. Again he dilated on the sharpness of the print as he passed his fingers lightly over it the sensitive tips missed some familiar indentation. His face clouded, his mouth trembled, and he said:

"Surely, surely it's the *Antiope*? No one touches the wood-cuts and etchings but myself. How can it have got misplaced?"

"Of course it's the *Antiope*, Herr Kronfeld," I said, hastening to take the "print" from his hand to expatiate upon various details which my own remembrance enabled me to conjure up upon the blank surface.

His bewilderment faded. The more I praised, the more gratified he became, until at last he said exultantly to the two women:

"Here's a man who knows what's what! You have been inclined to grumble at my 'squandering' money upon the collection. It's true that for half a century and more I denied myself beer, wine, tobacco, travelling, visits to the theatre, books, devoting all I could spare to these purchases you have despised. Well, Herr Rackner confirms my judgment. When I am dead and gone, you'll be richer than anyone in the town, as wealthy as the wealthiest folk in Dresden, and you'll have good reason for congratulating yourself on my 'craze'. But so long as I'm alive, the collection must be kept together. After I've been boxed and buried, this expert or another will help you to sell. You'll have to, since my pension dies with me."

As he spoke, his fingers caressed the despoiled portfolios. It was horrible and touching. Not for years, not since 1914, had I witnessed an expression of such unmitigated happiness on the face of a German. His wife and daughter watched him with tear-dimmed eyes, yet ecstatically, like those women of old who - affrighted and rapturous - found the stone rolled away and the sepulchre empty in the garden outside the wall of Jerusalem. But the man could not have enough of my appreciation. He went on from portfolio to portfolio from "print" to "print," drinking in my words, until, outweared, I was glad when the lying blanks were replaced in their cases and room was made to serve coffee on the table.

My host, far from being tired, looked rejuvenated. He had story after story to tell concerning the way he had chanced upon his multifarious treasures, wanting in this connexion, to take out each relevant piece once more. He grew peevish when I insisted, when his wife and daughter insisted, that I should miss my train if he delayed me any longer. . . .

In the end he was reconciled to my going, and we said good-bye. His voice mellowed; he took both my hands in his and fondled them with the tactile appreciation of the blind.

"Your visit has given me immense pleasure," he said with a quaver in his voice. "What a joy to have been able at long last to show my collection to one competent to appreciate it. I can do something to prove my gratitude, to make your visit to a blind old man worth while. A codicil to my will shall stipulate that your firm, whose probity everyone knows, will be entrusted with the auctioning of my collection."

He laid a hand lovingly upon the pile of worthless portfolios.

"Promise me they shall have a handsome catalogue. I could ask no better monument."

I glanced at the two women, who were exercising the utmost control, fearful lest the sound of their trembling should reach his keen ears. I promised the impossible, and he pressed my hand in response.

Wife and daughter accompanied me to the door. They did not venture to speak, but tears were flowing down their cheeks. I myself was in little better case. An art dealer, I had come in search

of bargains. Instead, as events turned out, I had been a sort of angel of good-luck, lying like a trooper in order to assist in a fraud which kept an old man happy. Ashamed of lying, I was glad that I had lied. At any rate I had aroused an ecstasy which seems foreign to this period of sorrow and gloom.

As I stepped forth into the street, I heard a window and my name called. Though the old fellow could not see me, he knew in which direction I should walk, and his sightless eyes were turned thither. He leaned out so far that his anxious relatives put their arms round him lest he should fall. Waving a handkerchief, he shouted:

"A pleasant journey to you, Herr Rackner."

His voice rang like a boy's. Never shall I forget that cheerful face, which contrasted so grimly with the careworn aspect of the passers-by in the street. The illusion I had helped to sustain made life good for him. Was it not Goethe who said:

“Collectors are happy creatures”?

IMPROMPTU STUDY OF A HANDICRAFT

A GLORIOUS April morning in 1931! After a drenching shower, the air was sweet, cool, moist, resplendent in the renewed sunshine. Incarnate spring-time, fluid ozone; and, even in the centre of Paris, even in the Boulevard Sebastopol, I inhaled the aromas of meadows and the seashore. This miracle was the outcome of one of those capricious cloudbursts in which a belated spring delights to herald its coming. An hour before, on the way westwards towards the capital, our express had thundered into a black storm which hung low over the horizon. At Epernay, when the advertisement hoardings of the great city were already beginning to thicken in the outraged fields, and when the elderly Englishwoman seated in the opposite corner was packing away her goods and chattels in an attache case, the huge raindrops had splashed down from the heavy cloud which had been racing over our train along the Marne valley ever since we had first encountered it at Vitry-le-Francois. A pale flash of lightning had given the signal, instantly followed by the drumming note of the rain with which the express was bombarded as if by machine-gun fire. The windows rattled protestingly under the hail; and the locomotive capitulating before the assault, lowered its grey streamer to touch the earth. Nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard, but hail and rain upon steel and grass; and, like a whipped beast, the train sped onward as if hoping to outrun the storm.

But the violence of the elements was spent by the we reached the Gare de l'Est. As the passengers engaged porters, the boulevard was glistening in the sunshine beneath the dispersing rain-cloud, the house-fronts shone like polished metal, and great rifts of azure showed in the sky. Bathed and refreshed like Venus Anadyomene rising from the waves, the town, in its golden nudity, emerged from the cloak of rain in which it had been enwrapped. To right and to left, from the hundreds places in which they had sought shelter, people throng back on to the pavements, laughing merrily as they resumed their course; the suspended wheel-traffic rolled on its noisy way; everyone obviously rejoicing in the restored sunshine. Even the sickly-looking trees of the boulevard, growing out of hard asphalt instead of soft earth, invigorated by the douche, seemed glad to stretch their be-blossomed fingers upward into the blue, and did their best to fill the air with perfume. Wonderful to relate, for a few minutes after the shower they were successful. In the very heart of Paris, the Boulevard Sebastopol, one could actually enjoy the aroma of horse-chestnut flowers.

As if this had not been enough to fill me with delight on so lovely an April morning, I was further in luck; for arriving early, I had no appointment to bother me until late afternoon. Not one among the five and a half million of Parisian bipeds knew of my coming or was expecting me, so I was divinely free to follow my own bent. I could saunter up and down the boulevards; read the newspapers; sit in a cafe; look into the shop-windows; go book-hunting along the Seine; telephone to my friends; or, simply enjoy the fresh April air. Having no ties, I could do anyone of these things, or a thousand others. Fortune favouring me, however, or the promptings of instinct, I chose the best course of all which was to do nothing definite. I made no plan, sought no goal but wandered aimlessly through the streets, slowly along the sidewalks, but quickening my steps when I came to a crossing. At length chance brought me into the big boulevards, and I was fairly

tired by the time I reached the terrace of a cafe at the corner of the Boulevard des Italiens and the Rue Drouot.

"Well, here I am once more," I thought, leaning back in a comfortable chair, while I lighted a cigar; and here are you, Paris, the same old Paris. It must be fully two years since we friends last met. Now, we re going to have a good look at one another again. Go ahead, Paris! Show me what new tricks you have learned since I was last here. Begin right away. Unroll your incomparable sound-film, *Les Boulevards de Paris*, that masterpiece of light and colour and movement with its hundreds of thousands of unpaid supers; and make music for me, the inimitable clattering music of your streets. Be lavish; smarten up; show what you can do; turn on your huge orchestrion with its marvellous harmonies and discords, its reckless automobiles, its shouting hawkers, its glaring posters, its hooters, its flashing shop-fronts, its hurrying foot-passengers. Here I sit, more receptive than ever in my life, with leisure and longing to look and listen till my eyes are dazzled and my head spins. On, on, more and more riotously, giving vent to perpetually new cries, shouts, and hootings, unwearingly, for all my senses are open to impressions; and I, tiny foreign insect that I am, alive and breathing, am ready to suck my fill of blood out of your titanic body. On, on, as ready to give yourself to me as I am ready to give myself up to the enjoyment of you, unknowable city whose witchery is everlastingly reborn."

For (a third wonder of a most wonderful morning) an effervescence in my blood had already shown me that this was to be one of my absorbingly interesting days such as are apt, in me, to follow a journey or a wakeful night. On such days I am, as it were, doubled or manifolded; my one restricted life does not suffice me, and a sense of inward tension makes me want to slough my skin as the imago bursts the pupa-case. Every pore is astretch; every nerve-ending develops into a grappling-iron; my sight and hearing grow unusually keen, to the accompaniment of an almost sinister lucidity of mind. I have a sense of a peculiarly intimate contact between myself and the objects in my environment, a contact like that of an electric switch which is working satisfactorily, and I am animated by a painful eagerness to multiply these contacts wherever possible. Whatever my eyes light upon has an eerie aspect. I can spend hours watching a navvy breaking up the surface of an asphalted street with a mechanical drill, and so intimate is my sympathy with his toil that my shoulders ache as I look on. Or I can stand for hours in front of a window, letting my imagination run riot concerning the destinies of the fellow-creatures who live in the room to which it admits the daylight; I can follow some casual passer-by for miles, magnetically drawn in his wake by idle curiosity; and, though I am aware all the time that an independent observer would regard my conduct as incomprehensible and foolish, my attention is more intoxicatingly riveted than it would be by a skilfully staged play or by the adventures described in an engrossing book. It may well be that this excessive sensitiveness, this pseudo-clairvoyance, is induced by the sudden change of locality, is the outcome of variations in barometric pressure and of the resulting chemical modifications in the blood - but I have never tried to discover the scientific explanation. Whatever the reason, when the state I am now describing takes possession of me, my ordinary life seems like a dream, and the memories of commonplace days grow jejune and void. It is only in this abnormal condition that I am fully myself, and wholly conscious of the amazing multiplicity of life.

In this receptive mood, ready for what chance would bring, I sat on the bank of the human stream, awaiting I knew not what. But my waiting was tinged by the tremulous expectation of the angler who is on the watch for a nibble. My zest was full of the conviction, the inviolable certainty, that something would happen to gratify my curiosity. For a while, however, nothing occurred; and in half an hour my eyes were wearied by the passing throng, so that I could no longer see anything distinctly. The people walking along the boulevard became featureless, a mere confused mass of faintly tinted ovals with anxious, yearning or masterful faces beneath hats, caps or kepis - a tedious swill of dirty human water which grew greyer and duller the more my gaze was fatigued. I was tired out, as by the flickering of a badly produced and badly screened film, and was on the point of leaving my seat and resuming my peregrinations. Then at length, at length, I discovered Him.

What first drew my attention to this stranger was the trifling fact that he was continually re-entering my field of vision. The thousands upon thousands of others who had appeared during the last half hour had vanished once for all, as if drawn by invisible threads. Hardly had I caught sight of a profile, a shadow, a sketch, when it was swept away by the current, never to reappear. But this man returned again and again to the same spot. That was why I noticed him. Just as, on the seashore the waves will, with incredible obstinacy, wash up the same ragged piece of seaweed ever and again, only to lick it back once more with their wet tongues before depositing it on the beach anew, so did this one figure emerge and re-emerge repeatedly from the whirlpool at the same spot on its marge, and with the same humble and submissive mien.

Except for the way in which he kept bobbing up like a cork, he was not much to look at - a wizened hungry fellow, whose lean body was wrapped in a light canary-coloured overcoat which had certainly not been cut to his measure, for his hands were lost in the long sleeves. Enormously too large for him, this yellow garment (of a bygone fashion) matched ill with a visage almost as pointed as that of a shrew-mouse, and with his thin lips, disfigured by a blond toothbrush moustache and the stubble of a beard. There was something ridiculous, too, about his movements, for this yellow wraith moved hither and thither upon painfully thin shanks, turning up furtively now from the right and now from the left side of the human vortex. At each emergence, he looked as timid as a hare coming out of an oat-field, snuffing the air anxiously, bowing his head subserviently and then vanishing again in the throng.

The second point that struck me about the shabbily dressed creature (who reminded me, by some quaint trick of association, of one of the petty officials in Gogol's play *The Inspector-General*) was that he must be extremely shortsighted or very awkward, for repeatedly I saw other pedestrians hurrying along with some more definite aim collide with and narrowly escape overturning this piece of human flotsam. He did not seem to take offence at such mishaps, but humbly drew aside, vanished, re-emerged - at length (perhaps) for the tenth or twelfth time during the half-hour I had been sitting in front of the cafe.

Well, this interested me. Nay, rather, I was annoyed with myself because, on one of my inquisitive and observant days, I could not guess what the fellow was about. The more I cudgelled my brains, the more vexatious became my ungratified curiosity. "What the devil are you at?" I thought. "Why are you waiting and continually bobbing up at the same corner? You're

not a beggar, certainly, for the professional mendicant does not choose a pitch where everyone is in a hurry, without an instant to feel in his pocket for a coin. Nor are you a workman, for a workman with a job to do has not so much time to waste. You can't be waiting for a girl, for the oldest and ugliest of women would never make a date with such a pitiful scarecrow as you are. What's your little game? Are you one of the rascals who style themselves 'guides,' but whose real business it is to peddle smutty photographs, and offer to show clod-hoppers on the razzle-dazzle in Paris all the wonders of Sodom and Gomorrah? No, that theory doesn't fit either, for I have not seen you accost a soul. Indeed, your main object seems to be to avoid notice or conversation. What on earth are you looking for in my cabbage patch?" I watched him more and more keenly, for in five minutes it had become a really urgent matter for me to discover what this canary-coated prowler was doing in the boulevard. Then the solution dawned on me. The man was a detective!

Yes, he was a plainclothes police officer. This was made clear to me by a detail - by the obliquely directed but lightning glance with which he scanned the faces of all whom he passed. During the first year of their training, the police have to learn the trick of seeing essentials in a moment, without attracting attention. Not so easy, thus in an instant to register fully how the person under observation is dressed, to study the features and compare them with the memory of those of "wanted" criminals. But, I repeat, the scrutiny must be effected without arousing suspicion in the mind of the person scrutinized, Now, the man I was myself surreptitiously observing had learned his trade. With seeming indifference he made his way through the press, allowing people to jostle him as they pleased, but, from between his half-opened lids, taking a snapshot of each of them. No one noticed his trick of observation; and I should never have noticed it on any other than one of my specially observant days, when I was persistently the watch.

My plainclothes man must certainly be a past master of his art, for he was so successful in imitating, not merely the garb, but also the gait of a tramp, thus hiding his dread occupation. As a rule one can recognize a plain-clothes policeman a hundred paces away by the peculiarities of the drilled man's walk, and the self-important air which makes him look like a sergeant in mufti. His spine is unbending; he lacks the obsequious manner usual in those who have been daunted by years of poverty and hardship. The present specimen, however, had reached perfection in his role of tatterdemalion and broken-down loafer. What fine touches that the canary-coloured overcoat and the brown bowler worn rakishly to one side should have, still clinging to them, vestiges of the elegance of a former owner, while the frayed-out trouser-legs and the threadbare collar of the coat showing above the wrap indicated extreme poverty. A skill psychologist, the man must have noticed how destitution, like a famished rat, begins by gnawing at the edges of garments. In admirable keeping with this melancholy rig-out were the wasted features, the thin stubble beard and moustache (probably stuck on with spirit gum), the tousled locks which would have convinced every unprejudiced observer that the poor wretch must have passed the previous night upon a bench or upon a plank-bed in the lock-up. Super-added was a hacking cough, a continual pulling of the thin wrap together as if to ward off the chill of the spring breeze, and a weary leaden walk - so that the whole picture was an impersonation of advanced pulmonary consumption.

Let me frankly admit that I plumed myself upon my discovery. I delighted at being thus able undetected to watch a watcher, to detect a detective - although in another part of my mind I was furious that on so splendid a morning, when the sun of God's April shone on the world in so friendly a fashion, a disguised and salaried officer of the State should be trying to hunt down some unhappy wight in the hope of dragging his quarry off to jail. Interest, however, overcame scruples, and I continued to watch the man's every movement with almost unalloyed delight.

Until of a sudden, pleasure in my discovery was dashed as promptly as the chilling of one's sense of genial warmth when a cloud hides the sun. I had become aware that there was something wrong with my diagnosis, something inharmonious in supposition. I was uncertain once more. Could the man really be a detective? The more closely I now examined the strange figure, the stronger grew my conviction that the signs of abject poverty were too genuine to be merely assumed by a police-spy. That filthy shirt-collar! No one who had anything else to wear could have brought himself to put such a thing round his neck. Then the shoes, if the articles in question really deserved the name. The right one was laced, not with proper laces, but with coarse string; the left one had a sole so loose that it clattered like a croaking frog at each step the wearer took. Who would fabricate such foot gear even for the most important of masquerades? No longer could I entertain the notion that this slouching ambulatory scarecrow could be any sort of police-agent. But if not, what was he? Why this ceaseless coming and going; why these furtive glances at all and sundry? Anger gripped me because I could not unriddle his riddle. An impulse moved me to take him by the shoulder and say: "Fellow, what are you doing? What is your business ere?"

Another flash of inspiration, and this time I felt my diagnosis was unchallengeable. I had hit the bull's-eye. Of course the man was not a detective! How could I have made so idiotic a mistake? He was (if the phrase can pass muster) the precise opposite of a police-agent. He was a criminal, a pickpocket; a veritable, highly trained, professional pickpocket, prowling up and down the boulevard on the hunt for note-cases, watch vanity bags, and other "unconsidered trifles" that might be snapped up. He followed the trade of Autolycus. This was made plain to me by the way he pushed into the thickest parts of the throng. His apparent clumsiness, his frequent collisions with passers-by - collisions which gave him a chance of practising his craft were explained. The position grew steadily clearer. Now, at length, I was able to grasp why he had chosen his pitch in front of the cafe at the street-corner, for the place was exceptionally crowded thanks to an adjoining shopkeeper's device. The goods exposed for sale were nothing out of the ordinary: coconuts, Turkish delight, and various highly-coloured caramels. The proprietor, however, had had the happy thought, not only of giving his shop-window an oriental and pseudo-tropical aspect by filling it with palms and by hanging up some exotic landscapes, but of supplementing this southland exuberance by having three monkeys in a huge cage which occupied the upper part of the space behind the plate glass. These beasts were unceasingly engaged in their habitual grimaces and often unseemly contortions.

The plan worked, for there was always a dense crowd in front of the window - a crowd consisting mainly of women, whose outcries of delight and admiration showed that it was a pleasure to them to see the ways of their men-folk parodied in the antics of these naked and tailed quadrumana.

Now, whenever there was a suitable medley of open-mouthed starers gathered in front of this window, my canary-coated friend insinuated himself into the mass. Although so far as I am aware, apart from certain rather old-world belle-tristic accounts such as are to be found, for instance, *The Winter's Tale* and *Oliver Twist*, the art and craft of pickpocketing remains to be described, I knew enough of it to remember that the Artful Dodger needs a crowd just as much as herrings need to be in a shoal during the spawning season - for it is only when people are closely jammed together that the pick-pocket's victim fails to notice the hand which is making free with his wallet or his watch. Furthermore, the free desired coup is hard to carry out unless the person who is to be robbed has his or her attention diverted by something which dulls the unconscious watchfulness wherewith (in a thievish world) everyone guards his possessions. A street fire is well known to be a thieves' harvest ground. Here the place of the fire was taken by the monkeys, with their farcical gestures. The gibbering posturing, grimacing little nudities were the unwitting accomplices of my new friend, the pickpocket.

I hope the reader will forgive me when I admit that I was filled with enthusiasm by my discovery. This was my first sight of a pickpocket, and novelties are always interesting. No, let me be scrupulously accurate. It was my second. In London, during my student days, wishing to better my knowledge of the English colloquial, I used often to attend police-court proceedings. There, on one occasion, I saw a carrot-haired and pimply-faced young fellow brought into the dock by two stalwart policemen. On the table lay a purse. Witnesses gave sworn evidence. The magistrate said a few words and the red-haired youth vanished - sentenced (if I rightly understood) to six months' imprisonment.

That was the first pickpocket I ever saw, but there was a notable difference from the present occasion. I had not then really seen a pickpocket, but only a man in custody and under trial, concerning whom two witnesses testified to his guilt. I had not seen the nefarious deed, but merely its juristic reconstruction. I had seen a man accused, then a man condemned, not a thief in the act of plying his trade. Therefore I had not seen a thief. For a thief is only a thief when he is thieving, and not at some later date when he is called upon to answer for his offence; even as a poet is only a poet in the act of creation, and not when (maybe several years afterwards) he recites his poem over the wireless. An artist is only an artist when practising his art, and no one is a doer except when engaged in the deed. There was now, perhaps to be vouchsafed me the sight of such a magical moment. I was to see a pickpocket at work, to see him in his most characteristic semblance, when actually stealing, when manifesting his quintessential reality - one of those rare instants which are as seldom disclosed to public gaze as procreation and birth. The possibility thrilled me.

I need hardly say that I was determined to make the most of my opportunity. I must not miss any detail of the preliminaries, and still less the supreme moment of action. I was resolved to unravel the whole mystery of this handicraft. My seat at the cafe was not a satisfactory post of observation, so I quitted it forthwith, wanting a point of vantage from which, unhindered, I could keep watch upon the activities of the newly discovered master-craftsman. This outlook was obtainable from beside a kiosk plastered with multi-coloured placards to advertise the plays then running in Paris. I stood as if reading these notices, whereas in truth I was closely following

every movement of my light-fingered friend. Thus I stood sentinel for more than an hour, while the nimble devil plied his difficult and dangerous trade - watched with keener interest and closer attention that I can remember to have ever felt at a first night performance in the theatre or at the production of the most widely trumpeted of films. For concentrated reality excels and outbids the most consummate art. Vive la realite!

The time from eleven till twelve thus spent in the boulevard passed with lightning speed, simply because it full was of enthralling tensions, of countless decisions and incidents, I could spend hours upon the description of the happenings of this one hour, whose incessant perils made so tremendous acclaim upon my nervous energy. Never before had I come near to understanding how complicated, how formidable, how horribly tensing an art is pocket-picking in the open street during broad daylight. Hitherto I had merely thought that the pickpocket must indeed be bold, and must have a sleight of hand akin to that of a conjurer.

I have already mentioned *Oliver Twist*. There Dickens describes how, in Fagin's den, the old rascal trained his apprentices to steal handkerchiefs. There was a lay figure wearing a coat with a handkerchief in the pocket. To the front of the pocket a bell was attached, and what the novice had to learn was how to withdraw the handkerchief so delicately that the bell did not ring. But it now became plain to me that Dickens had laid too much stress upon prestidigitation. Probably he had never watched, as I was now able to watch, a pickpocket at work, and had therefore never realized that a thief who is plying his trade in broad daylight needs to excel in many things besides sleight of hand. The pickpocket must be well equipped with the mental faculties of presence of mind and self-control, must be a cool and quick thinker, and must (above all) be extremely courageous. Twenty minutes' observation sufficed to show me that a thief must have the unerring decision of the operative surgeon. When a wounded heart is being sutured, a second's delay may be fatal. For such an operation, however, the patient is anaesthetized, cannot move, cannot resist; but the pickpocket has to "operate" like a lightning upon a person in full possession of his senses - and the region where the pocketbook is carried always hyper-sensitive.

Now while the pickpocket is operating with all possible speed, in the tensest and most exciting moment of action, his face must be calm, indifferent, almost bored. He must on no account betray excitement; must not, like the man of violence, the assassin, allow his eyes to flash when comes the supreme moment of the knife-thrust. The thief, while advancing his hand to seize his booty must look civil and friendly, prepared, if he jostles his victim, to say "Sorry" in an ordinary tone of polite apology. Nor does it suffice that he should be alert and adroit at the time of action. Beforehand it, has been incumbent upon him to use his intelligence and to exhibit his knowledge of human nature, to manifest both physiological and psychological expertize in deciding whether his chosen subject is a suitable one. Only the unobservant, the unsuspecting, are likely persons; and, among these, only those who have not buttoned up the overcoat, who are not walking too fast, and can therefore be approached inconspicuously. As my hour of close observation taught me, among a hundred, among five hundred foot-passengers, there will not be more than one or two worth considering from the pickpocket's outlook. Only on these rare exceptions will the intelligent thief venture to ply his trade; and, even then, the attempt will probably fail because such innumerable chances must collaborate to render success possible. How much experience, watchfulness, and self-command are requisite will be made plain by the consideration that

pickpocket, while paying the keenest attention to the task upon which he is engaged, must at the same time be constantly on the alert to see that he is not being spied upon. A constable or a sleuth may be watching from round any one of half a dozen corners. Apart from these professional thief-takers, the streets are full of persons, many of whom (like myself on the present occasion) have nothing better to do than to gratify their curiosity about other folk's business. Then the shop-fronts are full of mirrors in which his doings may be reflected, so that whose backs are turned to him may be watching him unknown. Mirrors apart, the shop-windows are a perpetual danger, for customers and assistants may have an eye on him through the plate-glass. The strain is terrific, the danger overwhelming, for a blunder may cost the performer three or four years of life; a tremor of the fingers, or too sharp a pull may make arrest inevitable.

Pocket-picking in daylight on a boulevard is work for a titan, demanding courage of the highest order. Since that April morning I always feel that injustice has been done when a newspaper dismisses the pickpocket with two or three lines as one of the most insignificant of evildoers. To steal a watch or a purse under such conditions needs as much boldness and intelligence as a balloon flight into the stratosphere, which will be recorded in scare headlines the world over; needs more reflective ingenuity than many a triumph in technical skill, more nerve than is requisite for most military or political enterprises. Were the world accustomed to judge achievements, not by final results, but by the amount of nervous energy expended in order to bring them about, it would (moral indignation notwithstanding) be less arrogantly inclined to make light of these street marauders. Of all the handicrafts, respectable or otherwise, practised on our planet, the one I am now considering is one of the most difficult, most dangerous, and in its fullest development, most closely akin to a fine art. My experience, my observations, on that April day in Paris have convinced me of this once for all.

Not only experience, not only observation, but in a sense participation as well. Only during the first few minutes was I able to study my canary-coated friend with the calm objectivity of a scientific observer. Passionate contemplation always evokes sympathy. By degrees, therefore, without conscious wish or deliberate intention, I began to identify myself with the thief, to get inside his skin, to join in the movements of his hands. From being a spectator I had, in the mental sphere, become an accomplice. To my surprise, after about a quarter of an hour I found myself scrutinizing the passers-by in order to decide whether they were likely subjects. Were their coats open or buttoned up: did they look absent-minded or wide-awake; was their appearance such as to suggest the possession of a fat wad of notes which would be worthy of my new friend's skill? Soon, indeed it grew plain to me that I had ceased to be neutral in the struggle which was afoot, but earnestly wished him to bring off a successful coup. I had forcibly to restrain the impulse to help him in his work! Well-nigh irresistible was the longing, when he seemed to be missing a favourable chance, to nod an indication: "There's your man, that fat fellow with the big bunch of flowers tucked under his arm."

Once, when the thief had again pushed into the throng, and, unexpectedly, a policeman came round the corner, my knees shook as if I myself were about to be taken into custody. I seemed to feel a heavy hand on his, nay on my shoulder. But then (thanks be!) the pickpocket slipped out of the press without having tried to steal, and was ignored by the minion of the law. All this was most exciting, but not yet exciting enough, for the more I identified myself with the thief the

more impatient did I grow because he had not yet made a strike. His unending hesitations aroused my anger. "Why the devil don't you pluck up heart and get to work? Try that chance, or that. Do something, anyhow to show you know your trade.

Luckily my friend, who neither knew nor guessed my interest in his doings, was not disturbed by my impatience. For this is the perennial difference between the accomplished artist and the amateur, that the artist knows full well how many futile efforts must precede the great success, being trained to await patiently the coming of the last, the decisive possibility. Just as the poet ignores a thousand alluring impressions that pass through his mind (impressions at which only a dilettante would prematurely grasp), in order to reserve his energies for the elaboration of the happy thought when it comes - so did this wizened creature let slip a hundred chances which seemed so promising to me, the tyro. He tried hither and thither, and had certainly handled the outside of a hundred pockets. But he had not found a hazard to his liking, and so with indefatigable patience and with an air of assumed indifference, he continued to tread the thirty paces up to the shop-window and back again, scrutinizing every possibility and weighing the chances of gain against dangers which to me were invisible. His tranquil, unflurried persistence filled me with admiration despite my impatience, and seemed to provide a guarantee of ultimate success, to strengthen my conviction that he would carry on until he had achieved his end. For my part, I was equally determined not to desist from my study of him until he had made his coup, even if it meant my staying at my post till midnight.

Noon had come, the hour when the streets of Paris are flooded, when from the lesser ways and the alleys, from stair cases and courtyards, streamlets of human beings pour into the great rivers - the boulevards. From factories and workshops, from offices and schools and shops, workmen and sempstresses and shop-assistants (the women are called "midinettes" because of their sudden emergence at this hour) came into the open; the workmen in white or blue overalls, the midinettes with little bunches of violets in their hair, petty officials clad in shiny frock-coats and each carrying the inevitable leather portfolio, porters, machinists of one sort and another - the countless types of those who do the unseen work of the great city. For long hours they had been pent in stuffy rooms; now they could stretch their limb: loosen their tongues, and breathe fresh air. They buzzed about; chattered merrily; lighted cigarettes and inhaled the smoke; thronged the cafes, the bars, and the creameries; enlivening the street for an hour. When that hour of freedom was up, they would have to return to confined spaces, and, behind closed windows, resume labour with the needle, at the bench, at the lathe, become again for the rest of the day tailors, cobblers, or what not. Knowing this, muscles and sinews made the most of the hour's freedom; knowing this, minds relaxed while the opportunity was given; knowing this, they all sought light and cheerfulness, novelty and entertainment. It was only to be expected that the shop where the monkeys were on show would profit by the need for distraction. Denser than ever became the crowd in front of the attractive window. The midinettes were in the front rows, twittering like birds; behind them stood workmen and loafers, uttering salacious witticisms; and the closer the throng, the more swiftly and vigorously did the man in the canary-coloured overcoat push his way through it, reminding me of a lively little goldfish swimming in a bowl.

"Now or never will he make his venture," I thought; and as this passed through my mind, I became dissatisfied with the point of observation at which I had been stationed so long. I must

get closer to the field of operations, must be near enough to see exactly how the trick was done. Not so easy to fulfill my wishes in this respect! The man was slippery as an eel, and could insinuate himself through the narrowest chinks in the crowd. A moment before, he had been standing close to me; now he was at the shop-window, in touch with the glass, so that in the twinkling of an eye he must have traversed five or six rows of the agglomerated onlookers.

More slowly than he, and more, cautiously, I followed him, keeping my eyes fixed on him, lest (in his elusive manner) he should have vanished to right or to left before I could get to him beside the window. I had no cause to be anxious, since for once in a way he was standing perfectly still. "There must be a reason for the change," said I to myself, and hastened to scan his nearest neighbours among the bystanders. One of them was an extremely stout woman, obviously impoverished. With her right hand she was holding the hand of an anemic-looking girl of about eleven years of age; in her left hand she carried an oil-cloth marketing-bag from which projected a couple of long cylindrical rolls of the typical French pattern. No doubt they were for the family dinner. Hatless, and dressed in a check cotton gown of rough and cheap material, this worthy woman of the people was enthralled by the monkeys. Her corpulent body was so violently shaken with laughter that the rolls in her bag rattled to and fro. This loud and unrestrained mirth became a rival attraction to the monkeys, and many of those who stood round her were looking at her as more of a raree-show than the four-handed beasts. She was enjoying herself with the frank delight, with the splendid thankfulness, of those whose limited means provide them with few opportunities for enjoyment; and to the poor there is something exceptionally fascinating about a free show, which comes like a gift from the gods. Nor did she desire a selfish gratification. Continually she leaned towards her daughter, saying, in a broad meridional accent, "Rrregarre doonc, Maargueriite," to make sure that the pale girl (who was shy in so big a crowd) was not missing any of the fun. A magnificent creature, this woman, a healthy and blooming fruit of the French people, she reminded me of the Greek goddess Gaea, the personification of the earth. I could have flung my arms round her to show my sympathy with her candid merriment. But suddenly I grew uneasy. I noticed that the sleeve of the canary-coloured overcoat was continually drawing nearer to the good woman's marketing-bag, which hung carelessly open - with the carelessness characteristic of the poor.

"Good God," I thought, "surely he's not going to grab this good-natured and cheerful woman's slenderly lined purse out of her marketing-bag!" I was revolted at the notion. Hitherto my attitude towards the pickpocket had been that of "a good sport." As previously explained, I had identified myself with him; had hoped, had wished, that in the end he might get a fine haul for so much trouble. Now, when for the first time I contemplated, not merely the attempt to steal, but the person who was to be robbed, when I looked at this charmingly simple, unsuspecting woman, happy and cheerful, though she probably had to gain her livelihood by scrubbing floors for a few sous an hour, anger seized me. "Hands off, you rascal!" I should have liked to shout. "Choose someone else to play your pranks on, and leave that poor woman alone!" I moved smartly forward, to get between the thief and the threatened marketing-bag. But as I did so, the fellow turned round and thrust past me with a "Pardon, Monsieur" uttered in thin and humble tones which I now heard clearly for the first time. In an instant, canary-coat was outside the crowd. Something (I know not what) gave me the impression that my intervention had come too late, that he had already made his coup.

Well, if so, I would not let him out of my sight. Roughly (a man on whose toes I trod, cursed me heartily) I shouldered my way after him, and was in time to see the canary-coloured overcoat vanish into a narrow side-street. I quickened my pace, and when I caught sight of him once more, I could scarcely trust my eyes. The little man whom I had been watching so closely for more than an hour had suddenly changed in aspect. Whereas hitherto his gait had been tottering and unsteady, like that of a much preoccupied weakling, he was now hurrying a like a weasel close to the wall, resembling a clerk who has missed his train and must race along on foot if he is not to be late at the office and risk getting the sack. Instead of, as before, looking repeatedly to right and to left he kept his lowered head steady as he hastened on his way. My conviction was strengthened. That was the gait of a thief after the act, gait number two, by which the criminal gets away from the scene of his crime as swiftly and inconspicuously as possible. There could be no doubt. The rogue had nipped the poor woman's purse out of her marketing-bag.

In my anger, I was on the point of raising a hue and cry, of shouting "Stop thief!" But courage failed me. After all, I had not seen the theft take place, I had nothing but surmise to guide me. More than this, one must have overweening self-confidence to be ready to collar a fellow-mortal and give him in charge; to assume God's prerogative of executing justice. I have never had self-confidence of that kind. I know too well how fallible is our "justice," and how presumptuous are those who endeavour, in this age of confusion and frustration, to buttress the temple of justice with the straws of particular instances.

While thus deliberating, and keeping my quarry in sight, I was myself overtaken by a fresh surprise. After he had traversed a couple more streets, this extraordinary man assumed a new gait. He no longer hastened, and no longer walked with hanging head, but drew himself up and sauntered with the independent air of any other citizen. He was outside the danger-zone: there was no pursuit; he no longer had any reason to expect trouble. He could take his ease. From being a pickpocket on active service, he had become an ordinary civilian, one of the five million inhabitants of Paris, who, puffing a cigarette, unconcernedly walk the boulevards. With a devastating air of innocence, striding easily and comfortably, he crossed the Chaussee d'Antin, and for the first time I had the impression that, like a genuine "flaneur," he was sizing up the looks or the approachability of every woman he encountered.

"Whither away, now, man of perpetual surprises?" We were in the little square that fronts the church of La Trinite, where the trees were already budding with fresh green. "Whither away? Ah, I understand! You want to rest for a few minutes on one of the benches. Naturally enough, for your morning's work must have tired you out." No, the man of incessant surprises did not sit down upon a bench, but confidently steered his course towards (the reader will excuse me?) a small, dowdy building intended for the satisfaction of one of the most private of human needs. Entering a compartment, he closed the door behind him.

Laughter shook me. All artists, thieves not excepted, share a common humanity. Besides, everyone knows that fear makes the bowels uneasy (the fact is mentioned in many a frank description of a battlefield), and canary-coat had been like a soldier under fire. But once again I was to learn that the farces of reality are more preposterous than the wildest inventions of fancy.

Reality does not hesitate to confront the extraordinary with the ludicrous, and, maliciously, to juxtapose the unusual with the universally human. While I waited upon a bench (what else could I do?) that commanded a view of the exit, I opined that this master-craftsman was only acting in accordance with the strict logic of his profession. It does not readily occur to anyone but an initiate (it had not yet occurred to me) that the professional thief who had picked a pocket has immediate need of a quiet place where he can examine his haul and rid himself of incriminating "exhibits" (to use a legal term). Yet in a great city, where a million eyes are always on the watch, it is hard at short notice to find four walls within which absolute privacy can be secured. Those accustomed to reading the reports of criminal trials must know how many persons are continually on hand to observe the most trifling incidents, and persons who seemed to be equipped with formidably tenacious memories.

Tear up a letter and scatter the fragments in the gutter. A dozen passers-by will have noticed you; and, likely as not, some inquisitive youngster with nothing better to do will amuse himself by picking up the torn scraps and piecing them together. Examine the contents of your pocketbook in the entrance-hall of a building. Next morning, when there have been posted notices referring to the theft of such an article, a woman you never caught sight of but who was watching you out of the corner of her eye will report the matter to the police and give a full description of your personal appearance. Go to a restaurant for luncheon and the waiter (whom you have never seen before, and who is for you indistinguishable from thousands of his fellows) will make a mental note of your dress, your shoes your hat, the colour of your hair, and whether your nails are cut round or pointed. From every window, from every shop, from behind every curtain, every flower-jar, a pair of eyes keep you under observation. You think you are walking unnoticed through the streets, but you are pried upon by thousands of unsuspected witnesses and your daily life is enmeshed by a daily renewed net of curiosity. It was a fine idea of my master-craftsman to buy absolute privacy for a few minutes at the cost of five sous. He would have ample time in which to remove the contents of the stolen purse, and a safe place in which to dispose of the incriminating article and anything suspect in the way of papers or the like. He would be under cover while counting the spoils. Even I, who had been dogging his footsteps, and was waiting outside in a mood of mingled cheerfulness and disappointment, should be unable to learn how much he had garnered.

Such, at least, was my expectation, but matters turned out otherwise. The instant he emerged from the public convenience, I knew, even as if I had myself counted the contents of the fat woman's purse, that he had not made a lucky strike. From his weary expression of countenance, his hang-dog air, the leaden movements of his feet, it was plain to me that the results of his morning's work had been meagre. In the stolen hand-bag there had perhaps been a powder-puff, a cracked mirror, a door-key, a handkerchief, a pencil, and, at most, two or three dirty ten-franc notes - a trifling reward for many hours of toil and peril; however much it may have meant to the unhappy charwoman, who now doubtless in Belleville, or some such out-of-the-way quarter, her eyes brimming over with tears, was for the tenth time telling her neighbours of her misadventure, for the tenth time railing at the rascally thief, for the tenth time showing the plundered marketing-bag. The thief was as poor as she, and it was obvious at the first glance that his plunder did not suffice for his needs. I was soon to have plain demonstration of the fact. The fragment of human misery to which he had now shrunken, having wearily walked a hundred

yards farther, stopped in front of a bootmaker's shop and appraised the wares exposed for sale. Which was the cheapest pair he could get to replace the ruins which scantily covered his feet? He wanted new shoes far more urgently than did the hundreds of thousands whose sound leather or rubber soles were at this moment noisily or silently trampling the Parisian pavements; new shoes were indispensable if he was to go on plying his trade. But his eager and despairing eyes disclosed the fact that he had not "earned" enough that morning to pay as much as fifty-four francs, which was about the lowest price marked on the shining wares in the boot-maker's window. With a despairing shrug of the shoulders, canary-coat resumed his walk.

Whither now? Would he go on with the hunt? Was he about to risk his liberty once more for so trifling a chance of gain? "No, poor wretch, better take a rest first." As if he had divined my thoughts, had been made telepathically aware of my wishes, he turned into a narrow alley, stopped in front of a cheap restaurant, and studied the prices on the bill of fare before venturing inside. I need hardly say that I followed him, being determined to unravel the mystery of this man whose proceedings I had studied with tense interest and throbbing pulses for two hours. Buying a newspaper behind which to entrench myself, and tilting my hat forward over my eyes, I seated myself at a table not too near. My precautions were superfluous. The pickpocket was too tired and hungry to be interested in anyone but himself. He stared blankly at the white paper which covered the table in lieu of a cloth, and remained inert until the waiter brought some bread. Then his lean hands eagerly seized a piece, and he began to eat like a famished wolf. Plainly he was underfed, had had nothing to eat since early in the morning, or maybe since yesterday. My sympathy with him became keener than ever when the waiter brought him the drink he had ordered - a glass of milk. Shade of Francois Villon. A Parisian thief who drank milk!

It is trifles such as this which, like a spark falling upon tinder, can throw a flame of light into the abysses of a mind. At this moment, when I saw the pickpocket (a man who would be officially classed as a criminal) drinking the most innocent, the most childish of beverages, when I saw him gulping down soft, white milk - in some inscrutable way he ceased for me to be a thief. He was but one more of "les miserables," one more of the numberless poor and hunted and ailing and pitiable inhabitants of this blighted planet; and I felt bound to him by ties far more fundamental than those of curiosity. In all the manifestations of our universal humanity - nudity, cold sleep, fatigue - in every supreme need of our mortal flesh, a term is put to the artificial distinctions that lead us to class people as good or bad, as reputable or disreputable, as honest or dishonest. These artificialities fall away, and nothing remains but the unhappy animal which suffers hunger and thirst, which needs sleep and rest, even as do you and I and others.

I was spellbound as I watched him sipping his milk to the last drop, devouring his bread to the last crumb; and yet at the same time I was ashamed to spy upon him, the hunted creature who had been the objective of my curiosity as he pursued his toilsome path while I did nothing to help him even by the bestowal of a few coins. I was seized with intense longing to go up to him, speak to him, offer him a trifle. I racked my brains for a method of approach, for a pretext, so that I could give him money. Yet we are strangely compounded! We are so abominably tactful when the moment calls for decisive action; so cowardly that we cannot boldly push our way through the thin film of air that separates us from a fellow human being in bitter need. All the

same, everyone knows how hard it is to help a man who does not ask for help, for in his not-asking is the last of his possessions - his pride. Only to professional beggars does asking come easily, so that it is easy to help them - and we ought to be thankful to them for not depriving us of the possibility. But the man I was now considering had his peculiar pride. Rather than beg, he would risk his life and liberty; and we are not entitled to despise him because theft seemed preferable to him to the asking of alms.

Would he not be terribly alarmed, unspeakably mortified, if I made him an ill-advised offer of help? Besides, he looked so tired, that it would have been inconsiderate to disturb him. To rest more thoroughly, he had pushed his chair against the wall, so that this could support his head while the chair-back sustained his body. His grey eyelids were closed, and he seemed to have dozed off. His pallor alarmed me, looking like the reflection of a whitewashed prison-cell. Then the hole in his sleeve, flaunting itself at every movement of the arm, showed that he had no wife or mistress to look after him with a woman's loving-kindness. I pictured his life in some attic room, the rusty iron bedstead in an unheated apartment, a chipped and cracked washhand basin, a tiny trunk as his sole private possession in this room which was let "furnished," and which was perpetually tenanted by fear - by dread of the heavy footfall of a policeman on the stone staircase and of a menacing knock at the door. These images coursed through my mind during the two or three minutes in which he was resting his gaunt body in the chair and his grizzled head against the wall.

But the waiter was already clearing the table with an authoritative rattle of plates, knives, and forks. So thrifty a guest must not be encouraged to linger. I paid my own shot forthwith, and went out into the street, where I had not long to wait before canary-coat reappeared without heeding me. As I followed him, he seemed sunk in thought, and what impelled me in his wake was no longer (as it had been in the morning) a love of sport and lively curiosity, no longer delight in the study of an unfamiliar handicraft, but an oppressive anxiety, which grew almost unbearable when I saw that he was making his way back to the big boulevards.

"Good Lord," I thought, "surely you are not going to be such a fool as to return to your pitch in front of the shop with the monkeys on show? That woman will have complained to the police as soon as she discovered her loss, and officers will be waiting for the chance of arresting you. Apart from this danger you will do well to give over work to-day. I conjure you to make no fresh attempt, for you are certainly not in form. You are exhausted, and any sort of artistic job done by a careworn man will be done badly. What you need is rest. Go home to bed. Above all, try no fresh hazard today."

It is hard to account for the firmness of my conviction that at the first attempt he would be apprehended; that, tired as he was, he would infallibly make a mess of things. But, for some reason or other, my anxiety grew as we approached the boulevards. "Whatever you do, keep away from the monkey-show!" The words were on my lips and my hand was outstretched to seize him by the arm, when he seemed to me on the point of crossing the street to the place where he had robbed the fat woman. But, as if he had again understood my wishes, he turned abruptly into the Rue Drouot, and marched up to a house as confidently as if he lived there. I knew the house. It was the Hotel Drouot, the most famous auction-room in Paris.

For the umpteenth time I was amazed by the behaviour of this inexplicable man. Even as I was endeavouring to understand him, so there must be something within him which marched with my secret desires. Of the hundreds of thousands of houses in Paris, I had planned that morning to visit this one in particular, for it is a place where I have spent many stimulating, informative and amusing hours. Livelier than a museum and often containing more valuable treasures, continually diversified and yet ever the same, this unostentatious Hotel Drouot is a place I love as one of the sights of Paris, as a locality which epitomizes the life of the French metropolis. What in an ordinary dwelling-house is assembled into an organic whole, is here to be seen disarticulated, as in a butcher's shop we have the detached fragments of that which, a day or two before, was walking the earth, a living and integral beast. Here the link between the sacred and the profane, the rarest and the commonest, is supplied by the most humdrum of all humdrum things in the world. Everything exposed to view in the Hotel Drouot is there in order to be turned into money. Beds and crucifixes, hats and carpets, clocks and wash basins, statues by Houdon and sets of boot-brushes, Persian miniatures and pinchbeck cigarette-cases, worn bicycles and first editions of the works of Paul Valéry, Vandyck portraits and hideous oleographs, Beethoven sonatas and broken stoves, the necessary and the superfluous, gimcracks and precious curios, large and small, genuine and spurious, old and new - all are huddled together for conversion into coin of the realm. The sublime and the beautiful are flung into this retort beside the base and the ugly: into this retort which sucks into its maw and then regurgitates all the valuables of the giant town. In this pitiless crucible where everything is inexorably smelted, in this titanic marketplace for the commerce between human vanities and human needs, in this grotesque mixing mill, one feels with peculiar intensity the confusing multiplicity of the world.

Where can one who keeps his eyes open and his wits alert better learn archaeology, bibliophily, and the history of art? Where can he better study numismatics, and where (not least) can he better study human nature? For as multifarious as the things which come here simply to change owners, and only for a brief space are freed from the tyranny of being mere "belongings" - are the races and the classes which throng the sale-rooms, eager for bargains, or their eyes flashing with the strange lust of the collector. Great dealers wearing fur lined overcoats and carefully brushed bowler hats sit cheek by jowl with the small fry of unwashed bric-a-brac traders from the "rive gauche" who have come in the hope of replenishing their shops cheaply. Among them, too, are the middlemen, the hyenas of the battlefield, agents and brokers, who snap up an article that is going cheap, or when they see that a famous collector has fallen in love with some exclusive rarity, nod and wink to one another as they run up the price against him.

Even librarians whose own skins have dried to parchment find their way hither, and, looking like sleepy tapirs, examine incunabula through their thick spectacles. Fashionably dressed ladies, wearing costly pearls and robes as polychrome as a peacock's tail, sit in front places, having sent their servants to keep these for them. In a corner, as still as cranes and as impassive, stand the connoisseurs, the freemasonry of experienced collectors. Filling in the interstices among these various types are members of the common herd - persons attracted into the Hotel Drouot, not by business enterprise, connoisseurship, or the love of art, but by mere curiosity, or by something simpler still, by a wish to linger for a while in a well-warmed room where they have to pay naught for firing, or by an itch to hear the big figures for which things are sold.

The various motives which have brought this heterogeneous crowd into the Hotel Drouot are betrayed by an amazing variety of physiognomies. One type, not ever, I had never seen or dreamed of seeing here, namely that of the pickpocket, yet when I saw my friend, guided by a sure instinct, worm his way among the potential buyers and lookers-on, I did not need to have it explained to me that perhaps in all Paris no better place could be found for the practice of the high mystery of his craft. Here must be an ideal hunting-ground for such as he. The necessary elements were admirably combined: an almost unbearable press of people; distraction of their thoughts by expectation, and by the excitement of watching the rival bids; thirdly, except for a race-course or a railway station (both of them favourite haunts of pickpockets!), an auction-room is almost the only place in the world where the rule of cash payment is rigidly enforced - and the payments are often large ones, so that almost every coat is likely to hide a bulging note-case. Here if anywhere there must be ample opportunities for one of the light-fingered gentry. For my friend, it now occurred to me, this morning's venture had been no more than practice "to keep his hand in," but this was the region in which he would execute his masterstroke.

Nevertheless, I wanted to pluck him back by the sleeve as he unconcernedly mounted the stairs to the first floor. "Damn it all, man don't you see that glaring notice, which seems to shout in three languages?"

BEWARE OF PICKPOCKETS!

ATTENTION AUX PICKPOCKETS!

ACHTUNG VOR TASCHENDIEBEN!

Are you blind, you idiot? They're on the look-out for your sort here. Probably there are at least a dozen detectives in the room. Besides, take it from me, this is not one of your fortunate days."

Calmly looking at the poster, and this time (it would appear) uninfluenced by a brain-wave from me, his would-be protector, canary-coat made his way, as I said, to the first floor. His preference for this field of operations was easy to understand. On the ground floor second-hand furniture was sold, cupboards, chests-of-drawers, and articles of that sort. The old-furniture dealers who wanted to buy such things were in a small way of business, and would be cautious individuals, likely (peasant-fashion) to have their cash stowed away in a belt buckled safely round the waist. It was on the first floor, where pictures, curios, books, autographs, jewellery, and other costly articles were sold, that there would be buyers carrying thick wads of notes in accessible positions.

I found it hard to keep close behind my friend, for he moved quickly from room to room, as if to sample the chances which each offered, diligently reading the notices that were posted up, as a gourmet studies a menu. At length he decided upon Room NO.7, where "La celebre collection de porcelaine chinoise et japonaise de Mme la Comtesse Yves de G." was being auctioned. Unquestionably there must be valuable articles in this collection, for the sale-room was full to overflowing, a knot of people blocked the doorway, and the table where the auction was

proceeding was at first inaccessible, even invisible, to newcomers like ourselves. A dense wall composed of twenty or thirty rows of human beings cut us off from our goal. All that we could see from the passage, craning over the heads of the throng, was the auctioneer as he sat at his high desk, hammer in hand - the white hammer with which he directed the auction as an orchestral conductor directs a musical performance, the auction in which long pauses led up ever and again, prestissimo, to a thrilling climax.

In ordinary life, presumably, a minor employee, living in Menilmontant or one of the other outlying districts, occupying a couple of rooms, gas-heated and with pelargoniums in window-boxes as their sole decorative touch - here he was a man of might and the notable of the occasion. Wearing a smart morning-coat, his hair shining with pomade, surrounded by well-to-do buyers, he was obviously swelling with pride at being able, for hours in succession, to transmute the most precious articles into hard cash by "knocking them down" with the symbol of his authority, the white hammer. With the veneer of amiability one sees on the face of a juggler who keeps a number of balls tossing simultaneously in the air, he graciously caught the bids as they came to him from the right and left, and from the front: "six hundred," "six hundred and five," "six hundred and ten"; flinging back the same syllables, more clearly articulated, more sonorously uttered across the heads of the crowd,

When the game slackened for a moment, he radiated encouragement, and would say alluringly: "No one on the right? No one on the left?" with surprise indicated by his raised eyebrows as well as by the tone of his voice, while he toyed with his ivory hammer as if about to knock down the lot to the last bidder; or insinuated with a smile: "Surely, Ladies and Gentlemen, we've not reached the top price yet? This splendid article is worth more than six hundred and ten francs." From time to time he would greet some acquaintance who had just entered, or would look inquiringly at possible bidders, As he introduced a new lot with the phrase "Now we come to lot number thirty-three," or what not, he would speak impressively; and when the bidding rose to his satisfaction there would be a corresponding mellifluousness in his rich tenor voice. Plainly it was gratifying to him that for several hours three or four hundred persons should hang upon the words that fell from his lips and should watch so closely the movements of the hammer in his hand. The illusion that he played the decisive role (whereas in truth he was but the sport of the chance bids) intoxicated him with self-satisfaction. With his vocal gymnastics he reminded me of a peacock showing off his tail; but for me, with my remembrance of what I had witnessed in the morning, he was on the same footing as the monkeys in the shop window whose antics had monopolized the attention of the crowd and given my pickpocket an opportunity.

For the time being, my worthy friend could derive advantage from this unconscious complicity on the auctioneer's part, for we were jammed in the doorway, and there seemed no possibility of our being able to wedge ourselves through the dense mass and reach the auction-table. Once more, however, I was to learn that I was only a prentice hand in this interesting craft. My comrade, the accomplished technician, knew from long experience that at the fall of the hammer (the auctioneer had at that very instant jubilantly exclaimed, "Gone for 7260 francs") the tension in the wall would slacken. Heads were lowered, the dealers noted the price in the catalogue, one or two persons who had had enough of it would depart, gaps formed like leads in an icefield. The pickpocket promptly seized his opportunity. With a bold thrust, he had traversed three or four

rows on his way towards the table; and I, who had sworn not to leave the incautious fellow to his own devices, was left stranded by myself on the outskirts.

I, too, tried to advance, but the auctioneer was already announcing a new lot, the leads had closed, I was caught in the throng and was helpless. Intolerable was the pressure of strangers' bodies to the right, to the left, in front, and behind; so close to me that, when a neighbour coughed, my own frame was shaken. The air, too, was foul, dust-laden, fetid, and stinking of sweat (as always when people are engaged in the hunt for money). Myself dripping with perspiration, I wanted to unbutton my overcoat and to feel whether my pocket-book was in its place. Stubbornly, meanwhile I pressed forward, slowly gaining a row or two, but in vain, for canary-coat had vanished. Yet he must be somewhere in the room, where I alone knew of his dangerous presence; only I, whose nerves quivered with anxiety lest he should come to harm, for I had an obsession that this was his unlucky day. From moment to moment I was expecting to hear the cry "Stop thief!" to see him standing there caught in the act, gripped by his two coat sleeves, and held firm while someone ran for the police. It remains a puzzle to me why I was so sure that misfortune awaited him that very day; perhaps the signs of it had been written on his face.

But nothing of the sort happened. No one shouted "Au voleur!" Instead of a clamour, there came a sudden silence, as if the two or three hundred persons in the auction-room were holding their breath; and they were all looking with redoubled attention at the auctioneer, who had moved back a step or two, so that the light from the central pendant shone more strongly on his face. Soon I grasped the reason. The most important article in the catalogue was about to be put up for sale - a huge vase sent three hundred years ago with a special delegation by the Emperor of China to the King of France. With many other art-treasures it had been "lifted" from the Court during the Revolution, and, after numerous vicissitudes, had found a new home in the Countess Yves's collection. With extreme and significant care, four uniformed porters lifted the enormous piece of pottery - it was blue-veined upon a whitish ground - on to the table. The auctioneer, having solemnly cleared his throat, announced that there was a reserve price and that no bid under one hundred and thirty thousand francs would be considered. One hundred and thirty thousand francs! Reverential silence received the figure consecrated by so many noughts. No one ventured to bid, to stir a foot, or to utter a syllable; the audience was a solid block of mute wonder. At length a small, white-haired man to the left of table raised his head and muttered, "One hundred and thirty-five thousand," to which, from another quarter, came a quick response of "One hundred and forty thousand." Thereupon the bidding grew brisk. The representative of a wealthy American auctioneering firm did not utter his bids, but was content to raise his finger, this sufficing, each time, to put up the price by five thousand francs. From the other end of the table the private secretary of a famous collector (whose name was whispered all over the room) answered in words. Soon the auction became a duel between the pair who though opposite one another, sedulously refrained from looking one another in the face. They confined their attention to the auctioneer, who eagerly glanced from one to the other in acceptance of their bids. At length, when the collector's secretary had said, "Two hundred and sixty thousand," and the auctioneer turned towards the American, the latter no longer raised his finger, and the 260,000 was left hanging in the air like a frozen tone. Amid increasing excitement, the auctioneer repeated four times, "Going for two hundred and sixty thousand." Then he waited awhile, hoping

for an additional rise, before saying: "No further bid?" Silence. Again, "No further bid?" It sounded almost like a cry of despair. The silence began to vibrate, like a string that does not yet vibrate amply enough to produce a sound. The auctioneer raised his hammer, and three hundred hearts almost ceased to beat. "Going for two hundred and sixty thousand," this time thrice reiterated. All held their breath in suspense. The ivory hammer was raised still higher. "Going," said the auctioneer. No answer. "Going!" No answer. "Going for two hundred and sixty thousand!" No answer. Down came the hammer with a click, to the accompaniment of a definitive "Gone!" It was over.

Two hundred and sixty thousand francs! The rigid wall of the audience broke up into a number of mobile living faces. There was a general stir, movement, breathing, clearing of throats. Like a single body, the densely backed mass resolved itself into an excited wave of units, animated by a common movement, and delivering a thrust.

To me, too, came this thrust, delivered by a stranger's elbow on my chest. Simultaneously someone murmured to me, "Pardon, Monsieur!" I started. That voice! Yes, it was he. By a lucky chance, the breaking wave had washed him up close beside me. For the first time since I had lost him, he was beside me. Now I could continue to watch him, and could protect him. Of course I avoided looking him squarely in the face. Furtively, I glanced at his hands, the tools of his trade, but they had disappeared! The sleeves of his overcoat hung down on either side, and, as if he had been cold, he had withdrawn his hands within them. If, now, he should move to pick a pocket, the victim would be aware only of the chance contact of an innocent piece of clothing, for the dangerous fingers were as safely hidden away as the claws in a cat's paw. "An excellent plan!" I thought; but on whom was he about to ply his trade? Looking cautiously to his right, I saw a lean individual carefully buttoned up, in front of whom stood a solid-looking gentleman with a broad and seemingly impregnable back. I was dubious as to the possibility of an effective onslaught being made in either of these quarters. Then of a sudden, when I felt a gentle touch on my own knee, a shudder ran through me at the thought that I was to be the victim.

"Are you going to be fool enough to try to rob the one man in the room who knows all about you and your little ways? Am I, as a last and bewildering lesson in your handicraft, to learn it through its being practised on my own person?" It really did seem as if the unlucky creature had singled me out, me who knew him through and through, me whose sympathies were enlisted in his favour. Yes, I could no longer doubt, for the pickpocket's elbow was gently pressing my side; inch by inch the long sleeve that hid his skilful hand was moving forward, ready, at the first liberating movement in the crowd, to shoot like a snake's tongue between my coat and my waistcoat.

True, I had ample time to defend myself. I need merely turn my back upon him, or button up my coat. But I lacked the strength to do either, for my whole body was hypnotized by excitement and expectation. My muscles and my nerves seemed frozen as I waited in this condition of senseless agitation. Quickly I tried to reckon up how much money I had in my note-case, and, while thus engaged (since every part of the body - be it tooth, or finger, or toe - grows sensitive the instant one begins to think about it), I became aware of the gentle pressure of the note-case against my chest. It was still there, then; and, thus forewarned and forearmed, I could tranquilly await the

onslaught. The strange thing was, however, that I could not tell whether I wanted it to come or not. My feelings were in a whirl - I was bipolar. For his own sake, I wished the fool to leave me alone; on the other hand, I was waiting with the same sensation of tensed anticipation as when one is in the dentist's chair and the drill approaches a sensitive spot. But canary-coat as if wishing to punish me for my inquisitiveness, showed no sign of hurry, keeping so close to me that I felt the warmth of his body. Inch by inch he softly drew nearer, and while my sense of touch was almost entirely engrossed by these contacts, with another of my sense organs I was attending to what passed at the auction table: "Three thousand seven hundred and fifty. Any further bid? Thank you, three thousand seven hundred and sixty, in two places. Three thousand seven hundred and seventy, eighty, ninety. Any further bid? Four thousand, Four thousand. Four thousand. Going at four thousand. Going, going, gone" - and down came the hammer.

Once more there was the sudden easing of the packed throng, the wave movement that always followed the fall of the hammer and the consequent release of tension. At this instant I again had a feeling that the wave was breaking against my own chest. Nothing very definite, it was as light as the movement of a snake, a gliding sense of bodily contact, so swift and tenuous that I should have never been aware of it had I not been alert with anticipation, and especially alert at the threatened spot. Only as if a chance gust had ruffled my overcoat, or as if a swallow had brushed me with its wing, and ...

And what now happened took me by surprise. My own hand leaped up and firmly gripped the slim fingers that had insinuated themselves beneath my coat. I had not planned this rough and brutish action of self-defence. It was a reflex which startled me, the outcome of a defensive purpose which existed as a "purpose" only in the automatic realm of the instinctive life. With the upshot that, to my amazement and horror, my hand now grasped another by the wrist, a cold, trembling wrist. Indubitably my movement, so quickly and successfully executed was not the outcome of conscious design. It was unwilling.

This second transcends my powers of description. I Was rigid with alarm at thus holding in a forcible clasp one of the limbs of a stranger. He, likewise, was paralysed by terror. Just as I lacked the strength and the presence of mind that were needed for letting go his wrist, so did he lack the courage and the presence of mind to snatch his hand away. "Four hundred and fifty; four hundred and sixty; four hundred and seventy," came from the direction of the table in the auctioneer's tenor voice, while I retained my hold of the thief's shuddering hand. "Four hundred and eighty; four hundred and ninety," continued the voice; and all the time no one noticed what was going on between the thief and myself, no one suspected that a struggle (not so much physical as mental) was going on between two persons in the room, and that this struggle was fraught with destiny. "Five hundred, and ten, and twenty, and thirty, and forty, and fifty" - the figures droned on. The whole thing had lasted perhaps ten or twenty seconds when I was able to draw breath once more. I released my grip. The stranger's hand was withdrawn, and vanished within the canary-coloured sleeve.

"And sixty, and seventy, and eighty, and ninety, six hundred, six hundred and ten," said the auctioneer; and we two, the would-be thief and the man he had tried to rob, still stood side by side, accomplices in the mysterious deed, both paralysed by the same experience, I still felt the

warmth of his body as it pressed against mine; and when, with the release of tension, my knees began to tremble, I fancied I could feel a responsive tremor in the knee which touched mine. "Six hundred and twenty, and thirty, and forty, and fifty, and sixty, and seventy," intoned the tenor voice, for the lot had not yet been knocked down; and we still stood side by side, as if chained together by a cold ring of horror. At length I found the energy to turn my head and scrutinize him. At the same instant he looked at me. As our eyes met, I read in his the entreaty: "Please, please, don't give me in charge!" I read in them the terror of an oppressed spirit. The primal anxiety of hunted beasts streamed from his contracted pupils, and his stubble beard quivered under stress of alarm. The terrified eyes mainly attracted my attention but the whole visage betrayed such panic as I have never seen in a human being before or since. I was intolerably ashamed that a fellow-mortal should look at me with so slavish an expression, as if I held in my hands the power of life and death. His anxiety humiliated me and in embarrassment I turned my face aside.

But he had understood. He knew what he wanted to know, that I should not denounce him or hand him over to the police, and the knowledge gave him back his strength. With a jerk, he drew away from me, and it was plain that his one desire was to be quit of me for ever. No longer did I feel his tremulous knee touching mine, nor the warmth of his adjacent body. Once more master of his craft, he made one of his sinuous movements and wriggled like an eel through the crowd.

At the moment when I ceased to feel the warmth of his body, it came to me with a pang of conscience that I must let him leave me thus. I owed him compensation for the terror he had just experienced because of me; and I was in his debt for the lessons in his handicraft which, unconsciously, he had given me this day. He was certainly entitled to a substantial fee. Hastily I pressed after him through the exit. But the poor devil saw my movement and misunderstood my intentions. He fancied that I had changed my mind, and had determined to hand him over to the police. Before I could get out of the auction-room he had almost disappeared among those who thronged the corridor. He was making for the street with all possible speed. For a moment I saw the yellow sheen of his overcoat before he vanished. My impromptu lesson was over.

THE ROYAL GAME

THE big liner, due to sail from New York to Buenos Aires at midnight, was filled with the activity and bustle incident to the last hour. Visitors who had come to see their friends off pressed hither and thither, page-boys with caps smartly cocked slithered through the public rooms shouting names snappily, baggage, parcels and flowers were being hauled about, inquisitive children ran up and down companion-ways, while the deck orchestra provided persistent accompaniment. I stood talking to an acquaintance on the promenade deck, somewhat apart from the hubbub, when two or three flash-lights sprayed sharply near us, evidently for press photos of some prominent passenger at a last-minute interview. My friend looked in that direction and smiled.

"You have a queer bird on board, that Czentovic."

And as my face must have revealed that the statement meant nothing to me he added, by way of explanation, "Mirko Czentovic, the world chess champion. He has just finished off the U.S.A. in a coast-to-coast exhibition tour and is on his way to capture Argentina."

This served to recall not only the name of the young world champion but also a few details relating to his rocket-like career; my friend a more observant newspaper reader than I, was able to eke them out with a string of anecdotes. At a single stroke, about a year ago, Czentovic had aligned himself with the solidest Elder Statesmen of the art of chess, such as Alekhin, Capablanca, Tartakover, Lasker, Boguljobov; not since the appearance of the nine-year-old prodigy, Reshevsky, in New York in 1922, had a newcomer crashed into the famed guild to the accompaniment of such widespread interest. It seems that Czentovic's intellectual equipment, at the beginning, gave small promise of so brilliant a career. The secret soon seeped through that in his private capacity this champion wasn't able to write a single sentence in any language without misspelling a word, and that, as one of his vexed colleagues, wrathfully sarcastic, put it, "He enjoys equal ignorance in every field of culture." His father, a poverty-stricken Yugoslavian boatman on the Danube, had been run down in his tiny vessel one night by a grain steamer, and the orphaned boy, then twelve, was taken in charge by the pastor of their obscure village out of pity. The good man did his level best to instill into the indolent, slow-speaking, low-browed child at home what he seemed unable to grasp in the village school.

But all efforts proved vain. Mirko stared blankly at the writing exercise just as if the strokes had not already been explained a hundred times; his lumbering brain lacked every power to grasp even the simplest subjects. At fourteen he still counted with his fingers, and it was only by dint of great strain that he could read in a book or newspaper. Yet none could say that Mirko was unwilling or disobedient. Whatever he was told to do he did: fetched water, split wood, worked in the field, washed up the kitchen, and he could be relied upon to execute - even if with exasperating slowness - every service that was demanded. But what grieved the kindly pastor most about the blockhead was his total lack of co-operation. He performed no deed unless specially directed, asked no questions, never played with other lads, and sought no occupation of

his own accord; after Mirko had concluded his work about the house, he would sit idly with that empty stare one sees with grazing sheep, without participating in the slightest in what might be going on. Of an evening, while the pastor sucked at his long peasant pipe and played his customary three games of chess with the police-sergeant, the fair-haired dull-wit squatted silent alongside them, staring from under his heavy lids, seemingly sleepy and indifferent, at the checkered board.

One winter evening, while the two men were absorbed in their daily game, a rapid crescendo of bells gave notice of a quickly approaching sleigh. A peasant, his cap covered with snow, stamped in hastily to tell the pastor that his mother lay dying and to ask his immediate attendance in the hope that there was still time to administer extreme unction. The priest accompanied him at once. The police-sergeant, who had not yet finished his beer, lighted a fresh pipe preparatory to leaving, and was about to draw on his heavy sheepskin boots when he noticed how immovably Mirko's gaze was fastened on the board with its interrupted game.

"Well, do you want to finish it?" he said jocularly, fully convinced that the sleepyhead had no notion of how to move a single piece. The boy looked up shyly, nodded assent, and took the pastor's place. After fourteen moves the sergeant was beaten and he had to concede that his defeat was in no wise attributable to avoidable carelessness. The second game resulted similarly.

"Balaam's ass!" cried the astounded pastor upon his return, explaining to the policeman, a lesser expert in the Bible, that two thousand years ago there had been a like miracle of a dumb being suddenly endowed with the speech of wisdom. The late hour notwithstanding, the good man could not forgo challenging his half-illiterate helper to a contest. Mirko beat him too, with ease. He played toughly, slowly, deliberately, never once raising bowed broad brow from the board. But he played with irrefutable certainty, and in the days that followed neither the priest nor the policeman was able to win a single game.

The priest, best able to assess his ward's various short comings, now became curious as to the manner in which this one-sided singular gift would resist a severer test. After Mirko had been made somewhat presentable by the efforts of the village barber, he drove him in his sleigh to the near-by town where he knew that many chess-players - a cut above him in ability, he was aware from experience - were always to be found in the cafe on the main square. The pastor's entrance, as he steered the straw-haired, red-cheeked fifteen-year-old before him, created no small stir in the circle; the boy, in his sheepskin jacket (woollen side in) and high boots, eyes shyly downcast, stood aside until summoned to a chess-table.

Mirko lost the first encounter because his master had never employed the Sicilian defence. The next game, with the best player of the lot, resulted in a draw. But in the third game and the fourth and all that came after he slew them, one after the other.

It so happens that little provincial towns of Yugoslavia are seldom the theatre of exciting events; consequently, this first appearance of the peasant champion before the assembled worthies became no less than a sensation. It was unanimously decided to keep the boy in town until the next day for a special gathering of the chess club and, in particular, for the benefit of Count

Simczic of the castle, a chess fanatic. The priest, who now regarded his ward with quite a new pride, but whose joy of discovery was subordinate to the sense of duty which called him home to his Sunday service, consented to leave him for further tests. The chess group put young Czentovic up at the local hotel, where he saw a water-closet for the first time in his life. The chess-room was crowded to capacity on Sunday afternoon. Mirko faced the board immobile for fours, spoke no word, and never looked up; one player after another fell before him. Finally a multiple game after was proposed; it took a while before they could make clear to the novice that he had to play against several contestants at one and the same time. No sooner had Mirko grasped the procedure than he adapted himself to it, and trod slowly with heavy, creaking shoes from table to table, eventually winning seven of the eight games.

Grave consultations now took place. True, strictly speaking, the new champion was not of the town, yet the innate national pride had received a fillip. Here was a chance, at last, for this town, so small that its existence was hardly suspected, to put itself on the map by sending a great man into the world. A vaudeville agent named Koller who supplied the local garrison cabaret with talent, offered to obtain professional training for the youth from a Viennese expert whom he knew, and to see him through for a year if the deficit were, made good. Count Simczic who in his sixty years of daily chess had never encountered so remarkable an antagonist, signed the guarantee promptly. That day marked the opening of the astonishing career of the Danube boatman's son.

It took only six months for Mirko to master every secret of chess technique, though with one odd limitation which later became apparent to the votaries of the game and caused many a sneer. He never was able to memorize a single game, or, to use the professional term, to play blind. He lacked completely the ability to conceive the board in the limitless space of the imagination. He had to have the field of sixty-four black and white squares and the thirty-two pieces tangibly before him; even when he had attained international fame he carried a folding pocket board with him in order to be able to reconstruct a game or work on a problem by visual means. This deficit, in itself not important, betrayed a want of imaginative power and provoked animated discussions among chess enthusiasts similar to those in musical circles when it discovers that an outstanding virtuoso or conductor is unable to play or direct without a score. This singularity, however, was no obstacle to Mirko's stupendous rise, At seventeen he already possessed a dozen prizes, at eighteen he won the Hungarian mastery, and finally, at twenty, the championship of the world. The boldest experts, everyone of them immeasurably his superior in brains, imagination, and audacity, fell before his tough, cold logic as did Napoleon before the clumsy Kutusov and Hannibal before Fabius Cunctator, of whom Livy records that his traits of phlegm and imbecility were already conspicuous in his childhood. Thus it occurred that the illustrious gallery of chess masters, which included eminent representatives of widely varied intellectual fields - philosophers, mathematicians, constructive, imaginative, and often creative talents - was invaded by a complete outsider, a heavy, taciturn peasant from whom not even the cunningest journalists were ever able to extract a word that would help to make a story. Yet, however he may have deprived the newspapers of polished phrases, substitutes in the way of anecdotes about his person were numerous, for, inescapably, the moment he arose from the board at which he was the incomparable master, Czentovic became a grotesque, an almost comic figure. In spite of his correct dress, his fashionable cravat with its too ostentatious pearl tie-pin, and his carefully

manicured nails, he remained in manners and behaviour the narrow-minded lout who was accustomed to sweeping out the priest's kitchen. He utilized his gift and his fame to squeeze out all the money they would yield, displaying petty and often vulgar greed, always with a shameless clumsiness that aroused his professional colleagues' ridicule and anger. He travelled from town to town, stopped at the cheapest hotels, played for any club that would pay his fee, sold the advertising rights in his portrait to a soap manufacturer, and oblivious of his competitors' scorn - they being aware that he hardly knew how to write - attached his name to a *Philosophy of Chess* that had been written by a hungry Galician student for a business-minded publisher. As with all leathery dispositions, he was wanting in any appreciation of the ludicrous; from the time he became champion he regarded himself as the most important man in the world, and the consciousness of having beaten all those clever, intellectual, brilliant speakers and writers in their own field and of earning more than they, transformed his early unsureness into a cold and awkwardly flaunted pride.

"And how can one expect that such rapid fame should fail to befuddle so empty a head?" concluded my friend who had just advanced those classic examples of Czentovic's childish lust for rank. "Why shouldn't a twenty-one-year-old lad from the Banat be afflicted with a frenzy of vanity if, suddenly, by merely shoving figures around on a wooden board, he can earn more in a week than his whole village does in a year by chopping down trees under the bitterest conditions? Besides, isn't it damned easy to take yourself for a great man if you're not burdened with the slightest suspicion that a Rembrandt, a Beethoven, a Dante, a Napoleon, ever even existed? There's just one thing in that immured brain of his - the knowledge that he hasn't lost a game of chess for months, and as he happens not to dream that the world holds other values than chess and money, he has every reason to be infatuated with himself."

The information communicated by my friend could not fail to excite my special curiosity. I have always been fascinated by all types of monomania, by persons wrapped up in a single idea; for the stricter the limits a man sets for himself, the more clearly he approaches the eternal. Just such seemingly world-alooft persons create their own remarkable and quite unique world-in-little, and work, termite like, in their particular medium. Thus I made no bones about my intention to examine this specimen of one-track intellect under a magnifying glass during the twelve-day journey to Rio.

"You'll be out of luck," my friend warned me. "So far as I know, nobody has succeeded in extracting the least bit of psychological material from Czentovic. Underneath all his abyssmal limitations this sly farm-hand conceals the wisdom not to expose himself. The procedure is simple: except with such compatriots of his own sphere as he contrives to meet in ordinary taverns he avoids all conversation. When he senses a person of culture he retreats into his shell; that's why nobody can plume himself on having heard him say something stupid or on having sounded the presumably bottomless depths of his ignorance."

As a matter of fact, my friend was right. It proved utterly impossible to approach Czentovic during the first few days of the voyage, unless by intruding rudely, which, of course, isn't my way. He did, sometimes, appear on the promenade deck, but then always with hands clasped behind his back in a posture of dignified self-absorption, like Napoleon in the familiar painting;

and, at that, those peripatetic exhibitions were carried off in such haste and so jerkily that to gain one's end one would have had to trot after him. The lounges, the bar, the smoking-room, saw nothing of him. A steward of whom I made confidential inquiries revealed that he spent the greater part of the day in his cabin with a large chess-board on which he recapitulated games or worked out new problems.

After three days it angered me to think that his defence tactics were more effective than my will to approach him. I had never before had a chance to know a great chess-player personally, and the more I now sought to familiarize myself with the type, the more incomprehensible seemed a lifelong brain activity that rotated exclusively about a space composed of sixty-four black and white squares. I was well aware from my own experience of the mysterious attraction of the royal game, which among all games contrived by man rises superior to the tyranny of chance and bestows its palm only on mental attainment, or rather on a definite form of mental endowment. But is it not an offensively narrow construction to call chess a game? Is it not a science, a technique, an art, that sways among these categories as Mahomet's coffin does between heaven and earth, at once a union of all contradictory concepts: primeval yet ever new; mechanical in operation yet effective only through the imagination; bounded in geometric space though boundless in its combinations; ever-developing yet sterile; thought that leads to nothing; mathematics that produce no result; art without works; architecture without substance, and nevertheless, as proved by evidence, more lasting in its being and presence than all books and achievements; the only game that belongs to all peoples and all ages; of which none knows the divinity that bestowed it on the world, to slay boredom, to sharpen the senses, to exhilarate the spirit? One searches for its beginning and for its end. Children can learn its simple rules, duffers succumb to its temptation, yet within this immutable tight square it creates a particular species of master not to be compared with any other - persons destined for chess alone, specific geniuses in whom vision, patience, and technique are operative through a distribution no less precisely ordained than in mathematicians, poets, composers, but merely united on a different level. In the heyday of physiognomical research a Gall would perhaps have dissected the brains of such masters of chess to establish whether a particular coil in the grey matter of the brain, a sort of chess muscle or chess bump was more conspicuously developed than in other skulls. How a physiognomist would have been fascinated by the case of a Czentovic where that which is genius appears interstratified with an absolute inertia of the intellect like a single vein of gold in a ton of dead rock! It stands to reason that so unusual a game, one touched with genius, must create out of itself fitting matadors. This I always knew, but what was difficult and almost impossible to conceive of was the life of a mentally alert person whose world contracts to a narrow, black-and-white one-way street; who seeks ultimate triumphs in the to-and-fro, forward-and-backward movement of thirty-two pieces; a being who, by a new opening in which the knight is preferred to the pawn, apprehends greatness and the immortality that goes with casual mention in a chess handbook - of a man of spirit who, escaping madness, can unremittingly devote all of his mental energy during ten, twenty, thirty, forty years to the ludicrous effort to corner a wooden king on a wooden board!

And here for the first time, one of these phenomena, one of these singular geniuses (or shall I say puzzling fools?) was close to me, six cabins distant, and I, unfortunate, for whom curiosity about mental problems manifested itself in a kind of passion, seemed unable to effect my purpose. I

conjured up the absurdest ruses: should I tickle his vanity by the offer of an interview in an important paper, or engage his greed by proposing a lucrative exhibition tour of Scotland? Finally it occurred to me that the hunter's never-failing practice is to lure the woodcock by imitating its mating cry, so what more; successful way was there of attracting a chess master's attention to myself than by playing chess?

At no time had I ever permitted chess to absorb me seriously, for the simple reason that it meant nothing to me but a pastime; if I spend an hour at the board it is not because I want to subject myself to a strain but, on the contrary to relieve mental tension. I "play" at chess in the literal sense of the word, whereas to real devotees it is serious business. Chess, like love, cannot be played alone, and up to that time I had no idea whether there were other chess lovers on board. In order to attract them from their lairs I set a primitive trap in the smoking-room in that my wife (whose game is even weaker than mine) and I sat at a chess-board as a decoy. Sure enough, we had made no more than six moves before one passer-by stopped, another asked permission to watch, and before long the desired partner materialized. Mac-Iver was his name; a Scottish foundation-engineer who, I learned, had made a large fortune boring for oil in California. He was a robust specimen with an almost square jaw and strong teeth, and a rich complexion pronouncedly rubicund as a result, at least in part surely, of copious indulgence in whisky. His conspicuously broad, almost vehemently athletic shoulders made themselves unpleasantly noticeable in his game, for this McIver typified those self-important worshippers of success who regard defeat in even a harmless contest as a blow to their self-esteem. Accustomed to achieving his ends ruthlessly, and spoiled by material success, this massive self-made man was so thoroughly saturated with his sense of superiority that opposition of any kind became undue resistance if not insult. After losing the first round he sulked and began to explain in detail, and dictatorially, that it would not have happened but for a momentary oversight; in the third he ascribed his failure to the noise in the adjoining room; never would he lose a game without at once demanding revenge. This ambitious crabbedness amused me at first, but as time went on I accepted it as the unavoidable accompaniment to my real purpose - tempt the master to our table.

By the third day it worked - but only half-way. It may be that Czentovic observed us at the chess-board through a window from the promenade deck or that he just happened to be honouring the smoking-room with his presence; anyway, as soon as he perceived us interlopers toying with the tools of his trade, he involuntarily stepped a little nearer and, keeping a deliberate distance, cast a searching glance at our board. It was MacIver's move. This one move was sufficient to apprise Czentovic how little a further pursuit of our dilettantish striving was worthy of his expert interest. With the same matter-of-course gesture with which one of us disposes of a poor detective story that has been proffered in a library - without even thumbing its pages - he turned away from our table and left the room. "Weighed in the balance and found wanting," I thought, slightly stung by the cool, contemptuous look, and to give vent to my ill-humour in some fashion, I said to MacIver, "Your move didn't seem to impress the master."

"Which master?"

I told him that the man who had just walked by after glancing disapprovingly at our game was Czentovic, international chess champion. I added that we would be able to survive it without

taking his contempt too greatly to heart; the poor have to cook with water. But to my astonishment these idle words of mine produced quite an unexpected result. Immediately he became excited, forgot our game, and his ambition took to an almost audible throbbing. He had no notion that Czentovic was on board: Czentovic simply had to give him a game; the only time he had ever played with a champion was in a multiple game when he was one of forty, even that was fearfully exciting, and he had come quite near winning. Did I know the champion personally? - I didn't. - Would I not invite him to join us? I declined on the ground that I was aware of Czentovic's reluctance to make new acquaintances. Besides, what charm would intercourse with third-rate players hold for a champion?

It would have been just as well not to say that about third-rate players to a man of MacIver's brand of conceit. Annoyed, he leaned back and declared gruffly that, as for himself, he couldn't believe that Czentovic would decline a gentleman's courteous challenge; he'd see to that. Upon getting a brief description of the master's person he stormed out, indifferent to our un-finished game, uncontrollably impatient to intercept Czentovic on the deck. Again I sensed that there was no holding the possessor of such broad shoulders once his will was involved in an undertaking.

I waited, somewhat tensed. Some ten minutes elapsed and MacIver returned, not in too good humour, it seemed to me.

"Well?" I asked.

"You were right," he answered, a bit annoyed. "Not a very pleasant gentleman. I introduced myself and told him who I am. He didn't even put out his hand. I tried to make him understand that all of us on board would be proud and honoured if he'd play the lot of us. But he was cursed stiff-necked about it; said he was sorry but his contract obligations to his agent definitely precluded any game during his entire tour except for a fee. And his minimum is \$250 per game."

I had to laugh. The thought would never have come to me that one could make so much money by pushing figures from black squares to white ones. "Well, I, hope you took leave of him with courtesy equal to his."

MacIver, however, remained perfectly serious. "The match is to come off at three to-morrow afternoon. Here in the smoking room. I hope he won't make mincemeat of us easily."

"What! You promised him the \$250?" I cried quite taken aback.

"Why not? It's his business. If I had a toothache and there happened to be a dentist aboard, I wouldn't, expect him to extract my tooth for nothing. The man's right to ask a fat price; in every line the big shots are the best traders. So far as I'm concerned, the less complicated the business, the better. I'd rather pay in cash than have your Mr. Czentovic do me a favour and in the end have to say 'thank you.' Anyway, many an evening at the club has cost me more than \$250 without giving me a chance to play a world champion. It's no disgrace for a third-rate player to be beaten by a Czentovic."

It amused me to note how deeply I had injured MacIver's self-love with that "third-rate." But as he was disposed to foot the bill it was not for me to remark on his wounded ambition which promised at last to afford me an acquaintance with my odd fish. Promptly we notified the four or five others who had revealed themselves as chess-players of the approaching event and reserved not only our own table but the adjacent ones so that we might suffer the least possible disturbance from passengers strolling by.

Next day all our group was assembled at the appointed hour. The centre seat opposite that of the master was allotted to MacIver as a matter of course; his nervousness found outlet in the smoking of strong cigars, one after another, and in restlessly glancing ever and again at the clock. The champion let us wait a good ten minutes - my friend's tale prompted the surmise that something like this would happen - thus heightening the impressiveness of his entry. He approached the table calmly and imperturbably. He offered no greeting. "You know who I am and I'm not interested in who you are" was what his discourtesy seemed to imply, but he, began in a dry, businesslike way to lay down the conditions. Since there were not enough boards on the ship for separate games he proposed that we should play against him collectively. After each of his moves he would retire to the end of the room so that his presence might not affect our consultations. As soon as our countermove had been made we were to strike a glass with a spoon, no table-bell being available. He proposed, if it pleased us ten minutes as the maximum time for each move. Like timid pupils we accepted every suggestion: un-questioningly. Czentovic drew black at the choice of colours, while still standing he made the first counter-move, then turned at once to go to the designated waiting place where he reclined lazily while carelessly examining an illustrated magazine.

There is little point in reporting the game. It ended, as it could not but end, in our complete defeat, and by the twenty-fourth move at that. There was nothing particularly astonishing about an international champion wiping off half a dozen mediocre or sub-mediocre players with his left hand; what did disgust us, though, was the lordly manner with which Czentovic caused us to feel, all too plainly, that it was with his left hand that, we had been disposed of. Each time he would give a quick, seemingly careless look at the board, and would look indolently past us as if we ourselves were dead wooden figures; and this impertinent proceeding reminded one irresistibly of the way one throws a mangy dog a morsel without taking the trouble to look at him. According to my way of thinking, if he had any sensitivity he might have shown us our mistakes or cheered us up with a friendly word. Even at the conclusion this sub-human chess automaton uttered no syllable, but, after saying "mate," stood motionless at the table waiting to ascertain whether another game was desired. I had already risen with the thought of indicating by a gesture - helpless as one always remains in the face of thick-skinned rudeness - that as far as I was concerned the pleasure of our acquaintance was ended now that the dollars-and-cents part of it was over, when, to my anger, MacIver, next to me, spoke up hoarsely: "Revanche!"

The note of challenge startled me; MacIver at this moment seemed much more like a pugilist about to put up his fists than a polite gentleman. Whether it was Czentovic's disagreeable treatment of us that affected him or merely MacIver's own pathological irritable ambition, suffice it that the latter had undergone a complete change. Red in the face up to his hair, his nostrils taut from inner pressure, he breathed hard, and a sharp fold separated the bitten lips from his

belligerently projected jaw. I recognized with disquiet that flicker of the eyes that connotes uncontrollable passion such as seizes players at roulette when the right colour fails to come after the sixth or seventh successively doubled stake. Instantly I knew that this fanatical climber would, even at the cost of his entire fortune, play against Czentovic and play and play and play, for simple or doubled stakes, until he won at least a single game. If Czentovic stuck to it, MacIver would prove a gold-mine that would yield him a nice few thousands by the time Buenos Aires came in sight.

Czentovic remained unmoved. "If you please," he responded politely. "You gentlemen will take black this time."

There was nothing different about the second game except that our group became larger because of a few added onlookers, and livelier, too. MacIver stared fixedly at the board as if he willed to magnetize the chess-men to victory; I sensed that he would have paid a thousand dollars with delight if he could but shout "Mate" at our cold-snouted adversary. Oddly enough, something of his sudden excitement entered unconsciously into all of us. Every single move was discussed with greater emotion than before; always we would wrangle up to the last moment before agreeing to signal Czentovic to return to the table. We had come to the seventeenth move and, to our own surprise, entered on a combination which seemed staggeringly advantageous because we had been enabled to advance a pawn to the last square but one; we needed but to move it forward to c1 to win a second queen. Not that we felt too comfortable about so obvious an opportunity; we were united in suspecting that the advantage which we seemed to have wrested could be no more than bait dangled by Czentovic whose vision enabled him to view the situation from a distance of several moves. Yet in spite of common examination and discussion, we were unable to explain it as a feint. At last, at the limit of our ten minutes, we decided to risk the move. MacIver's fingers were on the pawn to move it to the last square when he felt his arm gripped and heard a voice, low and impetuous, whisper, "For God's sake! Don't!"

Involuntarily we all turned about. I recognized in the man of some forty-five years, who must have joined the group during the last few minutes in which we were absorbed in the problem before us, one whose narrow sharp face had already arrested my attention on deck strolls because of its extraordinary, almost chalky pallor. Conscious of our gaze, he continued rapidly:

"If you make a queen he will immediately attack with the bishop, then you'll take it with your knight. Meantime, however, he moves his pawn to d7, threatens your rook, and even if you check with the knight you're lost and will be wiped out in nine or ten moves. It's practically the constellation that Alekhin introduced when he played Boguljobov in 1922 at the championship tournament at Pistany."

Astonished, MacIver released the pawn and, like the rest of us, stared amazedly at the man who had descended in our midst like a rescuing angel. Anyone who can reckon a mate nine moves ahead must necessarily be a first-class expert, perhaps even a contestant now on his way to the tournament to seize the championship, so that his sudden presence, his thrust into the game at precisely the critical moment, partook almost of the supernatural.

MacIver was the first to collect himself. "What do you advise?" he asked suppressedly.

"Don't advance yet; rather a policy of evasion. First of all, get the king out of the danger line from g8 to h7. Then he'll probably transfer his attack to the other flank. Then you parry that with the rook, c8 to c4; two moves and he will have lost not only a pawn but his superiority, and if you maintain your defensive properly you may be able to make it a draw. That's the best you can get out of it."

We gasped, amazed. The precision no less than the rapidity of his calculations dizzied us; it was as if he had been reading the moves from a printed page. For all that, this unsuspected turn by which, thanks to his cutting in, the contest with a world champion promised a draw, worked wonders. Animated by a single thought, we moved aside so as not to obstruct his observation of the board.

Again MacIver inquired: "The king, then; to h7?"

"Surely. The main thing is to duck."

MacIver obeyed and we rapped on the glass. Czentovic came forward at his habitual even pace, his eyes swept the board and took in the countermove. Then he moved the pawn h2 to h4 on the king's flank exactly as our unknown aid had predicted. Already the latter was whispering excitedly:

"The rook forward, the rook, to c4; then he'll first have to cover the pawn. That won't help him, though. Don't bother about his pawns but attack with the knight c3 to d5, and the balance is again restored. Press the offensive instead of defending."

We had no idea of what he meant. He might have been talking Chinese. But once under his spell MacIver did as he had been bidden. Again we struck the glass to recall Czentovic. This was the first time that he made no quick decision; instead he looked fixedly at the board. His eyebrows contracted involuntarily. Then he made his move, the one which our stranger had said he would, and turned to go. Yet before he started off something novel and unexpected happened. Czentovic raised his eyes and surveyed our ranks; plainly he wanted to ascertain who it was that offered such unaccustomed energetic resistance.

From this moment our excitement grew immeasurably. Thus far we had played without genuine hope, but now every pulse beat hotly at the thought of breaking Czentovic's cold disdain. Without loss of time our new friend had directed the next move and we were ready to call Czentovic back. My fingers trembled as I hit the spoon against the glass. And now we registered our first triumph. Czentovic, who hitherto had executed his purpose standing, hesitated, hesitated and finally sat down. He did this slowly and heavily, but that was enough to cancel - in a physical sense if in no other - the difference in levels that had previously obtained. We had necessitated his acknowledgment of equality, spatially at least. He cogitated long, his eyes resting immovably on the board so that one could scarcely discern the pupils under the heavy lids, and under the strained application his mouth opened gradually, which gave him a rather

foolish look. Czentovic reflected for some minutes, then made a move and rose. At once our friend said half audibly:

"A stall! Well thought out! But don't yield to it. Force an exchange, he's got to exchange, then we'll get a draw and not even the gods can help him."

MacIver did as he was told. The succeeding manoeuvres between the two men - we others had long since become mere supernumeraries - consisted of a back-and-forth that we were unable to comprehend. After some seven moves Czentovic looked up after a period of silence and said, "Draw."

For a moment a total stillness reigned. Suddenly one heard the rushing of the waves and the jazzing radio in the adjacent drawing-room; one picked out every step on the promenade outside and the faint thin susurrations of the wind that carried through the window-frames. None of us breathed; it had come upon us too abruptly and we were nothing less than frightened in the face of the impossible: that this stranger should have been able to force his will on the world champion in a contest already half lost. MacIver shoved himself back and relaxed, and his suppressed breathing became audible in the joyous "Ah" that passed his lips. I took another look at Czentovic. It had already seemed to me during the later moves that he grew paler. But he understood how to maintain his poise. He persisted in his apparent imperturbability and asked, in a negligent tone, the while he pushed the figures off the board with a steady hand:

"Would you like to have a third game, gentlemen?"

The question was matter-of-fact, just business. What was noteworthy was that he ignored MacIver and looked straight and intently into the eyes of our rescuer. Just as a horse takes a new rider's measure by the firmness of his seat, he must have become cognizant of who was his real, in fact his only, opponent. We could not help but follow his gaze and look eagerly at the unknown. However, before he could collect himself and formulate an answer, MacIver in his eager excitement, had already cried to him in triumph:

"Certainly, no doubt about it! But this time you've got to play him alone! You against Czentovic!"

What followed was quite extraordinary. The stranger, who curiously enough was still staring with a strained expression at the bare board, became affrighted upon hearing the lusty call and perceiving that he was the centre of observation. He looked confused.

"By no means, gentlemen," he said halting, plainly perplexed. "Quite out of the question. You'll have to leave me out. It's twenty, no, twenty-five years since I sat at a chess-board and . . . and I'm only now conscious of my bad manners in crashing into your game without so much as a by your leave Please excuse my presumption. I don't want to interfere further." And before we could recover from our astonishment he had left us and gone out.

"But that's just impossible!" boomed the irascible MacIver, pounding with his fist. "Out of the question that this fellow hasn't played chess for twenty-five years. Why, he calculated every move, every counter move, five or six in advance. You can't shake that out of your sleeve. Just out of the question - isn't it?"

Involuntarily, MacIver turned to Czentovic with the last question. But the champion preserved his unalterable frigidity.

"It's not for me to express an opinion. In any case there was something queer and interesting about the man's game; that's why I purposely left him a chance."

With that he rose lazily and added, in his objective manner: "If he or you gentlemen should want another game to-morrow, I'm at your disposal from three o'clock on."

We were unable to suppress our chuckles. Everyone of us knew that the chance which Czentovic had allowed his nameless antagonist had not been prompted by generosity and that the remark was no more than a childish ruse to cover his frustration. It served to stimulate the more actively our desire to witness the utter humbling of so unshakable an arrogance. All at once we peaceable, indolent passengers were seized by a mad ambitious will to battle, for the thought that just on our ship, in mid ocean, the palm might be wrested from the champion - a record that would be flashed to every news agency in the world - fascinated us challengingly. Added to that was the lure of the mysterious which emanated from the unexpected entry of our saviour at the crucial instant, and the contrast between his almost painful modesty and the rigid self-consciousness of the professional. Who was this unknown? Had destiny utilized this opportunity to command the revelation of a yet undiscovered chess phenomenon? Or was it that we were dealing with an expert, who, for some undisclosed reason, craved anonymity? We discussed these various possibilities excitedly; the most extreme hypotheses were not sufficiently extreme to reconcile the stranger's puzzling shyness with his surprising declaration in the face of his demonstrated mastery. On one point, however, we were of one mind: to forgo no chance of a renewal of the contest. We resolved to exert ourselves to the limit to induce our godsend to play Czentovic the next day, MacIver pledging himself to foot the bill. Having in the meantime learned from the steward that the unknown was an Austrian, I, as his compatriot, was delegated to present our request.

Soon I found our man reclining in his deck-chair, reading. In the moment of approach I used the opportunity to observe him. The sharply-chiselled head rested on the cushion in a posture of slight exhaustion; again I was struck by the extraordinary colourlessness of the comparatively youthful face framed at the temples by glistening white hair, and I got the impression, I cannot say why, that this person must have aged suddenly. No sooner did I stand before him than he rose courteously and introduced himself by a name that was familiar to me as belonging to a highly respected family of old Austria. I remembered that a bearer of that name had been an intimate friend of Schubert, and that one of the old Emperor's physicians-in-ordinary had belonged to the same family. Dr. B. was visibly dumbfounded when I stated our wish that he should take Czentovic on. It proved that he had no idea that he had stood his ground against a champion, let alone the most famous one in the world at the moment. For some reason this news seemed

to make a special impression on him, for he inquired once and again whether I was sure that his opponent was truly a recognized holder of international honours. I soon perceived that this circumstance made my mission easier, but sensing his refined feelings, I considered it discreet to withhold the fact that MacIver would be a pecuniary loser in case of an eventual defeat. After considerable hesitation Dr. B. at last consented to a match, but with the proviso that my fellow-players be warned against putting extravagant hope in his expertness.

"Because," he added with a clouded smile, "I really don't know whether I have the ability to play the game according to all the rules. I assure you that it was not by any means false modesty that made me say that I hadn't touched a chess-man since my college days, say more than twenty years. And even then I had no particular gifts as a player."

This was said so simply that I had not the slightest doubt of its truth. And yet I could not but express wonderment at his accurate memory of the details of positions in games by many different masters; he must, at least, have been greatly occupied with chess theory. Dr. B. smiled once more in that dreamy way of his.

"Greatly occupied! Heaven knows it's true enough that I have occupied myself with chess greatly. But that happened under quite special, I might say unique, circumstances. The story of it is rather complicated and it might go as a little chapter in the story of our agreeable epoch. Do you think you would have patience for half an hour . . . ?"

He waved towards the deck-chair next to his, I accepted the invitation gladly. There were no near neighbours. Dr. B. removed his reading spectacles, laid them to one side, and began.

"You were kind enough to say that, as a Viennese, you remembered the name of my family. I am pretty sure, however, that you could hardly have heard of the law office which my father and I conducted - and later I alone - for we had no cases that got into the papers and we avoided new clients on principle. In truth, we no longer had a regular law practice but confined ourselves exclusively to advising, and mainly to administering the fortunes of the great monasteries with which my father, once a Deputy of the Clerical Party, was closely connected. Besides - in this day and generation I am no longer obliged to keep silence about the Monarchy - we had been entrusted with the investment of the funds of certain members of the Imperial family. These connections with the Court and the Church - my uncle had been the Emperor's household physician, another was an abbot in Seitenstetten - dated back two generations; all we had to do was to maintain them, and the task allotted to us through this inherited confidence - a quiet, I might almost say a soundless, task - really called for little more than strict discretion and dependability, two qualities which my late father possessed in full measure; he succeeded, in fact, through his prudence in preserving considerable values for his clients through the years of inflation as well as the period of collapse. Then, when Hitler seized the helm in Germany and began to raid the properties of churches and cloisters, certain negotiations and transactions, initiated from the other side of the frontier with a view to saving at least the movable valuables from confiscation, went through our hands and we two knew more about sundry secret transactions between the Curia and the Imperial house than the public will ever learn of. But the

very inconspicuousness of our office - we hadn't even a sign on the door - as well as the care with which both of us almost ostentatiously kept out of Monarchist circles, offered the safest protection from officious investigations. In fact, no Austrian official had ever suspected that during all those years the secret couriers of the Imperial family delivered and fetched their most important mail in our unpretentious fourth floor office.

"It happened that the National Socialists began, long before they armed their forces against the world, to organize a different but equally schooled and dangerous army in all contiguous countries - the legion of the unprivileged, the despised, the injured. Their so-called 'cells' nested themselves in every office, in every business; they had listening-posts and spies in every spot, right up to the private chambers of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg. They had their man, alas! I learned only too late, even in our insignificant office. True, he was nothing but a wretched, ungifted clerk whom I had engaged, on the recommendation of a priest, for no other purpose than to give the office the appearance of a going concern; all that we really used him for were innocent errands, answering the telephone, and filing papers, that is to say papers of no real importance. He was not allowed to open the mail. I typed important letters myself and kept no copies. I took all essential documents to my home, and I held private interviews nowhere but in the priory of the cloister or in my uncle's consultation-room. The measures of caution prevented the listening-post from seeing anything that went on; but some unlucky happening must have made the vain and ambitious fellow aware that he was mistrusted and that interesting things were going on behind his back. It may have been that in my absence one of the couriers made a careless reference to 'His Majesty' instead of the stipulated 'Baron Fern,' or that the rascal opened letters surreptitiously. Whatever the reason, before I had so much as suspected him he managed to get a mandate from Berlin or Munich to watch us. It was only much later, long after my imprisonment began, that I remembered how his early laziness at work had changed in the last few months to a sudden eagerness when he frequently offered, almost intrusively, to post my letters. I cannot acquit myself of a certain amount of imprudence, but after all, haven't the greatest diplomats and generals of the world too been out-manuevered by Hitler's cunning? Just how precisely and lovingly the Gestapo had long been directing its attention to me was manifested tangibly by the fact that the S.S. people arrested me on the evening of the very day of Schuschnigg's abdication, and a day before Hitler entered Vienna. Luckily I had been able to burn the most important documents upon hearing Schuschnigg's farewell address over the radio, and the other papers, along with the indispensable vouchers for the securities held abroad for the cloisters and two archdukes, I concealed in a basket of laundry which my faithful housekeeper took to my uncle. All of this almost literally in the last minute before the fellows stove my door in."

Dr. B. interrupted himself long enough to light a cigar. I noticed by the light of the match a nervous twitch at the right corner of his mouth that had struck me before and which, as far as I could observe, recurred every few minutes. It was merely a fleeting vibration, hardly stronger than a breath, but it imparted to the whole face a singular restlessness.

I suppose you expect that I'm going to tell you about concentration camp to which all who held faith with our old Austria were removed; about the degradations, martyrings and tortures that I

suffered there. Nothing of the kind happened. I was in a different category. I was not put with those luckless ones on whom they released their accumulated resentment by corporal and spiritual degradation, but rather was assigned to that small group out of which the National Socialists hoped to squeeze money or important information. My obscure person in itself meant nothing to the Gestapo, of course. They must have guessed, though, that were the dummies, the administrators and confidants, of their most embittered adversaries, and what they expected to compel from me was incriminating evidence, evidence against the monasteries to support charges of violation by those who had selflessly taken up the cudgels for the Monarchy. They suspected, and not without good reason, that a substantial portion of the funds that we handled was still secreted and inaccessible to their lust for loot - hence their choice of me on the very first day in order to force the desired information by their trusted methods. That is why persons of my sort, to whom they looked for money or significant evidence, were not dumped into a concentration camp but were sorted out for special handling. You will recall that our Chancellor, and also Baron Rothschild, from whose family they hoped to extort millions, were not planted behind barbed wire in a prison camp but, ostensibly privileged, were lodged in individual rooms in a hotel, the Metropole, which happened to be the Gestapo headquarters; the same distinction was bestowed on my insignificant self.

"A room to oneself in a hotel - sounds pretty decent doesn't it? But you may believe me that they had not in mind a more decent but a more crafty technique when, instead of stuffing us 'prominent' ones in blocks of twenty into icy barracks, they housed us in tolerably heated hotel rooms, each by himself. For the pressure by which they planned to compel the needed testimony was to be exerted more subtly than through common beating or physical torture: by the most conceivably complete isolation. They did nothing to us; they merely deposited us in the midst of nothing, knowing well that of all things the most potent pressure on the soul of man is nothingness. By placing us singly, each in an utter vacuum, in a chamber that was hermetically closed to the world without, it was calculated that the pressure created from inside, rather than cold and the scourge, would eventually cause our lips to spring apart.

"The first sight of the room allotted to me was not at all repellent. There was a door, a table, a bed, a chair, a wash-basin, a barred window. The door, however, remained closed night and day; the table remained bare of book, newspaper, pencil, paper; the window gave on a brick wall; my ego and my physical self were contained in a structure of nothingness. They had taken every object from me: my watch, that I might not know the hour; my pencil, that I might not make a note; my pocket-knife, that I might not sever a vein; even the slight narcotic of a cigarette was forbidden me. Except for the warder, who was not permitted to address me or to answer a question, I saw no human face, I heard no human voice. From dawn to night there was no sustenance for eye or ear or any sense; I was alone with myself, with my body and four or five inanimate things, rescuelessly alone with table, bed, window, and basin. One lived like a diver in his bell in the black ocean of this silence - like a diver, too, who is dimly aware that the cable to safety has already snapped and that he never will be raised from the soundless depths. There was nothing to do, nothing to hear, nothing to see; about me; everywhere and without interruption, there was nothingness, emptiness without space or time. I walked to and fro, and with me went my thoughts to and fro, to and fro, ever again. But even thoughts, insubstantial as they seem require an anchorage if they are not to revolve and circle around themselves; they

too weigh down under nothingness. One waited for something from morn to eve and nothing happened. Nothing happened. One waited, waited, waited; one thought, one thought, one thought until one's temples smarted. Nothing happened. One remained alone. Alone. Alone.

"That lasted for a fortnight, during which I lived outside of time, outside the world. If war had broken out then I would never have discovered it, for my world comprised only table, door, bed, basin, chair, window and wall every line of whose scalloped pattern embedded itself as with a steel graver in the innermost folds of my brain every time it met my eye. Then, at last, the hearings began. Suddenly I received a summons; I hardly knew whether it was day or night. I was called and led through a few corridors, I knew not whither; then I waited and knew not where it was, and found myself standing at a table behind which some uniformed men were seated. Piles of papers on the table, documents of whose contents I was in ignorance; and then came the questions, the real ones and the false, the simple and the cunning, the catch questions and the dummy questions; and whilst I answered, strange and evil fingers toyed with papers whose contents I could not surmise, and strange evil fingers wrote a record and I could not know what they wrote. But the most fearsome thing for me at those hearings was that I never could guess or figure out what the Gestapo actually knew about the goings on in my office and what they sought to worm out of me. I have already told you that at the last minute I gave my housekeeper the really incriminating documents to take to my uncle. Had he received them? Had he not received them? How far had I been betrayed by that clerk? Which letters had they intercepted and what might they not already have screwed out of some clumsy priest at one of the cloisters which we represented?

"And they heaped question on question. What securities had I bought for this cloister, with which banks had I corresponded, do I know Mr. So-and-so or do I not, had I corresponded with Switzerland and with God-knows-where? And not being able to divine what they had already dug up, every answer was fraught with danger. Were I to admit something that they didn't know I might be unnecessarily exposing somebody to the axe, if I denied too much I harmed myself.

"The worst was not the examination. The worst was the return from the examination to my void, to the same room with the same table, the same bed, the same basin, the same wall-paper. No sooner was I by myself than I tried to recapitulate, to think of what I should have said and what I should say next time so as to divert any suspicion that a careless remark of mine might have aroused. I pondered, I combed through, I probed, I appraised every single word of testimony before the examining officers. I restated their every question and every answer that I made. I sought to sift out the part that went into the protocol, knowing well that it was all incalculable and unascertainable. But these thoughts, once given rein in empty space, rotated in my head unceasingly, always starting afresh in ever-changing combinations and insinuating themselves into my sleep.

"After every hearing by the Gestapo my own thoughts took over no less inexorably the martyrizing questions, searchings and torments, and perhaps even more horribly, for the hearings at least ended after an hour, but this repetition, thanks to the spiteful torture of solitude, ended never. And always the table, chest, bed, wallpaper, window; no diversion, not a book or magazine, not a new face, no pencil with which to jot down an item, not a match to toy with -

nothing, nothing, nothing. It was only at this point that I apprehended how devilishly intelligently, with what murderous psychology, this hotel-room system was conceived. In a concentration camp one would, perhaps, have had to wheel stones until one's hands bled and one's feet froze in one's boots; one would have been packed in stench and cold with a couple of dozen others. But one would have seen faces, would have had space, a tree, a star, something, anything, to stare at, while here everything stood before one unchangeably the same, always the same, maddeningly the same. There was nothing here to switch me off from my thoughts, from my delusive notions, from my diseased recapitulating. That was just what they purposed: they wanted me to gag and gag on my thoughts until they choked me and I had no choice but to spit them out at last, to admit - admit everything that they were after, finally to yield up the evidence and the people.

"I gradually became aware of how my nerves were slacking under the grisly pressure of the void and, conscious of the danger, I tensed myself to the bursting point in an effort to find or create any sort of diversion. I tried to recite or reconstruct everything I had ever memorized in order to occupy myself - the folk songs and nursery rhymes of childhood, the Homer of my high-school days, clauses from the Civil Code. Then I did problems in arithmetic, adding or dividing, but my memory was powerless without some integrating force. I was unable to concentrate on anything. One thought flickered and darted about: how much do they know? What is it that they don't know? What did I say yesterday - what ought I to say next time?

"This simply indescribable state lasted four months. Well, four months; easy to write, just about a dozen letters! Easy to say, too: four months, a couple of syllables. The lips can articulate the sound in a quarter of a second: four months. But nobody can describe or measure or demonstrate, not to another or to himself, how long a period endures in the spaceless and timeless, nor can one explain to another how it eats into and destroys one, this nothing and nothing and nothing that is all about, everlastingly this table and bed and basin and wall-paper, and always that silence, always the same warder who shoves the food in without looking at one, always those same thoughts that revolve around one in the nothingness, until one becomes insane.

"Small signs made me disturbedly conscious that my brain was not working right. Early in the game my mind had been quite clear at the examinations; I had testified quietly and deliberately; my twofold thinking - what should I say and what not? - had still functioned. Now I could no more than articulate haltingly the simplest sentences, for while I spoke my eyes were fixed in a hypnotic stare on the pen that sped recordingly across the paper as if I wished to race after my own words. I felt myself losing my grip, I felt that the moment was coming closer and closer when, to rescue myself, I would tell all I knew and perhaps more; when, to elude the strangling grip of that nothingness, I would betray twelve persons and their secrets without deriving any advantage myself but the respite of a single breath.

"One evening I really reached that limit: the warder had just served my meal at such a moment of desperation when I suddenly shrieked after him: 'Take me to the Board! I'll tell everything! I want to confess! I'll tell them where the papers are and where the money is! I'll tell them

everything! Everything!' Fortunately he was far enough away not to hear me. Or perhaps he didn't want to hear me.

"An event occurred in this extremest need, something unforeseeable, that offered rescue, rescue if only for a period. It was late in July, a dark, ominous, rainy day: I recall these details quite definitely because the rain was rattling against the windows of the corridor through which I was being led to the examination. I had to wait in the ante-room of the audience chamber. Always one had to wait before the session; the business of letting one wait was a trick of the game. They would first rip one's nerves by the call, the abrupt summons from the cell in the middle of the night, and then, by the time one was keyed to the ordeal with will and reason tensed to resistance, they caused one to wait, meaningless meaningful waiting, an hour, two hours, three hours before the trial, to weary the body and humble the spirit. And they caused me to wait particularly long on this Thursday, the 27th of July; twice the hour struck while I attended, standing, in the ante-room; there is a special reason, too, for my remembering the date so exactly.

"A calendar hung in this room - it goes without saying that they never permitted me to sit down; my legs bored into my body for two hours - and I find it impossible to convey to you how my hunger for something printed, something written, made me stare at these figures, these few words, '27 July,' against the wall; I wolfed them into my brain. Then I waited some more and waited and looked to see when the door would open at last, meanwhile reflecting on what my inquisitors might ask me this time, knowing well that they would ask me something quite different from that for which I was schooling myself. Yet in the face of all that, the torment of the waiting and standing was nevertheless a blessing, a delight, because this room was, after all, a different from my own, somewhat larger and with two windows instead of one, and without the bed and without the basin and without that crack in the window-sill that I had regarded a million times. The door was painted differently, a different chair stood against the wall, and to the left stood a filing cabinet with documents as well as a clothes-stand on which three or four wet militia coats hung - my torturers' coats. So that I had something; new, something different to look at, at last something different for my starved eyes, and they clawed greedily at every detail.

"I took in every fold of those garments; I observed for example, a drop suspended from one of the wet collars and, ludicrous as it may sound to you, I waited in an inane excitement to see whether the drop would eventually detach itself and roll down or whether it would resist gravity and stay put; truly, this drop held me breathless for minutes, as if my life had been at stake. It rolled down after all, and then I counted the buttons on the coats again, eight on one, eight on another, ten on the third, and again I compared the rank marks; all of these absurd and unimportant trifles toyed with, teased, and pinched my hungry eyes with an avidity which I forgo trying to describe. And suddenly I saw something that paralysed my gaze. I had discovered a slight bulge in the side-pocket of one of the coats. I moved closer to it and thought that I recognized, by the rectangular shape of the protrusion, what this swollen pocket harboured: a book! My knees trembled: a *book!*

"I hadn't had a book in my hand for four months, so that the mere idea of a book in which words appear in orderly arrangement, of sentences, pages, leaves, a book in which one could follow and stow in one's brain new, unknown, diverting thoughts, was at once intoxicating and stupefying.

Hypnotized, my eyes rested on the little swelling which the book inside the pocket formed; they glowered at the spot as if to burn a hole in the coat. The moment came when I could no longer control my greed; involuntarily I edged nearer. The mere thought that my hands might at least feel the book through the cloth made the nerves of my fingers tingle to the nails. Almost without knowing what I did, I found myself getting closer to it.

"Happily the warder ignored my singular behaviour; indeed it may have seemed to him quite natural that a man wanted to lean against a wall, after standing erect for two hours. And then I was quite close to the coat, my hands purposely clasped behind me so as to be able to touch the coat unnoticed. I felt the stuff and the contact confirmed that here was something square, something flexible, and that it crackled softly - book, a book! And then a thought went through me like a shot: steal the book! If you can turn the trick, you can hide the book in your cell and read, read, read - read again at last. The thought, hardly lodged in me, operated like a strong poison; at once there was a singing in my ears, my heart hammered, my hands froze and resisted my bidding. But after that first numbness I pressed myself softly and insinuatingly against the coat; I pressed - always fixing the warder with my eye - the book up out of the pocket, higher and higher, with my artfully concealed hands. Then: a tug, a gentle, careful pull, and in no time the little book was in my hand. Not until now was I frightened at my deed. Retreat was no longer possible. What to do with it? I shoved the book under my trousers at the back just far enough for the belt to hold it, then gradually to the hip so that while walking I could keep it in place by holding my hands on the trouser-seams, military fashion. I had to try it out, so I moved a step from the clothes-stand, two steps, three steps. It worked. It was possible to keep the book in place while walking if I but kept pressing firmly against my belt.

"Then came the hearing. It demanded greater attention than ever on my part, for while answering I concentrated my entire effort on securing the book inconspicuously rather than on my testimony. Luckily this session proved to be a short one and I got the book safely to room, though it slipped into my trousers most dangerously while in the corridor on my way back and I had to simulate a violent fit of coughing as an excuse for bending over to get it under my belt again. But what a moment; that, as I bore it back into my inferno, alone at last yet no longer alone!

"You will suppose, of course, that my first act was to seize the book, examine it and read it. Not at all! I wanted, first of all, to savour the joy of possessing a book; the artificially prolonged and nerve-inflaming desire to day-dream about the kind of book I would wish this stolen one to be: above all, very small type, narrowly spaced, with many, many letters, many, many thin leaves so that it might take long to read. And then I wished to myself that it might be one that would demand mental exertion, nothing smooth or light; rather something from which I could learn and memorize, preferably - oh, what an audacious dream! - Goethe or Homer. At last I could no longer check my greed and my curiosity. Stretched on the bed so as to arouse no suspicion in case the warder might open the door without warning, tremblingly I drew the volume from under my belt.

"The first glance produced not merely disappointment but a sort of bitter vexation, for this booty, whose acquirement was surrounded with such monstrous danger and such glowing hope,

proved to be nothing more than a chess anthology, a collection of one hundred and fifty championship games. Had I not been barred, locked in, I would in my first rage, have thrown the thing through an open window; for what was to be done - what could be done - with nonsense of the kind? Like most of the other boys at school, I had now and then tried my hand at chess to kill time. But of what use was this theoretical stuff to me? You can't play chess alone, and certainly not without chess-men and a board. Annoyed I thumbed the pages, thinking to discover reading matter of some sort, an introduction, a manual; but besides the bare rectangular reproductions of the various master games with their symbols a1-a2, Kt.-f1-Kt.-g3, etc. - to me then unintelligible, I found nothing. All of it appeared to me as a kind of algebra the key to which was hidden. Only gradually I puzzled out that the letters a, b, c stood for the vertical rows, the figures 1 to 8 for the rows across, and indicated the current position of each figure; thus these purely graphic expressions did, nevertheless, attain to speech.

"Who knows, I thought, if I were able to devise a chess-board in my cell I could follow these names through; and it seemed like a sign from heaven that the weave of my bedspread disclosed a coarse checker-work. With proper manipulation it yielded a field of sixty-four squares. I tore out the first leaf and concealed the book under my mattress. Then, from bits of bread that I sacrificed, I began to mould king, queen, and the other figures (with ludicrous results, of course), and after no end of effort I was finally able to undertake on the bedspread the reproduction of the positions pictured in the chess book. But my absurd bread-crumbs, half of which I had covered with dust to differentiate them from 'white' ones, proved utterly inadequate when I tried to pursue the printed game. I was all confusion in those first days; I would have to start a game afresh five times, ten times, twenty times. But who on earth had so much unused and useless time as I, slave of emptiness, and who commanded so much immeasurable greed and patience!

"It took me six days to play the game to the end with out an error, and in a week after that I no longer required the chess-men to comprehend the relative positions and in just one more week I was able to dispense with the bedspread; the printed symbols, a1, a2, c7, c8, at first abstractions to me, automatically transformed themselves into visual plastic positions. The transposition had been accomplished perfectly. I had projected the chess-board and its figures within myself and, thanks to the bare rules, observed the immediate set-up just as a practised musician hears all instruments singly and in combination upon merely glancing at a printed score.

"It cost me no effort, after another fortnight, to play every game in the book from memory or, in chess language, blind; and only then did I begin to understand the limitless benefaction which my impertinent theft constituted. For I had acquired an occupation - a senseless, a purposeless one if you wish - yet one that negated the nothingness that enveloped me; the one hundred and fifty championship games equipped me with a weapon against the strangling monotony of space and time.

"From then on, to conserve the charm of this new interest without interruption, I divided my day precisely: two games in the morning, two in the afternoon, a quick recapitulation in the evening. That served to fill my day which previously had been as shapeless as jelly; I had something to do that did not tire me, for a wonderful feature of chess is that through confining mental energy to a strictly bounded field the brain does not flag even under the most strained concentration; rather it

makes more acute its agility and energy. In the course of time the repetition of the master games, which had at first been mechanical, awakened an artistic, a pleasurable comprehension in me. I learned to understand the refinements, the tricks and feints in attack and defence; I grasped the technique of thinking ahead, planning combinations and riposting, and soon recognized the personal note of each champion in his individual method as infallibly as one spots a particular poet on hearing only a few lines. That which began as a mere time-killing occupation became a joy, and the personalities of such great chess strategists as Alekhin, Lasker, Boguljobov and Tartakover entered into my solitude as beloved comrades.

"My silent cell was constantly and variously peopled, and the very regularity of my exercises restored my already impaired intellectual capacity; my brain seemed refreshed and, because of constant disciplined thinking, even keenly whetted. My ability to think more clearly and concisely manifested itself, above all, at the hearings; unconsciously I had perfected myself at the chess-board in defending myself against false threats and masked dodges, from this time on I gave them no openings at the sessions and I even harboured the thought that the Gestapo men began, after a while, to regard me with a certain respect. Possibly they asked themselves, seeing so many others collapse, from what secret sources I alone found strength for such unshakable resistance.

"This period of happiness in which I played through the one hundred and fifty games in that book systematically, day by day, continued for about two and a half to three months. Then I arrived unexpectedly at a dead point. Suddenly I found myself once more facing nothingness. For by the time that I had played through each one of these games innumerable times, the charm of novelty and surprise was lost, the exciting and stimulating power was exhausted. What purpose did it serve to repeat again and again games whose every move I had long since memorized? No sooner did I make an opening move than the whole thing unravelled of itself; there was no surprise, no tension, no problem. At this point I would have needed another book with more games to keep me busy, to engage the mental effort that had become indispensable to divert me. This being totally impossible, my madness could take but one course: instead of the old games I had to devise new ones myself. I had to try to play the game with myself or, rather, against myself.

"I have no idea to what extent you have given thought to the intellectual status of this game of games. But one doesn't have to reflect deeply to see that if pure chance can determine a game of calculation, it is an absurdity in logic to play against oneself. The fundamental attraction of chess lies, after all, in the fact that its strategy develops in different ways in two different brains, that in this mental battle Black, ignorant of White's immediate manoeuvres, seeks constantly to guess and cross them, while White, for his part, strives to penetrate Black's secret purposes and to outstrip and parry them. If one person tried to be both Black and White you have the preposterous situation that one and the same brain at once knows something and yet does not know it; that, functioning as White's partner, it can instantly obey a command to forget what, a moment earlier as Black's partner, it desired and plotted. Such cerebral duality really implies a complete cleavage of the conscious, a lighting up or dimming of the brain function at pleasure as with a switch; in short, to want to play against oneself at chess is about as paradoxical as to want to jump over one's own shadow.

"Well, briefly, in my desperation I tried this impossibility, this absurdity, for months. There was no choice but this nonsense if I was not to become quite insane or slowly to disintegrate mentally. The fearful state that I was in compelled me at least to attempt this split between Black ego and White ego so as not to be crushed by the horrible nothingness that bore in on me."

Dr. B. relaxed in his deck-chair and closed his eyes for a minute. It seemed as if he were exerting his will to suppress disturbing recollection. Once again the left corner of his mouth twitched in that strange and evidently uncontrollable manner. Then he settled himself a little more erectly.

"Well, then, I hope I've made it all pretty intelligible to this point. I'm sorry, but I doubt greatly that the rest of it can be pictured quite as clearly. This new occupation, you see, called for so unconditional a harnessing of the brain as to make any simultaneous self-control impossible. I have already intimated my opinion that chess contest with oneself spells nonsense, but there is a minimal possibility for even such an absurdity if a real chess-board is present, because the board, being tangible, affords a sense of distance, a material extraterritoriality. Before a real chess-board with real chessmen you can stop to think things over, and you can place yourself physically first on this side of the table, then on the other, to fix in your eyes how the scene looks to Black and how it looks to White. Obligated as I was to conduct these contests against myself - or with myself, as you please - on an imaginary field, so I was obliged to keep fixedly in mind the current set-up on the sixty four squares, and besides, to make advance calculations as to the possible further moves open to each player, which meant - I know how mad this must sound to you - imagining double, triply, no, imagining sextuply, duodecibly for each one of my egos, always four or five moves in advance.

"Please don't think that I expect you to follow through the involutions of this madness. In these plays in the abstract space of fantasy I had to figure out the next four or five moves in my capacity of White, likewise as Black, thus considering every possible future combination with two brains, so to speak, White's brain and Black's brain. But even this auto-cleaving of personality was not most dangerous aspect of my abstruse experiment; rather it was that with the need to play independently I lost my foothold and fell into a bottomless pit. Then mere replaying of championship games, which I had been indulging in during the preceding weeks, had been, after all, no more than a feat of repetition, a straight recapitulation of given material and, as such, no greater strain than to memorize poetry or learn sections of the Civil Code by heart; it was a delimited, disciplined function and thus an excellent mental exercise. My two morning games, my two in the afternoon, represented a definite task that I was able to perform coolly; it was a substitute for normal occupation and, moreover, if I erred in the progress of a game or forgot the next move, I always had recourse to the book. It was only because the replaying of others' games left my self out of the picture that this activity served to soothe and heal my shattered nerves; it was all one to me whether Black or White was victor, for was it not Alekhin or Boguljobov who sought the palm, while my own person, my reason, my soul derived satisfaction as observer, as fancier of the niceties of those jousts as they worked out. From the moment at which I tried to play against myself I began, unconsciously, to challenge myself. Each of my egos, my Black ego and my White ego, had to contest against the other and become the centre, each on its own, of an ambition, an impatience to win, to conquer, after each move that I made as Ego Black I was in a

fever of curiosity as to what Ego White would do. Each of my egos felt triumphant when the other made a bad move and likewise suffered chagrin at similar clumsiness of its own.

"All that sounds senseless, and in fact such a self-produced schizophrenia, such a split consciousness with its fund of dangerous excitement, would be unthinkable in a person under normal conditions. Don't forget, though that I had been violently torn from all normality, innocently charged and behind bars, for months martyred by the refined employment of solitude - a man seeking an object against which to discharge his long-accumulated rage. And as I had nothing else than this insane match with myself, that rage, that lust for revenge, canalized itself fanatically into the game. Some-thing in me wanted to justify itself, but there was only this other self with which I could wrestle; so while the game was on, an almost maniac excitement waxed in me. In the beginning my deliberations were still quiet and imposed; I would pause between one game and the next so as to recover from the effort; but little by little my frayed nerves forbade all respite. No sooner had Ego White made a move than Ego Black feverishly plunged a piece forward; scarcely had a game ended but I challenged myself to another, for each time, of course, one of my chess-egos was beaten by the other and demanded satisfaction.

"I shall never be able to tell, even approximately, how many games I played against myself during those months in my cell as a result of this crazy insatiability; a thousand perhaps, perhaps more. It was an obsession against which I could not arm myself; from dawn to night I thought of nothing but knights and pawns, rooks and kings, and a b and c, and 'Mate!' and 'Castle'; my entire being and every sense embraced the checkered board. The joy of play became a lust for play; the lust for play became a compulsion to play, a frenetic rage, a mania which saturated not only my waking hours but eventually my sleep, too. I could think only in terms of chess, only in chess moves, chess problems; sometimes I would wake with a damp brow and become aware that a game had unconsciously continued in my sleep, and if I dreamt of persons it was exclusively in the moves of the bishop, the rook in the advance and retreat of the knight's move.

"Even when I was brought before the examining Board I was no longer able to keep my thoughts within the bounds of my responsibilities; I'm inclined to think that I must have expressed myself confusedly at the last sessions, for my judges would glance at one another strangely. Actually I was merely waiting, while they questioned and deliberated, in my cursed eagerness to be led back to my cell so that I could resume my mad round, to start a fresh game, and another and another. Every interruption disturbed me; even the quarter-hour in which the warder cleaned up the room, the two minutes in which he served my meals, tortured my feverish impatience; sometimes the midday meal stood untouched on the tray at evening because the game made me forgetful of food. The only physical sensation that I experienced was a terrible thirst; the fever of this constant thinking and playing must already have manifested itself then; I emptied the bottle in two swallows and begged the warder for more, and nevertheless felt my tongue dry in my mouth in the next minute.

"Finally my excitement during the games rose - by that time I did nothing else from morning till night - to such a height that I was no longer able to sit still for a minute; uninterruptedly, while cogitating on a move, I would walk to and fro, quicker and quicker, to and fro, to and fro, and the

nearer the approach to the decisive moment of the game the hotter my steps; the lust to win, to victory, to victory over myself increased to a sort of rage; I trembled with impatience, for the one chess-ego in me was always too slow for the other. One would whip the other forward and, absurd as this may seem to you, I would call angrily, 'Quicker, quicker!' or 'Go on, go on!' when the one self in me failed to riposte to the other's thrust quickly enough. It goes without saying that I am now fully aware that this state of mine was nothing less than a pathological form of overwrought mind for which I can find no other name than one not yet known to medical annals: chess poisoning.

"The time came when this monomania, this obsession, attacked my body as well as my brain. I lost weight, my sleep was restless and disturbed, upon waking I had to make great efforts to compel my leaded lids to open; sometimes I was so weak that when I grasped a glass I could scarcely raise it to my lips, my hands trembled so; but no sooner did the game begin than a mad power seized me: I rushed up and down, up and down with fists clenched, and I would sometimes hear my own voice as through a reddish fog, shouting hoarsely and angrily at myself, 'Check!' or 'Mate!'

"How this horrible, indescribable condition reached its crisis is something that I am unable to report. All that I know is that I woke one morning and the waking was different from usual. My body was no longer a burden, so to speak; I rested softly and easily. A tight, agreeable fatigue, such as I had not known for months, lay on my eyelids; the feeling was so warm and benignant that I couldn't bring myself to open my eyes. For minutes I lay awake and continued to enjoy this heavy soddenness, this tepid reclining in agreeable stupefaction. All at once I seemed to hear voices behind me, living human voices, low whispering voices that spoke words; and you can't possibly imagine my delight, for months had elapsed, perhaps a year, since I had heard other words than the hard, sharp, evil ones from my judges. 'You're dreaming,' I said to myself. 'You're dreaming! Don't, in any circumstances, open your eyes. Let the dream last or you'll again see the cursed cell about you, the chair and wash-stand and the table and the wall-paper with the eternal pattern. You're dreaming - keep on dreaming!'

But curiosity held the upper hand. Slowly and carefully I raised my lids. A miracle! It was a different room in which I found myself, a room wider and more ample than my hotel cell. An unbarred window emitted light freely and permitted a view of trees, green trees swaying in the wind, instead of my bald brick partition; the walls shone white and smooth, above above me a high white ceiling. I lay in a new and unaccustomed bed and - surely, it was no dream - human voices whispered behind me.

"In my surprise I must have made an abrupt, involuntary movement, for at once I heard an approaching step. A woman came softly, a woman with a white head-dress, a nurse, a Sister. A delighted shudder ran through me: I had seen no woman for a year. I stared at the lovely apparition, and it must have been a glance of wild ecstasy, for she admonished me, 'Quiet, don't move.' I hung only on her voice, for was not this a person who talked! Was there still somebody on earth who did not interrogate me, torture me? And to top it all - ungraspable wonder! - a soft, warm, almost tender woman's voice. I stared hungrily at her mouth, for the year of inferno had made it seem to me impossible that one person might speak kindly to another. She smiled at me -

yes, she smiled; then there still were people who could smile benevolently - put a warning finger to her lips, and went off noiselessly. But I could not obey her order; I was not yet sated with the miracle. I tried to wrench myself into a sitting posture so as to follow with my eyes this wonder of a human being who was kind. But when I reached out to support my weight on the edge of the bed something failed me. In place of my right hand, fingers, and wrist I became aware of something foreign - a thick, large, white cushion, obviously a comprehensive bandage. At first I gaped uncomprehendingly at this bulky object, then slowly I began to grasp where I was and to reflect on what could have happened to me. They must have injured me, or I had done some damage to my hand myself. The place was a hospital.

"The physician, an amiable elderly man, turned up at noon. He knew my family and made so genial an allusion to my uncle, the Imperial household doctor, as to create the impression that he was well disposed towards me. In the course of conversation he put all sorts of questions, one of which, in particular, astonished me: Was I a mathematician or a chemist? I answered in the negative.

" 'Strange,' he murmured. 'In your fever you cried out such unusual formulas, c3, c4. We could make nothing of it.'

"I asked him what had happened to me. He smiled oddly.

" 'Nothing too serious. An acute irritation of the nerves,' and added in a low voice, after looking carefully around, 'and quite intelligible, of course. Let's see, it was March 13, wasn't it!'

"I nodded.

" 'No wonder, with that system,' he admitted. 'You're not the first. But don't worry.' The manner of his soothing speech and sympathetic smile convinced me that I was in a safe haven.

"A couple of days thereafter the doctor told me quite of his own accord what had taken place. The warder had heard shrieks from my cell and thought, at first, that I was disputing with somebody who had broken in. But no sooner had he shown himself at the door than I made for him, shouted wildly something that sounded like 'Aren't you ever going to move, you rascal, you coward?' grasped at his windpipe, and finally attacked him so ferociously that he had to call for help. Then when they were dragging me, in my mad rage, for medical examination, I had suddenly broken loose and thrust myself against the window in the corridor, thereby lacerating my hand - see this deep scar. I had been in a sort of brain fever during the first few days in the hospital, but now he found my perceptive faculties quite in order. 'To be sure,' said he under his voice, 'it's just as well that I don't report that higher up or they may still come and fetch you back there. Depend on me, I'll do my best.'

"Whatever it was that this benevolent doctor told my torturers about me is beyond my knowledge. In any case, he achieved what he sought to achieve: my release. It may be that he declared me irresponsible, or it may be that my importance to the Gestapo had diminished, for Hitler had since occupied Bohemia, thus liquidating the case of Austria. I had merely to sign an

undertaking to leave the country within a fortnight, and this period was so filled with the multitude of formalities that now surround a journey - military certificate, police, tax and health certificates, passport, visas - as to leave me no time to brood over the past. Apparently one's brain is controlled by secret, regulatory powers which automatically switch off whatever may annoy or endanger the mind, for every time I wanted to ponder on my imprisonment the light in my brain seemed to go off; only after many weeks, indeed only now, on this ship, have I plucked up enough courage to pass in review all that I lived through.

"After all this you will understand my unbecoming and perhaps strange conduct to your friends. It was only by chance that I was strolling through the smoking-room and saw them sitting at the chess-board; my feet seemed rooted where I stood from astonishment and fright. For I had totally forgotten that one can play chess with a real board and real figures, forgotten that two physically separate persons sit opposite each other at this game. Truly it took me a few minutes before I remembered that what those men were playing was what I had been playing, against myself during the months of my helplessness. The cipher-code which served me in my worthy exercises was but a substitute, a symbol for these solid figures; my astonishment that this pushing about of pieces on the board was the same as the imaginary fantasies in my mind must have been like that of an astronomer who, after complicated paper calculations as to the existence of a new planet, eventually really sees it in the sky as clear white, substantial body. I stared at the board as if magnetized, and saw there my set-up, knight, rook, king, queen, and pawns, as genuine figures carved out of wood. In order to get the hang of the game I had voluntarily to transmute it from my abstract realm of numbers and letters into the movable figures. Gradually I was overcome with curiosity to observe a real contest between two players. Then followed that regrettable and impolite interference of mine with your game. But that mistaken move of your friend's was like a stab at my heart. It was pure instinct that made me hold him back, a quite impulsive grasp like that with which one involuntarily seizes a child leaning over a banister. It was not until afterwards that I became conscious of the impropriety of my intrusiveness."

I hastened to assure Dr. B. that we were all happy about the incident to which we owed his acquaintance and that, after what he had confided in me, I would be doubly interested in the opportunity to see him at tomorrow's improvised tournament.

"Really, you mustn't expect too much. It will be nothing but a test for me - a test whether I - whether I'm at all capable of dealing with chess in a normal way, in a game with a real board with substantial chess-men and a living opponent - for now I doubt more than ever that those hundreds, they may have been thousands, of games that I played were real games according to the rules, and not merely a sort of dream-chess, fever-chess, a delirium in which, as always in dreams, one skips intermediate steps. Surely you do not seriously believe that I would measure myself against a champion, that I expect to give tit for tat to the greatest one in the world. What interests and fascinates me is nothing but the humorous curiosity to discover whether what went on in my cell was chess or madness, whether I was then at the dangerous brink or already beyond it - that's all, nothing else."

At this moment the gong summoning passengers to dinner was heard. The conversation must have lasted almost two hours, for Dr. B. had told me his story in much greater detail than that in

which I assemble it. I thanked him warmly and took my leave. I had hardly covered the length of the deck when he was alongside me visibly nervous, saying with something of a stutter:

"One thing more. Will you please tell your friends beforehand, so that it should not later seem discourteous, that I will play only one game. . . . The idea is merely to close an old account - a final settlement, not a new beginning. . . . I can't afford to sink back a second time into that passionate play-fever that I recall with nothing but horror. And besides - besides, the doctor warned me, expressly warned me. Everyone who has ever succumbed to a mania remains for ever in jeopardy, and a sufferer from chess poisoning - even if discharged as cured - had better keep away from a chess-board. You understand, then - only this one experimental game for myself and no more."

We assembled in the smoking-room the next day promptly at the appointed hour, three o'clock. Our circle had increased by yet two more lovers of the royal game, two ship's officers who had obtained special leave from duty to watch the tourney. Czentovic, too, not as on the preceding day, was on time. After the usual choice of colours there began the memorable game this *homo obscurissimus* against the celebrated master.

I regret that it was played for thoroughly incompetent observers like us, and that its course is as completely lost to the annals of the art of chess as are Beethoven's improvisations to music. True, we tried to piece it together from our collective memory on the following afternoons but in vain; very likely, in the passion of the moment we had allowed our interest to centre on the players rather than on the game. For the intellectual contrast between the contestants became physically plastic according to their manner as the play proceeded. Czentovic, the creature of routine, remained the entire time as immobile as a block, his eyes unalterably fixed on the board; thinking seemed to cost him almost physical effort that called for extreme concentration on the part of every organ. Dr. B., on the other hand, was completely slack and unconstrained. Like the true dilettante, in the best sense of the word, to whom only the play in play - the *diletto* - gives joy, he relaxed fully, explained moves to us in easy conversation during the early intervals, lighted a cigarette carelessly, and glanced at the board for a minute only when it came his turn to play. Each time it seemed as if he had expected just the move that his antagonist made.

The perfunctory moves came off quite rapidly. It was not until the seventh or eighth that something like a definite plan seemed to develop. Czentovic prolonged his periods of reflection; by that we sensed that the actual battle for the lead was setting in. But, to be quite frank, the gradual development of the situation represented to us lay observers, as usually in tournament games, something of a disappointment. The more the pieces wove themselves into a singular design the more impenetrable became the real lie of the land. We could not discern what one or the other rival purposed or which of the two had the advantage. We noticed merely that certain pieces insinuated themselves forward like levers to undermine the enemy front, but since every move of these superior players was part of a combination that comprised a plan for several moves ahead, we were unable to detect the strategy of their back-and-forth.

An oppressive fatigue took possession of us, largely because of Czentovic's interminable cogitation between moves, which eventually produced visible irritation in our friend too. I observed uneasily now the longer the game stretched out, he became increasingly restless, moving about in his chair, nervously lighting a succession of cigarettes, occasionally seizing a pencil to make a note. He would order mineral water and gulp it down, glass after glass; it was plain that his mind was working a hundred times faster than Czentovic's. Every time the latter, after endless reflection, decided to push a piece forward with his heavy hand, our friend would smile like one who encounters something long expected and make an immediate riposte. In his nimble mind he must have calculated every possibility that lay open to his opponent; the longer Czentovic took to make a decision the more his impatience grew, and during the waiting his lips narrowed into an angry and almost inimical line. Czentovic, however, did not allow himself to be hurried. He deliberated, stiff and silent, and increased the length of the pauses the more the field became denuded of figures. By the forty-second move, after one and a half hours, we sat limply by, almost indifferent to what was going on in the arena. One of the ship's officers had already departed, another was reading a book and would look up only when a piece had been moved. Then, suddenly at a move of Czentovic's, the unexpected happened. As soon as Dr. B. perceived that Czentovic took hold of the bishop to move it, he crouched like a cat about to spring. His whole body trembled and Czentovic had no sooner executed his intention than he pushed his queen forward and said loudly and triumphantly, "There! That's done with!", fell back in his chair, his arms crossed over his breast and looked challengingly at Czentovic. As he spoke his pupils gleamed with a hot light.

Impulsively we bent over the board to figure out the significance of the move so ostentatiously announced. At first blush no direct threat was observable. Our friend's statement, then, had reference to some development that we short-thoughted amateurs could not prefigure. Czentovic was the only one among us who had not stirred at the provocative call; he remained as still as if the insulting "done with" had glanced of him unheard. Nothing happened. Everybody held his breath and at once the ticking of the clock that stood on the table to measure the moves became audible. Three minutes passed, seven minutes, eight minutes - Czentovic was motionless, but I thought I noticed an inner tension that became manifest in the greater distension of his thick nostrils.

This silent waiting seemed to be as unbearable to our friend as to us. He shoved his chair back, rose abruptly and began to traverse the smoking room, first slowly, then quicker and quicker. Those present looked at him wonderingly, but none with greater uneasiness than I, for I perceived that in spite of his vehemence this pacing never deviated from a uniform span; it was as if, in this awful space, he would each time come plump against an invisible cupboard that obliged him to reverse his steps. Shuddering, I recognized that it was an unconscious reproduction of the pacing in his erstwhile cell; during those months of incarceration it must have been exactly thus that he rushed to and fro, like a caged animal; his hands must have been clenched and his shoulders hunched exactly like this; it must have been like this that he pelted forward and back a thousand times there, the red lights of madness in his paralysed though feverish stare. Yet his mental control seemed still fully intact, for from time to time he turned impatiently towards the table to see if Czentovic had made up his mind. But time stretched to nine, then ten minutes.

What occurred then, at last, was something that none could have predicted. Czentovic slowly raised his heavy hand, which, until then, had rested inert on the table. Tautly we all watched for the upshot. Czentovic, however, moved no piece, but instead, with the back of his hand pushed, with one slow determined sweep, all the figures from the board. It took us a moment to comprehend: he gave up the game. He had capitulated in order that we might not witness his being mated. The impossible had come to pass: the champion of the world, victor at innumerable tournaments, had struck his colours before an unknown man, who hadn't touched a chess-board for twenty or twenty-five years. Our friend the anonymous, the ignotus, had overcome the greatest chess master on earth in open battle.

Automatically, in the excitement, one after another rose to his feet; each was animated by the feeling that he must give vent to the joyous shock by saying or doing something. Only one remained stolidly at rest: Czentovic. After a measured interval he lifted his head and directed a stony look at our friend.

"Another game?" he asked.

"Naturally," answered Dr. B. with an enthusiasm that was disturbing to me, and he seated himself, even before I could remind him of his own stipulation to play only once, and began to set up the figures in feverish haste. He pushed them about in such heat that a pawn twice slid from his trembling fingers to the floor; the pained discomfort that his unnatural excitement had already produced in me grew to something like fear. For this previously calm and quiet person had become visibly exalted; the twitching of his mouth was more frequent and in every limb he shook as with fever.

"Don't," I said softly to him. "No more now; you've had enough for to-day. It's too much of a strain for you."

"Strain! Ha!" and he laughed loudly and spitefully. "I could have played seventeen games during that slow ride. The only strain is for me to keep awake. - Well, aren't you ever going to begin?"

These last words had been addressed in an impetuous, almost rude tone to Czentovic. The latter glanced at him quietly and evenly, but there was something of a clenched fist in that adamantine stubborn glance. On the instant a new element had entered: a dangerous tension a passionate hate. No longer were they two players in a sporting way; they were two enemies sworn to destroy each other. Czentovic hesitated long before making the first move, and I had a definite sensation that he was delaying on purpose. No question but that this seasoned tactician had long since discovered that just such dilatoriness wearied and irritated his antagonist. He used no less than four minutes for the normal, the simplest of openings, moving the king's pawn two spaces. Instantly our friend advanced his king's pawn, but again Czentovic was responsible for an eternal, intolerable pause; it was like waiting with beating heart for the thunder-clap after a streak of fiery lightning, and waiting -with no thunder forthcoming. Czentovic never stirred. He meditated quietly, slowly, and as I felt, increasingly, maliciously slowly - which gave me plenty of time to observe Dr. B. He had just about consumed his third glass of water; it came to my

mind that he had spoken of his feverish thirst in his cell. Every symptom of abnormal excitement was plainly present: I saw his forehead grow moist and the scar on his hand become redder and more sharply outlined. Still, however, he held himself in rein. It was not until the fourth move, when Czentovic again pondered exasperatingly, that he forgot himself and exploded with, "Aren't you ever going to move?"

Czentovic looked up coldly. "As I remember it, we agreed on a ten-minute limit. It is a principle with me not to make it less."

Dr. B. bit his lips. I noticed under the table the growing restlessness with which he lifted and lowered the sole of his shoe, and I could not control the nervousness that overcame me because of the oppressive prescience of some insane thing that was boiling in him. As a matter of fact, there was a second encounter at the eighth move. Dr. B., whose self-control diminished with the increasing periods of waiting, could no longer conceal his tension; he was restless in his seat and unconsciously began to drum on the table with his fingers. Again Czentovic raised his peasant head.

"May I ask you not to drum. It disturbs me. I can't play with that going on."

"Ha, ha," answered Dr. B. with a short laugh, "one can see that."

Czentovic flushed. "What do you mean by that?" he asked, sharply and evilly.

Dr. B. gave another curt and spiteful laugh. "Nothing except that it's plain that you're nervous."

Czentovic lowered his head and said nothing. Seven minutes elapsed before he made his move, and that was the funereal tempo at which the game dragged on. Czentovic became correspondingly stonier; in the end he utilized the maximum time before determining on a move, and from interval to interval the conduct of our friend became stranger and stranger. It appeared as if he no longer had any interest in the game but was occupied with something quite different. He abandoned his excited pacing and remained seated motionlessly. Staring into the void with a vacant and almost insane look, he uninterruptedly muttered unintelligible words; either he was absorbed in endless combinations or - and, this was my inner suspicion - he was working out quite other games, for each time that Czentovic got to the point, a move he had to be recalled from his absent state. Then it took a minute or two to orient himself. My conviction grew that he had really forgotten all about Czentovic and the rest of us in this cold aspect of his insanity which might at any instant discharge itself violently. Surely enough, at the nineteenth move the crisis came. No sooner had Czentovic executed his play than Dr. B., giving no more than a cursory look at the board, suddenly pushed his bishop three spaces forward and shouted so loudly that we all started.

"Check! Check, the king!"

Every eye was on the board in anticipation of an extraordinary move. Then, after a minute, there was an unexpected development. Very slowly Czentovic tilted his head and looked - which he

had never done before - from one face to another. Something seemed to afford him a rich enjoyment, for little by little his lips gave expression to a satisfied and scornful smile. Only after he had savoured to the full the triumph which was still unintelligible to us did he address us, saying with mock deference:

"Sorry - but I see no check. Perhaps one of you gentlemen can see my king in check!"

We looked at the board and then uneasily over at Dr. B. Czentovic's king was fully covered against the bishop by a pawn - a child could see that - thus the king could not possibly be in check. We turned one to the other. Might not our friend in his agitation have pushed a piece over the line, a square too far one way or the other? His attention arrested by our silence, Dr. B. now stared at the board and began, stutteringly:

"But the king ought to be on f7 - that's wrong, all wrong- Your move was wrong! All the pieces are misplaced - the pawn should be on g5 and not on g4. Why, that's quite a different game - that's -"

He halted abruptly. I had seized his arm roughly, or rather I had pinched it so hard that even in his feverish bewilderment he could not but feel my grip. He turned and looked at me like a somnambulist.

"What - what do you want?"

I only said "Remember!" at the same time lightly drawing my finger over the scar on his hand. Automatically he followed my gesture, his eyes fixed glassily on the blood-red streak. Suddenly he began to tremble and his body shook.

"For God's sake," he whispered with pale lips. "Have I said or done something silly? Is it possible that I'm again ...?"

"No," I said, in a low voice, "but you have to stop the game at once. It's high time. Recollect what the doctor said."

With a single movement Dr. B. was on his feet. "I have to apologize for my stupid mistake," he said in his old, polite voice, inclining himself to Czentovic. "What I said was plain nonsense, of course. It goes without saying that the game is yours." Then to us: "My apologies to your gentlemen, also. But I warned you beforehand not to expect too much from me. Forgive the disgrace - it is the last time that I yield to the temptation of chess."

He bowed and left in the same modest and mysterious manner in which he had first appeared before us. I alone knew why this man would never again touch a chess-board, while the others, a bit confused, stood around with that vague feeling of having narrowly escaped something uncomfortable and dangerous. "Damned fool," MacIver grumbled in his disappointment. Last of all, Czentovic rose from his chair, half glancing at the unfinished game.

"Too bad," he said generously. "The attack wasn't at all badly conceived. The man certainly has lots of talent for an amateur."

LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN

R. the famous novelist, had been away on a brief holiday in the mountains. Reaching Vienna early in the morning, he bought a newspaper at the station, and when he glanced at the date was reminded that it was his birthday. "Forty-one!" - the thought came like a flash. He was neither glad nor sorry at the realization. He hailed a taxi, and skimmed the newspaper as he drove home. His man reported that there had been a few callers during the master's absence, besides some telephone messages. A bundle of letters was awaiting him. Looking indifferently at these, he opened one or two because he was interested in the senders, but laid aside for the time a bulky packet addressed in a strange handwriting. At ease in an armchair, he drank his morning tea, finished the newspaper, and read a few circulars. Then, having lighted a cigar, he turned to the remaining letter.

It was a manuscript rather than an ordinary letter, comprising several dozen hastily penned sheets in a feminine handwriting. Involuntarily he examined the envelope once more, in case he might have overlooked a covering letter. But there was nothing of the kind, no signature, and no sender's address on either envelope or contents. "Strange," he thought, as he began to read the manuscript. The first words were a superscription:

To you, who have never known me." He was perplexed. Was this addressed to him, or to some imaginary being? His curiosity suddenly awakened he, read as follows:

My boy died yesterday. For three days and three nights I have been wrestling with Death for this frail little life. During forty consecutive hours, while the fever of influenza was shaking his poor burning body I sat beside his bed. I put cold compresses on his fore head; day and night, night and day. I held his restless little hands. The third evening, my strength gave out. My eyes closed without my being aware of it, and for three or four hours I must have slept on the hard stool. Meanwhile, Death took him. There he lies, my darling boy, in his narrow cot, just as he died. Only his eyes have been closed, his wise, dark eyes; and his hands have been crossed over his breast. Four candles are burning, one at each corner of the bed. I cannot bear to look, I cannot bear to move; for when the candles flicker, shadows chase one another over his face and his closed lips. It looks as if his features stirred, and I could almost fancy that he is not dead after all, that he will wake and with his clear voice will say something childishly loving. But I know that he is dead; and I will not look again, to hope once more, and once more to be disappointed. I know, now, my boy died yesterday. Now I have only you left in the world; only you, who do not know me; you, who are enjoying yourself all unheeding, sporting with men and things. Only you, who have never known me, and whom I have never ceased to love.

I have lighted a fifth candle, and am sitting at the table writing to you. I cannot stay alone with my dead child without pouring my heart out to someone; and to whom should I do that in this dreadful hour if not to you, who have been and still are all in all to me? Perhaps I shall not be able to make myself plain to you. Perhaps you will not be able to understand me. My head feels

so heavy my temples are throbbing; my limbs are aching. I think I must be feverish. Influenza is raging in this quarter and probably I have caught the infection. I should not be sorry if I could join my child in that way, instead of making short work of myself. Sometimes it seems dark before my eyes, and perhaps I shall not be able to finish this letter; but I shall try with all my strength, this one and only time, to speak to you, my beloved, to you who have never known me.

To you only do I want to speak, that I may tell you everything for the first time. I should like you to know the whole of my life, of that life which has always been yours, and of which you have known nothing. But you shall only know my secret after I am dead, when there will be no one whom you will have to answer; you shall only know it if that which is now shaking my limbs with cold and with heat should really prove, for me, the end. If I have to go on living, I shall tear up this letter and shall keep the silence I have always kept. If you ever hold it in your hands, you may know that a dead woman is telling you her life-story; the story of a life which was yours from its first to its last fully conscious hour. You need have no fear of my words. A dead woman wants nothing; neither love, nor compassion, nor consolation. I have only one thing to ask of you, that you believe to the full what the pain in me forces me to disclose to you. Believe my words, for I ask nothing more of you; a mother will not speak false beside the deathbed of her only child.

I am going to tell you my whole life, the life which did not really begin until the day I first saw you. What I can recall before that day is gloomy and confused, a memory as of a cellar filled with dusty, dull and cob-webbed things and people - a place with which my heart has no concern. When you came into my life, I was thirteen, and I lived in the house where you live to-day, in the very house in which you are reading this letter; the last breath of my life. I lived on the same floor, for the door of our flat was just opposite the door of yours. You will certainly have forgotten us. You will long ago have forgotten the accountant's widow in her threadbare mourning, and the thin, half-grown girl. We were always so quiet, characteristic examples of shabby gentility. It is unlikely that you ever heard our name, for we had no plate on our front door, and no one ever came to see us. Besides, it is so long ago, fifteen or sixteen years. Impossible that you should remember. But I, how passionately I remember every detail. As if it had just happened, I recall the day, the hour, when I first heard of you, first saw you. How could it be otherwise, seeing that it was then the world began for me? Have patience awhile, and let me tell you everything from first to last. Do not grow weary of listening to me for a brief space, since I have not been weary of loving you my whole life long.

Before you came, the people who lived in your flat were horrid folk, always quarrelling. Though they were wretchedly poor themselves, they hated us for our poverty because we held aloof from them. The man was given to drink, and used to beat his wife. We were often wakened in the night by the clatter of falling chairs and breaking plates. Once, when he had beaten her till the blood came, she ran out on the landing with her hair streaming, followed by her drunken husband abusing her, until all the people came out on to the staircase and threatened to send for the police. My mother would have nothing to do with them. She forbade me to play with the children, who took every opportunity of venting their spleen on me for this refusal. When they met me in the street, they would call me names; and once they threw a snowball at me which was so hard that it cut my forehead. Everyone in the house detested them, and we all breathed more freely when

something happened and they had to leave - I think the man had been arrested for theft. For a few days there was a "To Let" notice at the the main door. Then it was taken down, and the caretaker told us that the flat had been rented by an author, who was a bachelor, and was sure to be quiet. That was the first time I heard your name.

A few days later, the flat was thoroughly cleaned, and the painters and decorators came. Of course they made lot of noise, but my mother was glad, for she said that would be the end of the disorder next door. I did not see you during the move. The decorations and furnishings were supervised by your servant, the little greyhaired man with such a serious demeanour, who had obviously been used to service in good families. He managed everything in a most businesslike way, and impressed us all very much. A high-class domestic of this kind was something quite new in our suburban flats. Besides, he was extremely civil, but was never hail-fellow-well-met with the ordinary servants. From the outset he treated my mother respectfully, as a lady; and he was always courteous even to little me. When he had occasion to mention your name, he did so in a way which showed that his feeling towards you was that of a family retainer. I used to love good old John for this, though I envied him at the same time because it was his privilege to see you constantly and to serve you.

Do you know why I am telling you these trifles? I Want you to understand how it was that from the very beginning your personality came to exercise so much power over me when I was still a shy and timid child. Before I had actually seen you, there was a halo round your head. You were enveloped in an atmosphere of wealth, marvel and mystery. People whose lives are narrow, are avid of novelty; and in this little suburban house we were all impatiently awaiting your arrival. In my own case, curiosity rose to fever point when I came home from school one afternoon and found the furniture van in front of the house. Most of the heavy things had gone up, and the furniture removers were dealing with the smaller articles. I stood at the door to watch and admire, for everything belonging to you was so different from what I had been used to. There were Indian idols, Italian sculptures, and great, brightly-coloured pictures. Last of all came books, such lovely books, many more than I should have thought possible. They were piled by the door. The manservant stood there carefully dusting them one by one. I greedily watched the pile as it grew. Your servant did not send me away, but he did not encourage me either, so I was afraid to touch any of them, though I should have so liked to stroke the smooth leather bindings. I did glance timidly at some of the titles; many of them were in French and in English, and in languages of which I did not know a single word. I should have liked to stand there watching for hours, but my mother called me and I had to go in.

I thought about you the whole evening, although I had not seen you yet. I had only about a dozen cheap books, bound in worn cardboard. I loved them more than anything else in the world, and was continually reading and re-reading them. Now I was wondering what the man could be like who had such a lot of books, who had read so much, who knew so many languages, who was rich and at the same time so learned. The idea of so many books aroused a kind of unearthly veneration. I tried to picture you in my mind. You must be an old man with spectacles and a long, white beard, like our geography master, but much kinder, nicer-looking, and gentler. I don't know why I was sure that you must be handsome, for I fancied you to be an elderly man. That very night, I dreamed of you for the first time.

Next day you moved in; but though I was on the watch I could not get a glimpse of your face, and my failure inflamed my curiosity. At length I saw you, on the third day. How astounded I was to find that you were quite different from the ancient godfather conjured up by my childish imagination. A bespectacled, good-natured old fellow was what I had anticipated; and you came looking just as you still look, for you are one on whom the years leave little mark. You were wearing a beautiful suit of light-brown tweeds, and you ran upstairs two steps at a time with the boyish ease that always characterizes your movements. You were hat in hand, so that, with indescribable amazement, I should see your bright and lively face and your youthful hair. Your handsome, slim, and spruce figure was a positive shock to me. How strange it was that in this first moment I should have plainly realized that which I and all others are continually surprised at in you. I realized that you are two people rolled into one: that you are an ardent, lighthearted youth devoted to sport and adventure; and at the same time, in your art, a deeply read and highly cultured man, grave, and with a keen sense of responsibility. Unconsciously I perceived what everyone who knew you came to perceive, that you led two lives. One of these was known to all, it was the life open to the whole world; the other was turned away from the world, and was fully known only to yourself. I, a girl of thirteen, coming under the spell of your attraction, grasped this secret of your existence, this profound cleavage of your two lives, at the first glance.

Can you understand, now, what a miracle, what an alluring enigma, you must have seemed to me, the child? Here was a man whom everyone spoke of with respect because he wrote books, and because he was famous in the great world. Of a sudden he had revealed himself to me as a boyish, cheerful young man of five-and-twenty. I need hardly tell you that henceforward in my restricted world, you were the only thing that interested me; that my life revolved round yours with the fidelity proper to a girl of thirteen. I watched you, watched your habits, watched the people who came to see you - and all this increased instead of diminishing my interest in your personality, for the two-sidedness of your nature was reflected in the diversity of your visitors. Some of them were young men, comrades of yours, carelessly dressed students with whom you laughed and larked. Some of them were ladies who came in motors. Once the conductor of the opera - the great man whom before this I had seen only from a distance, baton in hand - called on you. Some of them were girls, young girls still attending the commercial school, who shyly glided in at the door. A great many of your visitors were women. I thought nothing of this, not even when, one morning, as I was on my way to school, I saw a closely veiled lady coming away from your flat. I was only just thirteen, and in my immaturity I did not in the least realize that the eager curiosity with which I scanned all your doings was already love.

But I know the very day and hour when I consciously gave my whole heart to you. I had been for a walk with a schoolfellow, and we were standing at the door chattering. A motor drove up. You jumped out, in the impatient, springy fashion which has never ceased to charm me, and were about to go in. An impulse made me open the door for you, and this brought me in your path, so that we almost collided. You looked at me with a cordial, gracious, all-embracing glance, which was almost a caress. You smiled at me tenderly - yes, tenderly is the word - and said gently, nay, confidentially: "Thanks so much."

That was all. But from this moment, from the time when you looked at me so tenderly, so tenderly, I was yours. Later, before long indeed, I was to learn that this was a way you had of looking at all women with whom you came in contact. It was a caressive and alluring glance, at once enfolding and disclothing, the glance of the born seducer. Involuntarily you looked in this way at every shopgirl who served you, at every maidservant who opened the door to you. It was not that you consciously longed to possess all these women, but your impulse towards the sex unconsciously made your eyes melting and warm whenever they rested on a woman. At thirteen, I had no thought of this; and I felt as if I had been bathed in fire. I believed that the tenderness was for me, for me only; and in this one instant the woman was awakened in the half-grown girl, the woman who was to be yours for all future time.

"Who was that?" asked my friend. At first, I could not answer. I found it impossible to utter your name. It had suddenly become sacred to me, had become my secret. "Oh, it's just someone who lives in the house," I said awkwardly. "Then why did you blush so fiery red when he looked at you?" inquired my school fellow with the malice of an inquisitive child. I felt that she was making fun of me, and was reaching out towards my secret, and this coloured my cheeks more than ever. I was deliberately rude to her: "You silly idiot," I said angrily - I should have liked to throttle her. She laughed mockingly, until the tears came into my eyes from impotent rage. I left her at the door and ran upstairs.

I have loved you ever since. I know full well that you are used to hearing women say that they love you. But I am sure that no one else has ever loved you so slavishly, with such doglike fidelity, with such devotion, as I did and do. Nothing can equal the unnoticed love of a child. It is hopeless and subservient; it is patient and passionate; it is something which the covetous love of a grown woman, the love that is unconsciously exacting can never be. None but lonely children can cherish such a passion. The others will squander their feelings in companionship, will dissipate them in confidential talks. They have heard and read much of love, and they know that it comes to all. They play with it like a toy; they flaunt it as a boy flaunts his first cigarette. But I had no confidant; I had been neither taught nor warned, I was inexperienced and unsuspecting. I rushed to meet my fate. Everything that stirred in me, all that happened to me, seemed to be centred upon you, upon my imaginings of you. My father had died long before. My mother could think of nothing but her troubles, of the difficulties of making ends meet upon her narrow pension, so that she had little in common with a growing girl. My school fellows, half-enlightened and half-corrupted, were uncongenial to me because of their frivolous outlook upon that which to me was a supreme passion. The upshot was that everything which surged up in me, all which in other girls of my age is usually scattered, was focused upon you. You became for me - what simile can do justice to my feelings? You became for me the whole of my life. Nothing existed for me except in so far as it related to you. Nothing had meaning for me unless it bore upon you in some way. You had changed everything for me. Hitherto I had been indifferent at school, and undistinguished. Now, of a sudden, I was the first. I read book upon book, far into the night, for I knew that you were a book-lover. To my mother's astonishment, I began, almost stubbornly, to practise the piano, for I fancied that you were fond of music. I stitched and mended my clothes, to make them neat for your eyes. It was a torment to me that there was a square patch in my old school-apron (cut down from one of my mother's overalls). I was afraid you might notice it and would despise me, so I used to cover the patch with my satchel when I

was on the staircase. I was terrified lest you should catch sight of it. What a fool I was! You hardly ever looked at me again.

Yet my days were spent in waiting for you and watching you. There was a judas in our front door, and through this a glimpse of your door could be had. Don't laugh at me, dear. Even now, I am not ashamed of the hours I spent at this spy-hole. The hall was icy cold, and I was afraid of exciting my mother's suspicions. But there I would watch through the long afternoons, during those months and years, book in hand, tense as a violin string, and vibrating at the touch of your nearness. I was ever near you, and ever tense; but you were no more aware of it than you were aware of the tension of the main spring of the watch in your pocket, faithfully recording the hours for you, accompanying your footsteps with its unheard ticking and vouchsafed only a hasty glance for one second among millions. I knew all about you, your habits, the neckties you wore; I knew each one of your suits. Soon I was familiar with your regular visitors, and had my likes and dislikes among them. From my thirteenth to my sixteenth year, my every hour was yours. What follies did I not commit? I kissed the door-handle you had touched; I picked up a cigarette-end you had thrown away, and it was sacred to me because your lips had pressed it. A hundred times, in the evening, on one pretext or another, I ran out into the street in order to see in which room your light was burning, that I might be more fully conscious of your invisible presence. During the weeks when you were away (my heart always seemed to stop beating when I saw John carry your portmanteau downstairs), life was devoid of meaning. Out of sorts, bored to death, and in an ill-humour, I wandered about not knowing what to do, and had to take precautions lest my tear-dimmed eyes should betray my despair to my mother.

I know that what I am writing here is a record of grotesque absurdities, of a girl's extravagant fantasies. I ought to be ashamed of them; but I am not ashamed, for never was my love purer and more passionate than at this time. I could spend hours, days, in telling you how I lived with you though you hardly knew me by sight. Of course you hardly knew me, for if I met you on the stairs and could not avoid the encounter, I would hasten by with lowered head, afraid of your burning glance, hasten like one who is jumping into the water to avoid being singed. For hours, days, I could tell you of those years you have long since forgotten; could unroll all the calendar of your life: but I will not weary you with details. Only one more thing I should like to tell you dating from this time, the most splendid experience of my childhood. You must not laugh at it, for, trifle though you may deem it, to me it was of infinite significance.

It must have been a Sunday. You were away, and your man was dragging back the heavy rugs, which he had been beating, through the open door of the flat. They were rather too much for his strength, and I summoned up courage to ask whether he would let me help him. He was surprised, but did not refuse. Can I ever make you understand the awe, the pious veneration, with which I set foot in your dwelling, with which I saw your world - the writing-table at which you were accustomed to sit (there were some flowers on it in a blue crystal vase), the pictures, the books? I had no more than a stolen glance, though the good John would no doubt have let me see more had I ventured to ask him. But it was enough for me to absorb the atmosphere, and to provide fresh nourishment for my endless dreams of you in waking and sleeping.

This swift minute was the happiest of my childhood. I wanted to tell you of it, so that you who do not know me might at length begin to understand how my life hung upon yours. I wanted to tell you of that minute, and also of the dreadful hour which so soon followed. As I have explained, my thoughts of you had made me oblivious to all else. I paid no attention to my mother's doings, or to those of any of our visitors. I failed to notice that an elderly gentleman, an Innsbruck merchant, a distant family connection of my mother, came often and stayed for a long time. I was glad that he took mother to the theatre sometimes, for this left me alone, undisturbed in my thoughts of you, undisturbed in the watching which was my chief, my only pleasure. But one day my mother summoned me with a certain formality, saying that she had something serious to talk to me about. I turned pale, and felt my heart throb. Did she suspect anything? Had I betrayed myself in some way? My first thought was of you, of my secret, of that which linked me with life. But my mother was herself embarrassed. It had never been her way to kiss me. Now she kissed me affectionately more than once, drew me to her on the sofa, and began hesitatingly and rather shamefacedly to tell me that her relative, who was a widower, had made her a proposal of marriage, and that, mainly for my sake, she had decided to accept. I palpitated with anxiety, having only one thought, that of you. "We shall stay here, shan't we?" I stammered out. "No, we are going to Innsbruck, where Ferdinand has a fine villa." I heard no more. Everything seemed to turn black before my eyes. I learned afterwards that I had fainted. I clasped my hands convulsively, and fell like a lump of lead. I cannot tell you all that happened in the next few days; how I, a powerless child, vainly revolted against the mighty elders. Even now, as I think of it, my hand shakes so that I can scarcely write. I could not disclose the real secret, and therefore my opposition seemed ill-tempered obstinacy. No one told me anything more. All the arrangements were made behind my back. The hours when I was at school were turned to account. Each time came home some new article had been removed or sold. My life seemed falling to pieces; and at last one day, when I returned to dinner, the furniture removers had cleared the flat. In the empty rooms there were some packed trunks, and two camp-beds for Mother and myself. We were to sleep there one night more, and were then to go to Innsbruck.

On this last day I suddenly made up my mind that I could not live without being near you. You were all the world to me. It is difficult to say what I was thinking of and whether in this hour of despair I was able to think at all. My mother was out of the house. I stood up, just as I was, in my school dress, and went over to your door. Yet I can hardly say that I went. With stiff limbs and trembling joints, I seemed to be drawn towards your door as by a magnet. It was in my mind to throw myself at your feet, and to beg you to keep me as a maid, as a slave. I cannot help feeling afraid that you will laugh at this infatuation of a girl of fifteen. But you would not laugh if you could realize how I stood there on the chilly landing, rigid with apprehension, and yet drawn onward by an irresistible force; how my arm seemed to lift itself in spite of me. The struggle appeared to last for endless, terrible seconds; and then I rang the bell. The shrill noise still sounds in my ears. It was followed by a silence in which my heart well-nigh stopped beating, and my blood stagnated, while I listened for your coming.

But you did not come. No one came. You must have been out that afternoon, and John must have been away too. With the dead note of the bell still sounding in my ears, I stole back into our empty dwelling, and threw myself exhausted upon a rug, tired out by these few paces as if I had been wading through deep snow for hours. Yet beneath this exhaustion there still glowed the

determination to see you, to speak to you, before they carried me away. I can assure you that there were no sensual longings in my mind; I was still ignorant, just because I never thought of anything but you. All I wanted was to see you once more, to cling to you. Throughout that dreadful night I waited for you. Directly my mother had gone to sleep, I crept into the hall to listen for your return. It was a bitterly cold night in January. I was tired, my limbs ached, and there was no longer a chair on which I could sit; so I lay upon the floor, scourged by the draught that came under the door. In my thin dress I lay there, without any covering. I did not want to be warm, lest I should fall asleep and miss your footstep. Cramps seized me, so cold was it in the horrible darkness; again and again I had to stand up. But I waited, waited, waited for you, as for my fate.

At length (it must have been two or three in the morning) I heard the house-door open, and footsteps on the stair. The sense of cold vanished, and a rush of heat passed over me. I softly opened the door, meaning to run out, to throw myself at your feet. . . . I cannot tell what I should have done in my frenzy. The steps drew nearer. A candle flickered. Tremblingly I held the door-handle. Was it you coming up the stairs?

Yes, it was you, beloved; but you were not alone. I heard a gentle laugh, the rustle of silk, and your voice, speaking in low tones. There was a woman with you

I cannot tell how I lived through the rest of the night. At eight next morning, they took me with them to Innsbruck. I had no strength left to resist.

My boy died last night. I shall be alone once more, if I really have to go on living. To-morrow, strange men will come, black-clad and uncouth, bringing with them a coffin for the body of my only child. Perhaps friends will come as well, with wreaths - but what are the flowers on a coffin? They will offer consolation in one phrase or another. Words, words, words! What can words help? All I know is that I shall be alone again. There is nothing more terrible than to be alone among human beings. That is what I came to realize during those interminable two years in Innsbruck, from my sixteenth to my eighteenth year, when I lived with people as a prisoner and an outcast. My stepfather, a quiet, taciturn man, was kind to me. My mother as if eager to atone for an unwitting injustice, seemed ready to meet all my wishes. Those of my own age would have been glad to befriend me. But I repelled their advances with angry defiance. I did not wish to be happy, I did not wish to live content away from you; so I buried myself in a gloomy world of self-torment and solitude. I would not wear the new and gay dresses they bought for me. I refused to go to concerts or to the theatre, and I would not take part in cheerful excursions. I rarely left the house. Can you believe me when I tell you that I hardly got to know a dozen streets in this little town where I lived for two years? Mourning was my joy; I renounced society and every pleasure, and was intoxicated with delight at the mortification I thus super-added to the lack of seeing you. Moreover, I would let nothing divert me from my passionate longing to live only for you. Sitting alone at home, hour after hour and day after day, I did nothing but think of you, turning over in my mind unceasingly my hundred petty memories of you, renewing every movement and every time of waiting, rehearsing these episodes in the theatre of my mind. The countless repetitions of the years of my childhood from the day in which you came into my life

have so branded the details on my memory that I can recall every minute of those long-passed years as if they were yesterday.

Thus my life was still entirely centred in you. I bought all your books. If your name was mentioned in the newspaper the day was a red-letter day. Will you believe me when I tell you that I have read your books so often that I know them by heart? Were anyone to wake me in the night and quote a detached sentence, I could continue the passage unfalteringly even to-day, after thirteen years. Your every word was Holy Writ to me. The world existed for me only in relationship to you. In the Viennese newspapers I read the reports of concerts and first nights, wondering which would interest you most. When evening came, I accompanied you in imagination, saying to myself: "Now he is entering the hall; now he is taking his seat." Such were my fancies a thousand times, simply because I had once seen you at a concert.

Why should I recount these things? Why recount the tragic hopelessness of a forsaken child? Why tell it to you, who have never dreamed of my admiration or of my sorrow? But was I still a child? I was seventeen; I was eighteen; young fellows would turn to look after me in the street, but they only made me angry. To love anyone but you, even to play with the thought of loving anyone but you, would have been so utterly impossible to me, that the mere tender of affection on the part of another man seemed to me a crime. My passion for you remained just as intense, but it changed in character as my body grew and my senses awakened, becoming more ardent, more physical, more unmistakably the love of a grown woman. What had been hidden from the thoughts of the uninstructed child, of the girl who had rung your doorbell, was now my only longing. I wanted to give myself to you.

My associates believed me to be shy and timid. But I had an absolute fixity of purpose. My whole being was directed towards one end - back to Vienna, back to you. I fought successfully to get my own way, unreasonable, incomprehensible though it seemed to others. My step father was well-to-do, and looked upon me as his daughter. I insisted, however, that I would earn my own living, and at length got him to agree to my returning to Vienna as employee in a dressmaking establishment belonging to a relative of his.

Need I tell you whither my steps first led me that fog autumn evening when, at last, at last, I found myself back in Vienna? I left my trunk in the cloak-room, and hurried to a tram. How slowly it moved! Every stop was a renewed vexation to me. In the end, I reached the house. My heart leapt when I saw a light in your window. The town, which had seemed so alien, so dreary, grew suddenly alive for me. I myself lived once more, now that I was near you, you who were my unending dream. When nothing but the thin, shining pane of glass was between you and my uplifted eyes, I could ignore the fact that in reality I was as far from your mind as if I had been separated by mountains and valleys and rivers. Enough that I could go on looking at your window. There was a light in it; that was your dwelling; you were there; that was my world. For two years I had dreamed of this hour, and now it had come. Throughout that warm and cloudy evening I stood in front of your windows, until the light was extinguished. Not until then did I seek my own quarters.

Evening after evening I returned to the same spot.

Up to six o'clock I was at work. The work was hard, and yet I liked it, for the turmoil of the show-room masked the turmoil in my heart. The instant the shutters were rolled down, I flew to the beloved spot. To see you once more, to meet you just once, was all I wanted; simply from a distance to devour your face with my eyes. At length, after a week, I did meet you, and then the meeting took me by surprise. I was watching your window, when you came across the street. In an instant, I was a child once more, the girl of thirteen. My cheeks flushed. Although I was longing to meet your eyes, I hung my head and hurried past you as if someone had been in pursuit. Afterwards I was ashamed of having fled like a schoolgirl, for now I knew what I really wanted. I wanted to meet you; I wanted you to recognize me after all these weary years, to notice me, to love me.

For a long time you failed to notice me, although I took up my post outside your house every night, even when it was snowing, or when the keen wind of the Viennese winter was blowing. Sometimes I waited for hours in vain. Often, in the end, you would leave the house in the company of friends. Twice I saw you with a woman, and the fact that I was now awakened, that there was something new and different in my feeling towards you, was disclosed by the sudden heart-pang when I saw a strange woman walking confidently with you arm-in-arm. It was no surprise to me, for I had known since childhood how many such visitors came to your house; but now the sight aroused in me a definite bodily pain. I had a mingled feeling of enmity and desire when I witnessed this open manifestation of fleshly intimacy with another woman. For a day, animated by the youthful pride from which, perhaps, I am not yet free, I abstained from my usual visit; but how horrible was this empty evening of defiance and renunciation! The next night I was standing, as usual, in all humility, in front of your window; waiting, as I have ever waited, in front of your closed life.

At length came the hour when you noticed me. I marked your coming from a distance, and collected all my forces to prevent myself shrinking out of your path. As chance would have it, a loaded dray filled the street, so that you had to pass quite close to me. Involuntarily your eyes encountered my figure, and immediately, though you had hardly noticed the attentiveness in gaze, there came into your face that expression with which you were wont to look at women. The memory of it darted through me like an electric shock – that caressive and alluring glance, at once enfolding and disclothing, with which, years before, you had awakened the girl to become the woman and the lover. For a moment or two your eyes thus rested on me, for a space during which I could not turn my own eyes away, and then you had passed. My heart was beating so furiously that I had to slacken my pace; and when, moved by irresistible curiosity, I turned to look back, I saw that you were standing and watching me. The inquisitive interest of your expression convinced me that you had not recognized me. You did not recognize me, either then or later. How can I describe my disappointment? This was the first of such disappointments: the first time I had to endure what has always been my fate; that you have never recognized me. I must die, unrecognized. Ah, how can I make you understand my disappointment? During the years at Innsbruck I had never ceased to think of you. Our next meeting in Vienna was always in my thoughts. My fancies varied with my mood, ranging from the wildest possibilities to the most delightful. Every conceivable variation had passed through my mind. In gloomy moments it had seemed to me that you would repulse me, would despise me, for being of no account, for being

plain, or importunate. I had had a vision of every possible form of disfavour, coldness, or indifference. But never, in the extremity of depression, in the utmost realization of my own insignificance, had I conceived this most abhorrent of possibilities - that you had never become aware of my existence. I understand, now (you have taught me!) that a girl's or a woman's face must be for a man something extraordinarily mutable. It is usually nothing more than the reflection of moods which pass as swiftly as an image vanishes from a mirror. A man can readily forget a woman's face, because age modifies its lights and shades, and because at different times the dress gives it so different a setting. Resignation comes to a woman as her knowledge grows. But I, who was still a girl, was unable to understand your forgetfulness. My whole mind had been full of you ever since I had first known you, and this had produced in me the illusion that you must have often thought of me and waited for me. How could I have borne to go on living had I realized that I was nothing to you, that I had no place in your memory? Your glance that evening, showing me as it did that on your side there was not even : gossamer thread connecting your life with mine, meant for me a first plunge into reality, conveyed to me the first intimation of my destiny.

You did not recognize me. Two days later, when our paths again crossed, and you looked at me with an approach to intimacy, it was not in recognition of the girl who had loved you so long and whom you had awakened to womanhood; it was simply that you knew the face of the pretty lass of eighteen whom you had encountered at the same spot two evenings before. Your expression was one of friendly surprise, and a smile fluttered about your lips. You passed me as before, and as before you promptly slackened your pace. I trembled, I exulted, I longed for you to speak to me. I felt that for the first time I had become alive for you; I, too, walked slowly, and did not attempt to evade you. Suddenly, I heard your step behind me. Without turning round, I knew that I was about to hear your beloved voice directly addressing me. I was almost paralysed by the expectation, and my heart beat so violently that I thought I should have to stand still. You were at my side. You greeted me cordially, as if we were old acquaintances - though you did not really know me, though you have never known anything about my life. So simply charming was your manner that I was able to answer you without hesitation. We walked along the street and you asked me whether we could not have supper together. I agreed. What was there I could have refused you?

We supped in a little restaurant. You will not remember where it was. To you it will be one of many such. For what was I? One among hundreds; one adventure, one link in an endless chain. What happened that evening to keep me in your memory? I said very little, for I was so intensely happy to have you near me and to hear you speak to me. I did not wish to waste a moment upon questions or foolish words. I shall never cease to be thankful to you for that hour, for the way in which you justified my ardent admiration. I shall never forget the gentle tact you displayed. There was no undue eagerness, no hasty offer of a caress. Yet from the first moment you displayed so much friendly confidence, that you would have won me even if my whole being had not long ere this been yours. Can I make you understand how much it meant to me that my five years of expectation were so perfectly fulfilled?

The hour grew late, and we came away from the restaurant. At the door you asked me whether I was in any hurry, or still had time to spare. How could I hide from you that I was yours? I said I

had plenty of time. With a momentary hesitation, you asked me whether I would not come to your rooms for a talk. "I shall be delighted," I answered with alacrity, thus giving frank expression to my feelings. I could not fail to notice that my ready assent surprised you. I am not sure whether your feeling was one of vexation or pleasure, but it was obvious to me that you were surprised. To-day, of course, I understand your astonishment. I know now that it is usual for a woman, even though she may ardently desire to herself to a man, to feign reluctance, to simulate alarm in indignation. She must be brought to consent by urgent pleadings, by lies, adjurations, and promises. I know that only professional prostitutes are accustomed to answer such an invitation with a perfectly frank assent - prostitutes, or simple-minded, immature girls. How could you know that, in my case, the frank assent was but the voicing of an eternity of desire, the uprush of yearnings that had endured for a thousand days and more?

In any case, my manner aroused your attention; I had become interesting to you. As we were walking along together, I felt that during our conversation you were trying to sample me in some way. Your perceptions, your assured touch in the whole gamut of human emotions, made you realize instantly that there was something unusual here; that this pretty, complaisant girl carried a secret about with her. Your curiosity had been awakened, and your discreet questions showed that you were trying to pluck the heart out of my mystery. But my replies were evasive. I would rather seem a fool than disclose my secret to you.

We went up to your flat. Forgive me, beloved, for saying that you cannot possibly understand all that it meant to me to go up those stairs with you - how I was mad, tortured, almost suffocated with happiness. Even now I can hardly think of it without tears, but I have no tears left. Everything in that house had been steeped in my passion; everything was a symbol of my childhood and its longing. There was the door behind which a thousand times I had awaited your coming; the stairs on which I had heard your footsteps, and where I had first seen you; the judas through which I had watched your comings and goings; the door-mat on which I had once knelt; the sound of a key in the lock, which had always been a signal to me. My childhood and its passions were nested within these few yards of space. Here was my whole life, and it surged around me like a great storm, for all was being fulfilled, and I was going with you, I with you, into your, into our house. Think (the way I am phrasing it sounds trivial, but I know no better words) that up to your door was the world of reality, the dull everyday world which had been that of all my previous life. At this door began the magic world of my childish imaginings. Aladdin's realm. Think how a thousand times, I had had my burning eyes fixed upon this door through which I was now passing, my head in a whirl, and you will have an inkling - no more - of all that this tremendous minute meant to me.

I stayed with you that night. You did not dream that before you no man had ever touched or seen my body. How could you fancy it, when I made no resistance, and when I suppressed every trace of shame, fearing lest I might betray the secret of my love? That would certainly have alarmed you; you care only for what comes and goes easily, for that which is light of touch, is imponderable. You dread being involved in anyone else's destiny. You like to give yourself freely to all the world but not to make any sacrifices. When I tell you that I gave myself to you as a maiden, do not misunderstand me. I am not making any charge against you. You did not entice me, deceive me, seduce me. I threw myself into your arms; went out to meet my fate. I have

nothing but thankfulness towards you for the blessedness of that night. When I opened my eyes in the darkness and you were beside me, I felt that I must be in heaven, and I was amazed that the stars were not shining on me. Never, beloved, have I repented giving myself to you that night. When you were sleeping beside me, when I listened to your breathing, touched your body, and felt myself so near you, I shed tears for very happiness.

I went away early in the morning. I had to go to my work and I wanted to leave before your servant came. When I was ready to go, you put your arm round me and looked at me for a very long time. Was some obscure memory stirring in your mind; or was it simply that my radiant happiness made me seem beautiful to you? You kissed me on the lips, and I moved to go. You asked me: "Would you not like to take a few flowers with you?" There were four white roses in the blue crystal vase on the writing-table (I knew it of old from that stolen glance of childhood), and you gave them to me. For days they were mine to kiss.

We had arranged to meet on a second evening. Again it was full of wonder and delight. You gave me a third night. Then you said that you were called away from Vienna for a time - oh, how I had always hated those journeys of yours! - and promised that I should hear from you as soon as you came back. I would only give you a poste-restante address, and did not tell you my real name. I guarded my secret. Once more you gave me roses at parting - at parting.

Day after day for two months I asked myself . . . no, I will not describe the anguish of my expectation and despair. I make no complaint. I love you just as you are, ardent and forgetful, generous and unfaithful. I love you just as you have always been. You were back long before the two months were up. The light in your windows showed me that, but you did not write to me. In my last hours I have not a line in your handwriting, not a line from you to whom my life was given. I waited, waited despairingly. You did not call me to you, did not write a word, not a word.
...

My boy who died yesterday was yours too. He was your son, the child of one of those three nights. I was yours, and yours only from that time until the hour of his birth. I felt myself sanctified by your touch, and it would not have been possible for me then to accept any other man's caresses. He was our boy, dear; the child of my fully conscious love and of your careless, spendthrift, almost unwitting tenderness. Our child, our son, our only child. Perhaps you will be startled, perhaps merely surprised. You will wonder why I never told you of this boy; and why, having kept silence throughout the long years, I only tell you of him now, when he lies in his last sleep, about to leave me for all time - never, never to return. How could I have told you? I was a stranger, a girl who had shown herself only too eager to spend those three nights with you. Never would you have believed that I, the nameless partner in a chance encounter, had been faithful to you, the unfaithful. You would never without misgivings, have accepted the boy as your own. Even if, to all appearance, you had trusted my word, you would still have cherished the secret suspicion that I had seized an opportunity of fathering upon you, a man of means, the child of another lover. You would have been suspicious. There would always have been a shadow of mistrust between you and me. I could not have borne it. Besides, I know you. Perhaps I know you better than you know yourself. You love to be care-free, light of heart, perfectly at ease; and that is what you understand by love. It would have been repugnant to you to find yourself

suddenly in the position of father; to be made responsible, all at once, for a child's destiny. The breath of freedom is the breath of life to you, and you would have felt me to be a tie. Inwardly, even in defiance of your conscious will, you would have hated me as an embodied claim. Perhaps only now and again, for an hour or for a fleeting minute, should I have seemed a burden to you, should I have been hated by you. But it was my pride that I should never be a trouble or a care to you all my life long. I would rather take the whole burden on myself than be a burden to you; I wanted to be the one among all the women you had intimately known of whom you would never think except with love and thankfulness. In actual fact, you never thought of me at all. You forgot me.

I am not accusing you. Believe me, I am not coming. You must forgive me if for a moment, now and again, it seems as if my pen had been dipped in gall. You must forgive me; for my boy, our boy, lies dead there beneath the flickering candles. I have clenched my fists against God, and have called him a murderer, for I have been almost beside myself with grief. Forgive me for complaining. I know that you are kindhearted, and always ready to help. You will help the merest stranger at a word. But your kindness is peculiar. It is unbounded. Anyone may have of yours as much as he can grasp with both hands. And yet, I must own, your kindness works sluggishly. You need to be asked. You help those who call for help; you help from shame, from weakness, and not from sheer joy in helping. Let me tell you openly that those who are in affliction and torment are not dearer to you than your brothers in happiness. Now, it is hard, very hard, to ask anything of such as you, even of the kindest among you. Once, when I was still a child, I watched through the judas in our door how you gave something to a beggar who had rung your bell. You gave quickly and freely, almost before he spoke. But there was a certain nervousness and haste in your manner, as if your chief concern were to be speedily rid of him; you seemed to be afraid to meet his eye. I have never forgotten this uneasy and timid way of giving help, this shunning of a word of thanks. That is why I never turned to you in my difficulty. Oh, I know that you would have given me all the help I needed, in spite of a doubt that my child was yours. You would have offered me comfort, and have given me money, an ample supply of money; but always with a masked impatience, a secret desire to shake off trouble. I even believe that you would have advised me to rid myself of the coming child. This was what I dreaded above all, for I knew that I should do whatever you wanted. But the child was all in all to me. It was yours; it was you reborn - not the happy and carefree you, whom I could never hope to keep; but you, given to me for my very own, flesh of my flesh, intimately intertwined with my own life. At length I held you fast; I could feel your life-blood flowing through my veins; I could nourish you, caress you, kiss you, as often as my soul yearned. That was why I was so happy when I knew that I was with child by you and that is why I kept the secret from you. Hence forward you could not escape me; you were mine.

But you must not suppose that the months of waiting passed so happily as I had dreamed in my first transports. They were full of sorrow and care, full of loathing for the baseness of mankind. Things went hard with me. I could not stay at work during the later months, for my stepfather's relatives would have noticed my condition, and would have sent the news home. Nor would I ask my mother for money; so until my time came I managed to live by the sale of some trinkets. A week before my confinement, the few crown-pieces that remained to me were stolen by my laundress, so I had to go to the maternity hospital. The child, your son, was born there, in that

asylum of wretchedness, among the very poor, the outcast, and the abandoned. It was a deadly place. Everything was strange, was alien. We were all alien to one another, as we lay there in our loneliness, filled with mutual hatred, thrust together only by our kinship of poverty and distress into this crowded ward, reeking of chloroform and blood, filled with cries and moaning. A patient in these wards loses all individuality, except such as remains in the name at the head of the clinical record. What lies in the bed is merely a piece of quivering flesh, an object of study ...

I ask your forgiveness for speaking of these things. I shall never speak of them again. For eleven years I have kept silence, and shall soon be dumb for evermore. Once, at least, I had to cry aloud, to let you know how dearly bought was this child, this boy who was my delight, and who now lies dead. I had forgotten those dreadful hours, forgotten them in his smiles and his voice, forgotten them in my happiness. Now, when he is dead, the torment has come to life again; and I had, this once, to give it utterance. But I do not accuse you; only God, only God who is the author of such purposeless affliction. Never have I cherished an angry thought of you. Not even in the utmost agony of giving birth did I feel any resentment against you; never did I repent the nights when I enjoyed your love; never did I cease to love you or to bless the hour when you came into my life. Were it necessary for me, fully aware of what was coming, to relive that time in hell, I would do it gladly, not once, but many times.

Our boy died yesterday, and you never knew him. His bright little personality has never come into the most fugitive contact with you, and your eyes have never rested on him. For a long time after our son was born, I kept myself hidden from you. My longing for you had become less overpowering. Indeed, I believe I loved you less passionately. Certainly, my love for you did not hurt so much, now that I had the boy. I did not wish to divide myself between you and him, and so I did not give myself to you, who were happy and independent of me, but to the boy who needed me, whom I had to nourish, whom I could kiss and fondle. I seemed to have been healed of my restless yearning for you. The doom seemed to have been lifted from me by the birth of this other you, who was truly my own. Rarely, now, did my feelings reach out towards you in your dwelling. One thing only - on your birthday I have always sent you a bunch of white roses, like the roses you gave after our first night of love. Has it ever occurred to you, during these ten or eleven years, to ask yourself who sent them? Have you ever recalled having given such roses to a girl? I do not know, and never shall know. For me it was enough to send them to you out of the darkness; enough, once a year, to revive my own memory of that hour.

You never knew our boy. I blame myself to-day for having hidden him from you, for you would have loved him. You have never seen him smile when he first opened his eyes after sleep, his dark eyes that were your eyes, the eyes with which he looked merrily forth at me and the world. He was so bright, so lovable. All your lightheartedness and your mobile imagination were his likewise - in the form in which these qualities can show themselves in a child. He would spend entranced hours playing with things as you play with life; and then, grown serious, would sit long over his books. He was you, reborn. The mingling of sport and earnest, which is so characteristic of you, was becoming plain in him; and the more he resembled you, the more I loved him. He was good at his lessons, so that he could chatter French like a magpie. His exercise books were the tidiest in the class. And what a fine, upstanding little man he was! When

I took him to the seaside in the summer, at Grado, women used to stop and stroke his fair hair. At Semmering, when he was tobogganing, people would turn round to gaze after him. He was so handsome, so gentle, so appealing. Last year, when he went to college as a boarder, he began to wear the collegiates' uniform of an eighteenth-century page, with a little dagger stuck in his belt - now he lies here in his shift, with pallid lips and crossed hands.

You will wonder how I could manage to give the boy so costly an upbringing, how it was possible for me to provide for him an entry into this bright and cheerful life of the well-to-do. Dear one, I am speaking to you from the darkness. Unashamed, I will tell you. Do not shrink from me. I sold myself. I did not become a streetwalker, a common prostitute, but I sold myself. My friends, my lovers, were wealthy men. At first I sought them out, but soon they sought me, for I was (did you ever notice it?) a beautiful woman. Everyone to whom I gave myself was devoted to me. They all became my grateful admirers. They all loved me - except you, except you whom I loved.

Will you despise me now that I have told you what I did? I am sure you will not. I know you will understand everything, will understand that what I did was done only for you, for your other self, for your boy. In the lying-in hospital I had tasted the full horror of poverty. I knew that, in the world of the poor, those who are downtrodden are always the victims. I could not bear to think that your son, your lovely boy, was to grow up in that abyss, amid the corruptions of the street, in the poisoned air of a slum. His delicate lips must not learn the speech of the gutter; his fine, white skin must not be chafed by the harsh and sordid underclothing of the poor. Your son must have the best of everything, all the wealth and all the lightheartedness of the world. He must follow your footsteps through life, must dwell in the sphere in which you had lived.

That is why I sold myself. It was no sacrifice to me, for what are conventionally termed "honour" and "disgrace" were unmeaning words to me. You were the only one to whom my body could belong, and you did not love me, so what did it matter what I did with that body? My companions' caresses, even their most ardent passion, never sounded my depths, although many of them were persons I could not but respect, and although the thought of my own fate made me sympathize with them in their unrequited love. All these men were kind to me; they all petted and spoiled me; they all paid me every deference. One of them, a widower, an elderly man of title, used his utmost influence until he secured your boy's nomination to the college. This man loved me like a daughter. Three or four times he urged me to marry him. I could have been a countess to-day, mistress of a lovely castle in Tyrol. I could have been free from care, for the boy would have had a most affectionate father and I should have had a sedate, distinguished, and kind-hearted husband. But I persisted in my refusal though I knew it gave him pain. It may have been foolish of me. Had I yielded, I should have been living a safe and retired life somewhere, and my child would still have been with me. Why should I hide from you the reason for my refusal? I did not want to bind myself. I wanted to remain free - for you. In my innermost self in the unconscious, I continued to dream the dream of my childhood. Some day, perhaps you would call me to your side, were it only for an hour. For the possibility of this one hour I rejected everything else, simply that I might be free to answer your call. Since my first awakening to womanhood, what had my life been but waiting, a waiting upon your will?

In the end, the expected hour came. And still you never knew that it had come! When it came, you did not recognize me. You have never recognized me, never, never. I met you often enough, in theatres, at concerts, in the Prater, and elsewhere. Always my heart leapt but always you passed me by, unheeding. In outward appearance I had become a different person. The timid girl was a woman now; beautiful, it was said; decked out in fine clothes; surrounded by admirers. How could you recognize in me one whom you had known as a shy girl in the subdued light of your bedroom? Sometimes my companion would greet you, and you would acknowledge the greeting as you glanced at me. But your look was always that of a courteous stranger, a look of deference, but not of recognition - distant, hopelessly distant. Once, I remember, this non-recognition, familiar as it had become, was a torture to me. I was in a box at the opera with a friend, and you were in the next box. The lights were lowered when the Overture began. I could no longer see your face, but I could feel your breathing quite close to me, just as when I was with you in your room; and on the velvet-covered partition between the boxes your slender hand was resting. I was filled with an infinite longing to bend down and kiss this hand, whose loving touch I had once known. Amid the turmoil of sound from the orchestra, the craving grew even more intense. I had to hold myself in convulsively, to keep my lips away from your dear hand. At the end of the first act, I told my friend I wanted to leave. It was intolerable to me to have you sitting there beside me in the darkness, so near, and so estranged.

But the hour came once more, only once more. It was all but a year ago, on the day after your birthday. My thoughts had been dwelling on you more than ever, for I used to keep your birthday as a festival. Early in the morning I had gone to buy the white roses which I sent you every year in commemoration of an hour you had forgotten. In the afternoon I took my boy for a drive and we had tea together. In the evening we went to the theatre. I wanted him to look upon this day as a sort of mystical anniversary of his youth, though he could not know the reason. The next day I spent with my intimate of that epoch, a young and wealthy manufacturer of Brunn, with whom I had been living for two years. He was passionately fond of me, and he, too, wanted me to marry him. I refused, for no reason he could understand, although he loaded me and the child with presents, and was lovable enough in his rather stupid and slavish devotion. We went together to a concert, where we met a lively company. We all had supper at a restaurant in the Ringstrasse. Amid talk and laughter, I proposed that we should move on to a dancing-hall. In general, such places, where the cheerfulness is always an expression of partial intoxication, are repulsive to me, and I would seldom go to them. But on this occasion some elemental force seemed at work in me, leading to make the proposal, which was hailed with acclamation by the others. I was animated by an inexplicable longing, as if some extraordinary experience were awaiting me. As usual, everyone was eager to accede to my whims. We went to the dancing hall, drank some champagne, and I had a sudden access of almost frenzied cheerfulness such as I had never known. I drank one glass of wine after another, joined in the chorus of a suggestive song, and was in a mood to dance with glee. Then, all in a moment, I felt as if my heart had been seized by an icy or a burning hand. You were sitting with some friends at the next table, regarding me with an admiring and covetous glance, that glance which had always thrilled me beyond expression. For the first time in ten years you were looking at me again under the stress of all the unconscious passion in your nature. I trembled, and my hand shook so violently that I nearly let my wineglass fall. Fortunately my companions did not notice my condition, for their perceptions were confused by the noise of laughter and music.

Your look became continually more ardent, and touched my own senses to fire. I could not be sure whether you had at last recognized me, or whether your desires had been aroused by one whom you believed to be a stranger. My cheeks were flushed, and I talked at random. You could not help noticing the effect your glance had on me. You made an inconspicuous movement of the head, to suggest my coming into the ante-room for a moment. Then, having settled your bill, you took leave of your associates and left the table, after giving me a further sign that you intended to wait for me outside. I shook like one in the cold stage of a fever. I could no longer answer when spoken to, could no longer control the tumult of my blood. At this moment, as chance would have it, a couple of Negroes with clattering heels began a barbaric dance to the accompaniment of their own shrill cries. Everyone turned to look at them, and I seized my opportunity. Standing up, I told my friend that I would be back in a moment, and followed you.

You were waiting for me in the lobby, and your face lighted up when I came. With a smile on your lips, you hastened to meet me. It was plain that you did not recognize me, neither the child nor the girl of old days. Again, to you, I was a new acquaintance. "Have you really got an hour to spare for me?" you asked in a confident tone, which showed that you took me for one of the women whom anyone can buy for a night. "Yes," I answered; the same tremulous but perfectly acquiescent "Yes" that you had heard from me in my girlhood, more than ten years earlier, in the darkling street. "Tell me when we can meet," you said. "Whenever you like," I replied, for I knew nothing of shame where you were concerned. You looked at me with a little surprise, with a surprise which had in it the same flavour of doubt mingled with curiosity which you had shown before when you were astonished at the readiness of my acceptance. "Now?" you inquired, after a moment's hesitation. "Yes," I replied, "let us go."

I was about to fetch my wrap from the cloak-room, when I remembered that my Brunn friend had handed in our things together, and that he had the ticket. It was impossible to go back, and ask him for it, and it seemed to me even more impossible to renounce this hour with you to which I had been looking forward for years. My choice was instantly made. I gathered my shawl around and went forth into the misty night, regardless not only, of my cloak, but regardless, likewise, of the kind-hearted man with whom I had been living for years - regardless of the fact that in this public way, before his friends I was putting him into the ludicrous position of one whose mistress abandons him at the first nod of a stranger. Inwardly, I was well aware how basely and ungratefully I was behaving towards a good friend. I knew that my outrageous folly would alienate him from me for ever and that I was playing havoc with my life. But what was his friendship, what was my own life, to me when compared with the chance of again feeling your lips on mine of again listening to the tones of your voice. Now that all is over and done with I can tell you this, can let you know how I loved you. I believe that were you to summon me from my death-bed I should find strength to rise in answer to your call.

There was a taxi at the door, and we drove to your rooms. Once more I could listen to your voice, once more I felt the ecstasy of being near you, and was almost as intoxicated with joy and confusion as I had been so long before. I cannot describe it all to you, how what I had felt ten years earlier was now renewed as we went up the well-known stairs together; how I lived simultaneously in the past and in the present, my whole being fused as it were with yours. In

your rooms, little was changed. There were a few more pictures, a great many more books, one or two additions to your furniture - but the whole had the friendly look of an old acquaintance. On the writing-table was the vase with the roses - my roses, the ones I had sent you the day before as a memento of the woman whom you did not remember, whom you did not recognize, not even now when she was close to you, when you were holding her hand and your lips were pressed on hers. But it comforted me to see my flowers there, to know that you had cherished something that was an emanation from me, was the breath of my love for you.

You took me in your arms. Again I stayed with you for the whole of one glorious night. But even then you did not recognize me. While I thrilled to your caresses it was plain to me that your passion knew no difference between a loving mistress and a meretrix, that your spendthrift affections were wholly concentrated in their own expression. To me, the stranger picked up at a dancing-hall, you were at once affectionate and courteous. You would not treat me lightly, and yet you were full of an enthralling ardour. Dizzy with the old happiness, I was again aware of the two-sidedness of your nature, of that strange mingling of intellectual passion with sensual, which had already enslaved me to you in my childhood. In no other man have I ever known such complete surrender to the sweetness of the moment. No other has for the time being given himself so utterly as did you who, when the hour was past, were to relapse into an interminable and almost inhuman forgetfulness. But I, too, forgot myself. Who was I, lying in the darkness beside you? Was I the impassioned child of former days; was I the mother of your son; was I a stranger? Everything in this wonderful night was at one and the same time entrancingly familiar and entrancingly new. I prayed that the joy might last for ever.

But morning came. It was late when we rose, and you asked me to stay to breakfast. Over the tea, which an unseen hand had discreetly served in the dining-room, we talked quietly. As of old, you displayed a cordial frankness; and, as of old, there were no tactless questions, there was no curiosity about myself. You did not ask my name, nor where I lived. To you I was as before a casual adventure, a nameless woman, an ardent hour which leaves no trace when it is over. You told me that you were about to start on a long journey, that you were going to spend two or three months in northern Africa. The words broke in upon my happiness like a knell: "Past, past, past and forgotten!" I longed to throw myself at your feet, crying: "Take me with you, that you may at length come to know me, at length after all these years!" But I was timid, cowardly, slavish, weak. All I could say was: "What a pity!" You looked at me with a smile: "Are you really sorry?"

For a moment I was as if frenzied. I stood up and looked at you fixedly. Then I said: "The man I love has always gone on a journey." I looked you straight in the eyes. "Now, now," I thought, "now he will recognize me!" You only smiled, and said consolingly: "One comes back after a time." I answered: "Yes, one comes back, but one has forgotten by then."

I must have spoken with strong feeling, for my tone moved you. You, too, rose, and looked at me wonderingly and tenderly. You put your hands on my shoulders:

"Good things are not forgotten, and I shall not forget you." Your eyes studied me attentively, as if you wished to form an enduring image of me in your mind. When I felt this penetrating glance,

this exploration of my whole being, I could not but fancy that the spell of your blindness would at last be broken. "He will recognize me! He will recognize me!" My soul trembled with expectation.

But you did not recognize me. No, you did not recognize me. Never had I been more of a stranger to you than I was at that moment, for had it been otherwise you could not possibly have done what you did a few minutes later. You had kissed me again, had kissed me passionately. My hair had been ruffled, and I had to tidy it once more. Standing at the glass, I saw in it - and as I saw, I was overcome with shame and horror - that you were surreptitiously slipping a couple of banknotes into my muff. I could hardly refrain from crying out; I could hardly refrain from slapping your face. You were paying me for the night I had spent with you, me who had loved you since childhood, me the mother of your son. To you I was only a prostitute picked up at a dancing hall. It was not enough that you should forget me; you had to pay me, and to debase me by doing so.

I hastily gathered up my belongings, that I might escape as quickly as possible; the pain was too great. I looked round for my hat. There it was, on the writing table, beside the vase with the white roses, my roses. I had an irresistible desire to make a last effort to awaken your memory. "Will you give me one of your white roses?" - "Of course," you answered, lifting them all out of the vase. "But perhaps they were given you by a woman, a woman who loves you?" - "Maybe," you replied, "I don't know. They were a present, but I don't know who sent them; that's why I'm so fond of them." I looked at you intently: "Perhaps they were sent you by a woman whom you have forgotten!"

You were surprised. I looked at you yet more intently. "Recognize me, only recognize me at last!" was the clamour of my eyes. But your smile, though cordial, had no recognition in it. You kissed me yet again, but you did not recognize me.

I hurried away, for my eyes were filling with tears, and I did not want you to see. In the entry, as I precipitated myself from the room, I almost cannoned into John, your servant. Embarrassed but zealous, he got out of my way, and opened the front door for me. Then, in this fugitive instant, as I looked at him through my tears, a light suddenly flooded the old man's face. In this fugitive instant, I tell you, he recognized me, the man who had never seen me since my childhood. I was so grateful that I could have kneeled before him and kissed his hands. I tore from my muff the banknotes with which you had scourged me, and thrust them upon him. He glanced at me in alarm - for in this instant I think he understood more of me than you have understood in your whole life. Everyone, everyone, has been eager to spoil me; everyone has loaded me with kindness. But you, only you, forgot me. You, only you, never recognized me.

My boy, our boy, is dead. I have no one left to love; no one in the world, except you. But what can you be to me - you who have never, never recognized me, you who stepped across me as you might step across a stream, you who trod on me as you might tread on a stone, you who went on your way unheeding, while you left me to wait for all eternity? Once I fancied that I could hold you for my own; that I held you, the elusive, in the child. But he was your son! In the night, he

cruelly slipped away from me on a journey; he has forgotten me, and will never return. I am alone once more, more utterly alone than ever. I have nothing, nothing from you. No child, no word, no line of writing, no place in your memory. If anyone were to mention my name in your presence, to you it would be the name of a stranger. Shall I not be glad to die, since I am dead to you? Glad to go away, since you have gone away from me?

Beloved, I am not blaming you. I do not wish to intrude my sorrows into your joyful life. Do not fear that I shall ever trouble you further. Bear with me for giving way to the longing to cry out my heart to you this once, in the bitter hour when the boy lies dead. Only this once I must talk to you. Then I shall slip back into obscurity, and be dumb towards you as I have ever been. You will not even hear my cry so long as I continue to live. Only when I am dead will this heritage come to you from one who has loved you more fondly than any other has loved you, from one whom you have never recognized, from one who has always been awaiting your summons and whom you have never summoned. Perhaps, perhaps when you receive this legacy you will call to me; and for the first time I shall be unfaithful to you, for I shall not hear you in the sleep of death. Neither picture nor token do I leave you, just as you left me nothing, for never will you recognize me now. That was my fate in life, and it shall be my fate in death likewise. I shall not summon you in my last hour; I shall go my way leaving you ignorant of my name and my appearance. Death will be easy to me, for you will not feel it from afar. I could not die if my death were going to give you pain.

I cannot write any more. My head is so heavy; my limbs ache; I am feverish. I must lie down. Perhaps all will soon be over. Perhaps, this once, fate will be kind to me, and I shall not have to see them take away my boy. . . . I cannot write any more. Farewell, dear one, farewell. All my thanks go out to you. What happened was good in spite of everything. I shall be thankful to you till my last breath. I am so glad that I have told you all. Now, you will know, though you can never fully understand, how much I have loved you; and yet my love will never be a burden to you. It is my solace that I shall not fail you. Nothing will be changed in your bright and lovely life. Beloved, my death will not harm you. This comforts me.

But who, ah who, will now send you white roses on your birthday? The vase will be empty. No longer will come that breath, that aroma, from my life, which once a year was breathed into your room. I have one last request - the first, and the last. Do it for my sake. Always on your birthday - a day when one thinks of oneself - get some roses and put them in the vase. Do it just as others, once a year, have a Mass said for the beloved dead. I no longer believe in God, and therefore I do not want a Mass said for me. I believe in you alone. I love none but you. Only in you do I wish to go on living - just one day in the year, softly, quietly, as I have always lived near you. Please do this, my darling, please do it. . . My first request, and my last. . . . Thanks, thanks. . . I love you, I love you. . . . Farewell. . . .

The letter fell from his nerveless hands. He thought long and deeply. Yes, he had vague memories of a neighbour's child, of a girl, of a woman in a dancing-hall - all was dim and confused, like a flickering and shapeless view of a stone in the bed of a swiftly running stream. Shadows chased one another across his mind, but would not fuse into a picture. There were

stirrings of memory in the realm of feeling, and still he could not remember. It seemed to him that he must have dreamed of all these figures, must have dreamed often and vividly - and yet they had only been the phantoms of a dream. His eyes wandered to the blue vase on the writing-table. It was empty. For years it had not been empty on his birthday. He shuddered, feeling as if an invisible door had been suddenly opened, a door through which a chill breeze from another world was blowing into his sheltered room. An intimation of death came to him, and an intimation of deathless love. Something welled up within him; and the thought of the dead woman stirred in his mind, bodiless and passionate, like the sound of distant music.

RACHEL ARRAIGNS GOD

A LEGEND

ONCE again had the froward and fickle folk of Jerusalem forgotten the Covenant, once again had they offered up sacrifices to brazen idols. Nor were they satisfied with this impiety; for even in God's Temple, which Solomon His servant had built, they set up an image of Baal, and the gutters ran red with the blood of the victims.

When God saw how they mocked Him in the heart of the sanctuary, His wrath found vent. He stretched forth His hand, and His voice made the skies tremble. His patience was exhausted; He would shower destruction upon the sinful city and scatter its inhabitants like chaff. His thunders resounded, announcing this resolve from one end of the world to the other.

Now that the Almighty had given utterance to His anger, the earth quaked with terror. The windows of heaven were opened, as they had been in the days of Father Noah, the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the high hills tottered. The birds of the air dropped to earth, and even the angels were affrighted by the fury of the Lord.

Far beneath, in the doomed town, men, though they heard the thunder of God's voice, were deaf to the meaning of His words. They knew not that they had been sentenced to destruction. Yet full well they were aware that the foundations of the world were crumbling; that at high noon it had grown dark as midnight; that at high noon it had grown dark as midnight; that a hurricane was raging which broke the stems of the mighty cedars like straws. Fearful lest the roofs should fall in upon their heads, they fled from their houses into the open, to be even more panic-stricken by the force of the blast, the driving of the rain, the sulphurous reek of the murky air. Vainly did they rend their garments and put ashes on their heads, vainly did they abase themselves and implore God's forgiveness. The fury of the elements was unabated, the darkness unrelieved.

So fierce had been the thunder of God's wrath that it aroused even the dead from the slumbers in which, as is decreed, they lie awaiting the Last Trump. Believing that this dread summons had sounded, they rose and winged their way heavenward, to find, after they had traversed the fearful storm, that the Last Judgment was not yet. Nevertheless, the souls of the fathers and forefathers gathered in a circle round the Throne, to beseech that the doom might be averted from their children and from the pinnacles of the Holy City. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob led the prayer. But their voices were drowned by the Voice of the Lord, repeating that too long had He endured the stubbornness of His creatures. Ungrateful though these were, the shattering of the Temple would teach the wicked who could not be taught by love.

Since the ancestors of the Chosen People were thus struck dumb, there now petitioned those who in life had been the mouthpieces of God's Holy Word, the prophets Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha - men with tongues of fire and burning hearts. But the Lord would not hearken, and the tempest of His anger blew their words back into their faces. Brighter than before flashed the lightnings that were to consume the Temple and raze it to the ground.

The prophets and sages, too, lost courage. Their souls quivered like grass in the tempest; they were as dead leaves trodden under foot. No man among them dared to breathe another syllable. But the soul of a woman spake, that of Rachel, the arch-mother of Israel, who in her tomb at Ramah had likewise heard God's proclamation, and had come weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted. Drawing strength from love, she ventured to take up her parable before Him whose face she could not see - for none but the angels can look upon God's countenance until the Judgment Day. Kneeling, she raised her hands and said her word:

"My heart is like water within me, Almighty, thus to address Thee, but Thou madest this heart so timid; and Thou gavest me lips wherewith, though fearfully, to utter my prayer. The bitter need of my children enables me. Thou didst not gift me with either wisdom or cunning, nor know I how to allay Thine anger. But as for Thee, Thou knowest what I would say, for every word forms itself in Thy mind before it is spoken by human lips, and every human action is foreseen by Thee. Nevertheless I pray Thee to hear me for those poor sinners' sake."

Having thus spoken, Rachel bowed her head. God saw her humility, and noted the tears that coursed down her cheeks. He restrained His wrath, and was silent, to hear her pleading.

Now when God listens in heaven, space is emptied and time stands still. The wind ceased howling, the thunder roared no longer, creeping and crawling things stayed from creeping and crawling, the birds of the air folded their pinions, no one ventured even to draw breath. The movement of the hours was arrested, and the cherubim were motionless as statues. Even the sun and the moon and the stars rested from their circling, and the rivers from their flow.

Far beneath, the inhabitants of the doomed city knew naught of Rachel's pleading in their behalf, or that the Almighty was hearkening to her prayer. For mortals cannot perceive what passes in heaven. All they were aware of was that the storm had abated. But when taking heart of grace, they looked skyward, it was to see the black clouds hanging over them like the pall that covers a coffin. In the unrelieved darkness they were still terrified, all the more because the quietude continued to envelop them as a shroud enwraps a corpse.

But Rachel, glad that God was paying heed to her supplication, plucked up courage, raised her head, and continued:

"Lord, as Thou knowest, I dwelt in Haran, the land of the people of the east, where I kept my father Laban's sheep. Came a morning when we maidens drove the sheep to the water, but lacked strength to roll the stone from the well's mouth. Then a youth appeared, a stranger, well-made, who sprang forward to help us, and rolled away the stone so easily that we were astonished at his strength. Jacob was his name, and he was the son of my father's sister Rebekah. When he told us who he was, I led him to my father Laban's house. Within an hour of the meeting by the well, our hearts yearned for one another. At night, I could not sleep for longing - nor am I ashamed to say this, seeing that, if passion flames up in us like the ardours of the Burning Bush, it is through Thy will, Lord, that such things happen. Through Thy will doth it come to pass that a woman craves for a man's embraces, that youth and maiden are magically drawn together. Because these things

are so, we did not try to quench the flames, but on that first day of our meeting Jacob and I exchanged vows of betrothal.

"As thou knowest, Lord, my father Laban was a hard man; hard as the stony ground he ploughed, hard as the horns of the oxen whose necks he bent beneath the yoke. When Jacob asked me of him in marriage, he had it in mind first of all to discover whether this suitor, his nephew, was a man of his own kind, a strenuous worker and endowed with iron patience. Laban demanded of Jacob seven years' service as the price of my hand. My soul trembled, and Jacob's cheeks paled, for to both of us, young and impatient, seven years seemed an infinity of waiting. For Thee, Lord, seven years are but a movement, the flicker of an eyelash, since time is nothing to the Eternal. But for us mortals (deign to remember it, Lord God) seven years is a tenth of our life. Short is the allotted span, and scarcely have our eyes opened to see Thy holy light, when they are closed in the darkness of death. Like a freshet in springtime races the current of human existence, and a wave that has passed can never return. Seven long years were we to be sundered, though living in close companionship; kept apart, while our lips thirsted for one another's kisses. Nevertheless, Jacob complied with his uncle's wishes, and I obeyed my father's behest. We resolved upon seven years of waiting, of obedience and patience - because we loved one another.

"Yet Thou hast made patience difficult to Thy creatures, having given them hot passions, and instilled into them a brooding anxiety because of the shortness of their lives. We know that our autumn follows close upon our springtime, that the season of our summer is brief. That is why we snatch at fleeting hours of joy, and are eager to make the most of evanescent pleasures. How can we be expected to wait without repining, we who grow older day by day? Of course we burn, since, by Thy decree, time perpetually consumes us. Can we fail to be in a hurry, since we know that Death unceasingly dogs our footsteps? Yet we mastered our impulses, while each day of waiting was as long as a thousand. In the end, when the seven years were accomplished, they seemed, as we looked back on them, to have been no more than a single day. Thus, Lord, did I wait for Jacob and thus did Jacob love me.

"When the seventh year of waiting had drawn to a close, I went joyfully to Laban, my father, and asked him to prepare the wedding tent. But Laban, my father looked coldly on my joy. His brows were clouded, and for a space his mouth was sealed. At length he broke silence, and commanded me to summon Leah, my sister.

"Leah, as Thou knowest, Lord, was two years mine elder, and hard-favoured. Hence no man coveted her whereat she was sorely grieved. Yet I loved her fondly, because of her affliction and her gentleness. When, however, my father bade me summon Leah, it entered my mind in a flash that he had planned to beguile me and Jacob. I therefore hid close to the tent, that I might overhear their conversation. My father spake as follows:

" Leah, my nephew Jacob has served me faithfully seven years, in order to win Rachel as his wife. Yet for thy sake I will not do this thing, since it must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. In the beginning, the Almighty commanded us to be fruitful and multiply, that we might people His world and raise up many to praise His holy name. He did not desire the soil to lie fallow, or that a woman should bear no children. No ewe and no heifer feeds

on my pastures without bringing forth after their kind. Can it be expected of me that I should allow the womb of my elder daughter to remain closed? Make ready, then, Leah. Don the bridal veil, and Jacob (unknowing) shall wed thee in Rachel's stead.' Thus spake my father to Leah, who listened in a timid silence.

"But I eavesdropping, was filled with anger against Laban, my father and against Leah, my sister. Forgive me Lord for being so undaughterly, so unsisterly; but bethink Thee how Jacob and I had been waiting for one another seven years, and now, after all his service, my sister was to be imposed upon him whose life was dearer to me than my own. I mutinied against my father, even as Thy children in Jerusalem have mutinied against Thee - for thus hast Thou made us, O Lord, that we grow stiff-necked when we deem that we are unjustly treated. Secretly I talked with Jacob, and disclosed my father's plan. That this scheme might be frustrated, I told him of a sign by which he might know me. 'When thou art wedded,' I declared, 'thy bride shall kiss thee thrice on the forehead before she enters the tent.' Jacob understood, and approved the sign.

"That evening, Laban had Leah veiled for the bridal. Also he had her face skilfully made up, lest Jacob should recognize her before he had gone in unto her. He had me barred in the granary, fearing lest one of the servants might warn me of what was afoot. Like an owl, I sat there in the gloom, and as the hours wore on towards nightfall, I ate my heart out with rage and pain. Not, Lord, as Thou knowest, that I bore a grudge against my sister because she was to be possessed by Jacob - but I was wroth that my beloved was to be tricked out of what he had slaved seven years to secure. I bit my wrists, when the cymbals clashed merrily, and my passions gnawed at my vitals as lions tear at their kill.

"Thus prisoned and forgotten I spent the weary hours, consumed with bitterness, until, when the darkness without was as impenetrable as the darkness of my soul, the bolts were drawn back, the door was gently opened, and Leah entered. Yes, Leah, my sister, had stolen away to visit me, before the bridal. I knew her footsteps, but I turned from her in enmity, for my heart was hardened against her. Leah stroked my hair, and, when I looked up, I could see, by the light of the lamp she carried that her face was overcast. Thereupon, Lord, as I frankly acknowledge, a malicious pleasure stirred within me. It did me good to know that she was uneasy, that Leah (too) was suffering on her wedding day. But she, poor innocent, did not suspect my feelings.

Had we not drawn suck from the same breasts, and had we not always loved one another? Confidently, she put her arms around me, saying, with pallid lips;

" 'What will be the upshot, Rachel, my sister? I am sore at heart because of this scheme of our father's. He is taking your lover from you and giving Jacob to me; grievous is the thought of tricking him thus. How can I dare to substitute myself for you? My legs will refuse to carry me; and my heart is full of fear, for assuredly, Rachel, he will detect the fraud. How shamefaced I shall be, if thereupon he drives me forth from his tent! Down to the second and third generation, children will make mock of me saying: "That is Leah, ugly Leah! Don't you know her story? She was thrust upon a husband, who wouldn't have her when he found out the trick, and drove her away like a mangy cur." What am I to do, Rachel, dear? Shall I take the venture, or shall I defy our father (whose hand is heavy)? How can I prevent Jacob discovering the fraud too soon, so

that shame will be brought upon my innocent head? Help me, Sister, help me, I implore you, in the name of the All-Merciful !'

"Lord, I was still exceeding wroth; and, much though I loved my sister, the evil within me still made her anxiety sweet to me. Since, however, she had called upon Thy holy name, the holiest of Thy names, since she had implored me in the name of the All-merciful, the might of Thy compassion, the power of Thy goodness, flowed through my veins like wine, and entered like a blaze of light into my darkened soul. For this is one of Thy everlasting miracles, O Lord, that the barriers which separate each of us from others are broken down the instant we become sympathetically aware of the suffering of our neighbour, and share the pain within our neighbour's tortured breast. My sister's anxiety permeated me, so that, instead of thinking of my private sorrow, I felt her bitter need. Sharing her distress, I, Thy foolish handmaid (mark this, Lord, I pray Thee), had compassion upon her in the hour when she stood before me in tears, even as now, in this hour, I stand before Thee in tears. I had compassion upon her, because she had appealed to me for pity, even as now I appeal to Thee. In my own despite, I taught her how to deceive Jacob, betraying to her the sign I had pledged myself to give him. 'Kiss him thrice on the brow,' said I 'before thou enterest his tent.' Thus, for love of Thee, the All-Merciful, did I gain the victory over my jealousy, and play the traitor to the man I loved.

"When I had told this secret to Leah, she could no longer contain herself, but prostrated herself before me, fondling my hands and kissing the hem of my raiment; for thus hast Thou fashioned Thy creatures, that always they are filled with humility and gratitude when they discern in another a trace of Thine own goodness. We embraced, making one another's cheeks salt with our mingled tears. Leah was comforted, and prepared to depart. But as she arose, once more her face became shadowed with sorrow, and again her lips blanched.

" 'I thank thee, Sister, for thy loving-kindness,' she said, 'and shall do as thou biddest. But what if the sign fail to convince him? Yet more counsel do I need, Rachel. What shall I do if he address me by thy name? Can I remain stubbornly silent, a bride to whom the bridegroom speaketh? Yet the instant I open my mouth, he will know that it is Leah whom he is taking to wife, and not Rachel. I cannot answer him in thy voice! Help me yet further, Sister, shrewd as thou art; help me in the name of the All-Merciful!'

"Again, Lord, when she thus appealed to me in the holiest of Thy names; again that intoxicating fire flowed through me, so that once more my heart melted, and ruthlessly I trod my own wishes under foot. I was ready for the supreme sacrifice, and answered:

" 'Be comforted, Leah. Here, too, I can find a way. For the sake of the All-merciful I will see to it that Jacob shall not recognize thee as Leah until after he has known thee, believing thee to be Rachel. This is my plan. I shall slip into Jacob's tent, and shall there crouch in the darkness beside the nuptial couch. Should he speak to thee, I shall answer him. Then he will have no suspicion, but will embrace thee, and will fertilize thy body with his seed. This will I do for thee, Leah, because of the love we have borne one another since we were little children together, and for the love of the All-Merciful, that He may have compassion on my children and my children's children, whenever they may call upon Him by the holiest of His names.'

"Lord, thereupon Leah embraced me and kissed me on the lips. Another woman, a woman renewed, was she who rose from her knees. Freed from care, she went forth, to offer herself to Jacob, her face hidden behind the deceitful veil. As for me, I drank my cup to the dregs, hiding myself beside the couch on which my lover was to enter into my sister. Soon the cymbals clashed once more, as the musicians attended the wedded pair, who in a minute stood at the entry to the tent. But before Jacob raised the veil to give his bride a blessing, he paused in expectation of the sign I had promised. Then Leah kissed him thrice on the forehead. Jacob, satisfied with the token, clasped his bride lovingly, lifted her in his arms, and carried her to the bed behind which I cowered. Even now, however, as Leah had foreseen, before the final embrace, he asked: 'Is it truly Rachel whom I hold in my arms?' Then Lord (Thou, the All-Knowest, knowest how hard it was for me to utter the words!), I whispered: 'Yes, it is I, Jacob, my husband.' He, recognizing my voice, he, who had wasted seven years to possess me, thereupon made Leah my sister his own, with all the vigour of a young man in his prime. Lord, Thou whose vision pierces the darkness as a scythe cuts grass, Thou sawest my plight when I crouched there within touch of them, while passionately he possessed Leah believing himself to be entering into me, who so ardently longed for his embraces. Omnipresent Lord, recall, I pray Thee, that memorable night when I spent seven hours of agony, hearing the transports that should have been mine and were denied me. Seven hours, seven aeons, did I lie beside that couch, holding my breath, wrestling against my longing to cry out, even as Jacob, later, wrestled with Thy angel until the breaking of the day. Longer, far longer, seemed to me these seven night hours than Jacob's seven years of waiting. Never could I have endured it, this night of forbearance, had I not (in the silence of my soul) called repeatedly upon Thy holy name, and strengthened my resolve with the thought of Thine infinite patience.

"This, Lord, was my deed, the only one upon which I plume myself among all that I did during my earthly pilgrimage, for then I rivalled my Creator in forbearance and compassion. I doubt if ever Thou hast laid so heavy a burden upon a woman as upon me in the anguish of that night. Yet I endured to the uttermost; and at length when the cocks crew, I rose up wearily while the pair on the bed were in a profound slumber. Hastily I fled to my father's house, for soon the fraud would be disclosed, and my teeth chattered as I thought of Jacob's fury. Alas, my forebodings were justified. Scarcely was I safely ensconced at my father's, when the shouts of the husband whom we had beguiled rent the air of morning like the bellowing of an enraged bull. Armed with an axe, he rushed hither and thither in search of Laban, my father, who was paralysed with terror at sight of his infuriated son-in-law, and sank upon the ground, calling upon Thy holy name. Once again, Lord, this appeal to Thee revived my flagging courage, inspired me with determination, so that I flung myself between Jacob and Laban, to turn my lover's wrath towards myself, and save my unhappy father. Jacob saw red, and directly his eyes lighted upon me who had helped to deceive him, he struck me in the face with his fist, and I fell. Thou knowest, Lord, that I bore this chastisement without repining, being aware that the greatness of his love accounted for the greatness of his wrath. Had he slain me and, indeed, he raised the axe to smite me - I should have appeared uncomplainingly before Thy Throne.

"But as soon as he saw me stretched at his feet, bruised and bleeding, pity overcame him. The axe dropped from his nerveless hands. Leaning over me, he tenderly kissed the blood from my

lips. For my sake, he forgave my father Laban, and did not drive Leah from his tent. A week later, my father gave me to him as second wife. Jacob opened my womb, and I bare him children, which I nourished upon the milk of my breasts and upon the words of Thy Covenant, children which I bade call upon Thee in their need, with the mystery of Thy ineffable name. To-day, Lord, Almighty and All-Merciful, in my own uttermost need, I call upon Thee to do what Jacob did, to drop the axe of Thine anger and to dispel the clouds of Thy wrath. Because Rachel was pitiful to Leah, her sister, wilt not Thou be pitiful to Rachel's children and children's children; wilt not Thou be patient, even as I was patient, and spare the Holy City? Have mercy on them, Lord; have mercy on Jerusalem."

Rachel's voice echoed through the vaults of heaven. Her strength was spent, and she sank back upon her knees, exhausted, while her hair fell in a black flood over her trembling body. Thus did Rachel await God's answer.

But God did not answer. He was silent. And in heaven, upon earth, in the circling sphere between, there is nothing more dreadful than God's silence. When God is silent, the movement of time ceases; light is merged into darkness, day into night; and throughout all the worlds of the habitable universe there prevails only the chaos of the days before creation. The movable moves no longer, the flow of the rivers is stayed, the flowers do not bloom, even the tides cannot ebb and flow without the power of God's word. No mortal ear can bear God's silence, no mortal heart can continue beating in this awesome void, wherein nothing is but God, and even He, the life of lives, is alive no longer when He is silent.

Rachel, for all her patience, could not endure the endless silence with which God answered her proclamation of infinite need. Once more she lifted her eyes towards the Invisible, once more she lifted her motherly hands, and anger struck words of fire from her lips.

"Hast Thou not heard me, Omnipresent? Hast Thou not understood me, Omniscient? Must Thy handmaid speak yet more plainly to thrust her meaning home? Learn, then (hard of hearing though Thou art), that I was jealous because Jacob had bestowed on my sister what was meant for me, just as Thou art jealous because my children have sacrificed to other gods than Thee. But I, a weak woman, mastered my jealousy, grew pitiful for sake of Thee, whom I have called the All-Merciful. I had pity on Leah, and Jacob had pity on me. Take note of this, Almighty! All of us, poor mortals though we be, control the evil passion of envy. But Thou, Almighty, Creator of the universe, alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, Thou who hast an ocean where we have only droplets - Thou canst not show compassion. Well do I know that my children are a stiff-necked brood, that again and ever again they revolt against the yoke. But since Thou art God, and Lord of Plenty, shall not Thy forbearance match their stubbornness, and shall not Thy forgiveness march with their transgressions? For this must not be, God; this must not be, that before Thine own angels Thou shouldst be put to shame, so that the angels will say: 'Once upon earth there was a woman, a frail mortal, Rachel by name, who held her anger in check. But He, God Almighty, Lord and Master of the universe, was the slave of His own wrath.' No, God that must not be, for unless Thy mercy is infinite, Thou Thyself art not infinite - which means that Thou art not God! Thou art not the God whom I made for myself out of my tears, and whose voice called to me through my sister's tears. Thou Thyself art a 'strange god,' a god of wrath,

punishment, and vengeance; and I, Rachel, I, who loved only the Loving God and served only the All-Merciful - I reject Thee before Thine own angels. They and Thy prophets may abase themselves. But I Rachel, the mother, will not abase me. I stand erect and defy Thee. God, I arraign Thee, before Thou executest Thy will upon my children. Thy word, God, conflicts with Thine own nature and Thy wrathful mouth gives the lie to the promptings of Thine own heart. Judge, God, betwixt Thyself and Thy word. If Thou art, in very truth, the wrathful and jealous God Thou proclaimest Thyself to be, then will I fling myself down into the darkness to join my children and share their doom. I do not wish to contemplate the visage of an angry God, and I loathe the thought of a jealous one. But if Thou art a merciful God, the God I have loved, and by the guidance of whose teachings I tried to walk, then show Thyself to me in that light; be clement, spare my children, have mercy upon Jerusalem."

When Rachel had uttered this message of defiance, again her strength was spent. She awaited the answer of the Most High, her eyelids closed like those of the dead.

The forefathers and the prophets drew away, in terror of the lightnings which must, they felt assured, blast the impious spirit of her who had arraigned God. Timidly they gazed upward at the Throne. But there was no sign vouchsafed.

The angels, affrighted by the angry aspect of God's visage, hid their heads under their wings. Then (peeping forth) they looked aghast at the woman who had denied the omnipotence of the Lord - and perceived that a light shone on Rachel's forehead. It was as if this radiance emanated from within, and the tears on her motherly cheeks sparkled red like dew-drops in the glow of dawn. What was happening? The angels understood. God was showing Rachel the glory of His loving countenance. They became aware that the Almighty loved this repudiator of His word for the very reason that she was froward and impatient, loved her more than He loved the sages and the prophets, the pious who so servilely complied with His word. Mastering their terror, the angels confidently raised their eyes, to behold that a splendid and luminous calm once more enveloped God's majesty, and that the consoling azure of His smile filled the infinite spaces of heaven. Thereupon the cherubim winked anew their joyful flight, the rustle of their pinions making music in the skies. The sheen upon God's face grew so bright that the firmament glowed with an intensity no mortal eyes could endure. Now the angels sang together, the dead who had arisen from their tombs joined in the chorus of praise, and mingled therein were the innumerable voices of those whom the Almighty had not yet called to live upon earth.

But they who now dwelt thereon, mortals far beneath, ignoring (as ever) the happenings in heaven, knew naught of what was going on overhead. Clad in their shrouds, they bowed their faces sadly towards the darkened earth. Then to one and another of them came the sound of a stirring, like the rustle of a March wind. Looking upward they were astonished. The dense clouds had been riven in sunder, and across the interspace spread an arch, sevenfold in colour, a rainbow, which was made by the light from God's countenance shining upon Mother Rachel's tears.

VIRATA, OR THE EYES OF THE UNDYING BROTHER

It is not by shunning action that we can be really freed from action, Never can we be freed from all activity, even for a moment.

-*Bhagavatgita*, Third Song.

What is action? What is inaction?-These questions have long puzzled the sages.

For we must pay heed to action, must pay heed to forbidden action. Must pay heed likewise to inaction-The nature of action is unfathomable.

-*Bhagavatgita*, Fourth Song.

A LEGEND

This is the Story of Virata who was honoured by his Fellow Countrymen with the four Names of Virtue. Yet there is no word of him in the Chronicles of the Conquerors or in the Books of the Sages, and his Memory has passed from the Minds of Men.

IN the days before the sublime Buddha lived on earth to fill his servants with the light of his knowledge, there dwelt in the land of the Birwagha as subject of a king in Rajputana a noble and upright man named Virata. He was known also as the Flashing of the Sword, for he was a great warrior, bold before all others; and he was a great hunter, whose arrow never missed its mark, whose lance never swerved, and whose trusty sword-arm had the strength of a thunderbolt. His countenance was serene, and his eyes did not quail before any man's glance. He never clenched his fist in anger, nor raised his voice in wrath. Himself a loyal servant of the king, his own slaves served him with veneration, for he was deemed pre-eminent in justice among all who lived in the Land of the Five Rivers. The pious bowed low when they passed before his dwelling, and the children who caught sight of him smiled to see his starry eyes.

But one day misfortune overtook the king his master. The viceroy over half the kingdom, who was brother of the monarch's wife, lusted to make himself ruler of the whole, and by secret gifts had enticed the best warriors of the realm to espouse his cause. He had induced the priests to bring him under cover of darkness the herons of the lake, the sacred herons which for thousands of years had been the insignia of royalty among the Birwagher. He marshalled his elephants in the field, summoned to his army the malcontents from the hills, and marched against the capital.

From morning till evening, by the king's orders, the copper cymbals were beaten and the ivory horns were sounded. At night, fires were lighted upon the towers, and fish-scales were cast into the flames, which flared yellow in the starlight as an alarm signal. Few answered the summons, for the news of the theft of the sacred herons had been bruited abroad, and the leaders' hearts were faint within them. The commander-in-chief and the head of the elephant corps, who had been the most trusted among the king's warriors, had gone over to the enemy. Vainly did the forsaken monarch look around him seeking friends. Alas, he had been a harsh master, ever ready to punish, and strict in the exaction of feudal dues. None of the tried and trusted chiefs were now in attendance at the palace, where only a helpless rabble of slaves and underlings was to be seen.

In this extremity the king's thoughts turned to Virata, from whom a pledge of loyal service had come the instant the horns had been sounded. He entered his ebony litter, and was borne to the dwelling of his faithful subject. Virata prostrated himself when the king stepped forth from the litter. But the king's mien was that of a petitioner as he besought Virata to take command of the army and lead it against the enemy. Virata made obeisance, and said:

"I will do it, Lord, and will not return to the shelter of this roof until the flames of revolt shall have been stamped out beneath the feet of thy servants."

Thereupon he assembled his sons, his kinsmen, and his slaves, and, going forth with them to join the loyal remnant, he marshalled his forces for the campaign. They made their way through the jungle and came at eventide to the river on whose opposite shore the enemy was drawn up in countless numbers. Confident in their strength, the rebels were felling trees to build a bridge, by which they hoped to cross next morning, and drown the land in blood. But Virata, when hunting the tiger, had discovered a ford above the place of the bridge building. At dead of night he led his men across the stream, and took the enemy by surprise. With flaming torches, the loyalists scared the elephants and buffaloes in the hostile camp, so that the beasts stampeded, and spread disorder among the sleeping horde. Virata was the first to reach the tent of the would-be usurper; and ere the inmates were fully awake, he put two of them to the sword, and then a third who was reaching out for his own weapon. With a fourth and a fifth he strove man to man in the darkness, cutting down one by a blow on the head, and piercing the other through the unarmoured breast. As soon as they all lay motionless, shade beside shade, Virata stationed himself at the entry of the tent, to defend it against any who might seek to carry off the white herons, the sacred emblem of royalty. But none came to attempt the deed, for the foe were in flight, hard pressed by the jubilant and victorious loyalists. Soon the din of the chase grew faint in the distance. Virata seated himself tranquilly in front of the tent, sword in hand, to await the return of his fellow-soldiers.

Ere long, God's day dawned behind the forest. The palm trees were golden red in the early sunlight and were mirrored like torches in the river. The Sun showed all bloody, a fiery wound in the east, Virata arose laid aside his raiment, and walked to the stream, hands uplifted. Having bowed in prayer before the glowing eye of God, he went down into the waters for the prescribed ablutions, and cleansed the blood from his hands. Now in the white light of morning, he returned to the bank, wrapped himself in his garment, and, serene of countenance, made his way back to the tent to contemplate the deeds of the night. The dead lay there with eyes staring and faces contorted with terror. The usurper's head was cloven; and the traitor who had been commander-in-chief in the land of the Birwagha who perished from a sword-thrust in the breast. Closing their eyes, Virata moved on to look at those whom he had killed as they slumbered. These lay half-wrapped in their mats. Two of them were strangers to him, slaves of the traitor, men from the south with woolly hair and black faces. But when he looked upon the last of the dead men, Virata's eyes grew dim, for he saw before him the face of his elder brother Belangur, the Prince of the Mountains, who had come to the aid of the usurper, and whom Virata had struck down all unwitting. Trembling he stooped to feel for the heart-beat of the misguided man. The heart was stilled forever; the dead man's eyes encountered his with a glassy stare-dark eyes which seemed to pierce his very soul. Hardly able to breathe, Virata sat down among the dead, feeling as if he himself were one of them, and turning away his eyes from the accusing gaze of his mother's first-born.

Soon, shouts were heard without. Glad at heart, enriched with plunder, and with wild and gleeful cries like those of birds of prey, the returning soldiers came to the tent. Finding the would-be usurper slain amid his adherents, and learning that the sacred herons were safe, they leapt and danced, kissed the garment of the unheeding Virata, and acclaimed him the Flashing of the Sword. As more came behind them and more, they loaded carts with their booty. So deep sank the wheels beneath the burden that they

had to scourge the buffaloes with thorns, and the boats were in danger of sinking. A messenger forded the stream, and hastened to bear tidings to the king; but the others tarried beside the spoil, and rejoiced over the victory.

Virata, meanwhile, sat silent, as if in a dream. Once only did he uplift his voice, when the soldiers were about to strip the dead. Thereupon, rising to his feet, he commanded that funeral pyres should be built, in order that the slain might be burned and their souls go forth cleansed to the transmigration. The underlings were amazed that he should deal thus tenderly with conspirators who should have been torn limb from limb by the jackals, and whose bones should have been left to bleach in the sun: nevertheless, they did as they were bidden. When the pyres had been built, Virata himself kindled them, and cast spices and sandalwood into the flames. Then, turning away his face, he stood in silence until the blazing platforms fell in and the glowing ashes sank to the ground.

Meanwhile the slaves had finished the bridge whose building had been dauntingly begun the day before by the servitors of the usurper. The first to cross it were the warriors, crowned with flowers of the plantain; then came the slaves; then the nobles on horseback. Virata sent most of the warriors in advance, for their shouts and songs were discordant with his mood. Halting in the middle of the bridge, he gazed for a long time to right and to left over the flowing waters, while the soldiers who had crossed in front of him and those who had still to cross and who, by their commander's orders were keeping well to the rear, marvelled as they looked at him. They saw him raise his sword, as if to threaten heaven but when he lowered his arm, his fingers loosed their grip, and the weapon sank into the river. From either bank, naked boys jumped into the water, supposing that the sword had been accidentally dropped, and hoping to recover it by diving; but Virata forbade the attempt and strode forward, sad of mien, between the wondering servitors. No word passed his lips during the long homeward march.

The jasper gates and pinnacled towers of Birwagha were still far distant when a white dust-cloud was seen advancing, heralded by runners and riders who had outstripped the dust. They halted at sight of the army and spread carpets athwart the road as a sign of the coming of the king, the sole of whose foot must never press the common clay from the day of his birth to that hour when the flames of the funeral pyre would enwrap his illustrious corpse. Now the monarch came in sight, borne by the lord of the elephants, and surrounded by youths. Obedient to the *ankus*, the great beast kneeled, and the king stepped down upon the carpet. Virata wished to prostrate himself before his master, but the king hastened to embrace him - an honour that had never yet been paid to an inferior. Virata had the herons brought, and when they flapped their white wings there was such a clamour of rejoicing that the chargers reared and the mahouts were hard put to it to control the elephants. At sight of these emblems of victory, the king embraced Virata once more, and beckoned an attendant, who was carrying the sword of the primal hero of the Rajputs. For seven times seven hundred years, this weapon had been preserved in the treasuries of the kings. The hilt glittered with jewels, and on the blade was inscribed in golden characters a mystic assurance of victory, in the ancient writing which none but sages and the priests of the great temple could now decipher. The king offered this sword of swords to Virata as a token of gratitude, and to show that henceforward Virata was to be the chief of his warriors and the leader of his armies.

But Virata made a deep obeisance, saying: "May I ask a grace from the most gracious and a favour from the most generous of monarchs?"

Looking down on the petitioner's bowed head, the king answered: "Your request is granted, even before you raise your eyes to meet mine. You have but to ask, and the half of my kingdom is yours."

Thereupon Virata said: "Grant then, O King, that this sword may be taken back to your treasury, for I have vowed in my heart never again to wield a sword, now that I have slain my brother, the only fruit besides myself which my mother bore in her womb, and whom my mother dandled together with me."

The king looked at him in amazement. Then he replied: "In that case, be the commander of my armies, though without a sword, that I may know my realm to be safe from its enemies, for never has a hero led an army more wisely against overwhelming odds. Take my sash as a token of power, and my charger likewise, that all may know you as chief among my warriors."

But Virata prostrated himself once more, and rejoined: "The Invisible One has sent me a sign, and my heart has understood. I have slain my brother, and this has taught me that everyone who slays another human being kills his brother. I cannot lead the armies in war, for the sword is the embodiment of force, and force is the enemy of right. Whosoever participates in the sin of slaying, is himself a slayer. It is not my wish to inspire dread in others, and I would rather eat the bread of a beggar than deny the sign which has been vouchsafed to me. Short is our life amid the unending flux of things, and I would fain live out my days without further wrongdoing."

For a space, the king's brow was dark, and there was the silence of terror where before there had been tumult, for never yet had it happened since the days of fathers and forefathers that a nobleman had renounced war or that a prince had refused to accept his king's gift. But at length the monarch looked upon the sacred herons which Virata had wrested from the insurgents. At sight of these emblems of victory, his face cleared, and he said:

"I have always known you to be brave in conflict with my enemies, and to excel as a just man among the servants of my kingdom. If I must indeed do without your aid in war, I cannot dispense with your services in another field. Since, yourself a just man, you know and can appraise wrongdoing, you shall be the chief among my judges, and shall pass sentence from the threshold of my palace, so that truth may prevail within my walls and right be maintained throughout the land."

Virata prostrated himself before the king, who commanded him to mount the royal elephant. Side by side they entered the sixty-towered town, amid acclamations which thundered like the surges of a stormy sea.

Henceforward, from dawn to sunset, at the summit of the rose-coloured stairway in the shade of the palace, Virata delivered justice in the name of the king. His decisions were like those of a balance whose pointer trembles long before it sways this way or that. His clear eyes searched deeply into the soul of the accused, and his questions burrowed into the profundities of the offence as a badger burrows in the underground darkness. His sentences were rigorous, but were never delivered on the day of the hearing. He always allowed the cool span of night to intervene before passing judgment. During the long hours ere the sun rose, the members of his household could hear his footsteps as he paced the roof of the house while pondering the rights and wrongs of the matter. Before passing sentence, he laved his hands and his brow, that his decision might be free from the heat of passion. Always, too, after passing sentence, he would ask the culprit whether there was any reason to complain of the justice of the decision. Rarely was any objection raised. Silently the offender would kiss the step of the judgment seat, and with bowed head would accept the punishment as if it had been God's decree.

Never did Virata pass sentence of death, even for the most heinous of crimes, resisting all solicitations that he should do so. He dreaded to stain his hands with blood. The basin of the ancient fountain of the Rajputs, over whose margin the headsman would make the criminals lean before he delivered the death-

blow, and whose stones had been blackened with blood, were washed white by the rains during the years of Virata's justiceship. Yet there was no increase of evil throughout the land. He confined ill-doers in the prison hewn out of the rock, or sent them to the mountains where they had to quarry stones for the walls of the gardens, or to the rice mills on the river bank where they turned the wheels side by side with the elephants. But he revered life, and men revered him, for never was any decision of his shown to be wrong, never was he weary of searching out the truth, and never did his words betray anger. From the remotest parts of the country, the peasants would come in buffalo carts bringing their disputes for his settlement; the priests obeyed his admonitions and the king hearkened to his counsel. His fame grew as the young bamboo grows, and folk forgot they had once named him the Flashing of the Sword. Now, throughout Rajputana, he was known as the Wellspring of Justice.

In the sixth of the years of Virata's judgeship it came to pass that certain plaintiffs brought a youth of the tribe of the Kazars, the wild men who dwelt beyond the rocky hills and served other gods. His feet were bloodstained for they had compelled him to make long marches during many days. His mighty arms were strongly bound, lest he should use them to do the harm that his fierce and sullen eyes threatened. Bringing him to the seat of judgment, they forced their prisoner to his knees before Virata, and then, prostrating themselves, they lifted up their hands as a sign that they were petitioners.

The judge looked questioningly at the strangers, saying: "Who are ye, brothers, that come to me from afar, and who is this man whom ye bring to me thus fettered?"

The eldest of the company made obeisance, and answered: "We are herdsmen, Lord, living peacefully in the eastern land. He whom we bring you is the most evil of an evil stock, a wretch who has slain more men than he has fingers on his hands. A dweller in our village, whose daughter he had asked in marriage, refused, because the men of his tribe have impious customs, being dog-eaters and cow-killers: instead, the father gave her for wife to a merchant in the lowlands. In his wrath, thereupon, this fellow drove off many of our cattle; one night he killed the father of the girl, and her three brothers; and whenever anyone of that household went to herd cattle in the foothills, this man slew him. Eleven from our village had he thus done to death, when at length we assembled our forces and hunted him like a wild beast until we had made him prisoner. Now, most just among judges, we have brought him to you that you may rid the land of the evil-doer."

Virata, raising his head, looked at the bound man. "Is it true, what they say of you?"

"Who are you? Are you the king?"

"I am Virata, servant of the king and servant of justice, that I may atone for my own wrongdoings and sift the true from the false."

The accused was silent for a space, and then gave Virata a piercing look.

"How, on your distant judgment seat, can you know what is true, and what is false, seeing that all your knowledge comes from what people tell you?"

"Give your rejoinder to their accusation, that from the two I may learn the truth."

The prisoner raised his eyebrows contemptuously.

"I shall not dispute with them. How can you know what I did, inasmuch as I myself do not know what my hands do when anger seizes me? I did justice on him who sold a woman for money, and I did justice on his children and his servants. Let these men bring a charge against me if they will. I despise them, and I despise your judgment."

A storm of anger burst forth from the accusers when they heard the prisoner express his scorn of the just judge. The apparitor raised his cudgel for a blow. Virata signed to them to restrain their anger, and resumed his questions. Each time the accusers returned to the charge, the judge asked the prisoner to reply. But the latter clenched his teeth in an angry grin, and spoke only once more, saying:

"How can you learn the truth from the words of others?"

The noon-day sun was directly overhead when Virata had finished his examination. Rising to his feet, he said, as was his custom, that he would return home and would deliver sentence on the following day. The accusers raised their arms in protest.

"Lord," said they, "we have journeyed seven days to see the light of your countenance, and it will take us another seven days to return to our homes. How can we wait till the morrow when our cattle are athirst and our land needs the plough? We beseech you to deliver judgment forthwith."

Thereupon Virata seated himself once more and was plunged for a while deep in thought. His brow was furrowed like that of one who bears a heavy burden upon his head, for never before had he been constrained to pass sentence upon any who did not sue for pardon or upon one who remained defiant. His meditation lasted a long time, and the shadows grew as the hours passed. Then he went to the fountain, and, having laved his forehead and his hands in the cool water that his words might be free from the heat of passion, he returned to the judgment seat and said:

"May the decision I shall deliver be a just one. A deadly sin lies upon this offender, who has hunted eleven living souls from their warm human bodies into the world of transmigration. For a year the life of man ripens unseen in the mother's womb, and for this reason, for each one of those whom he has slain the guilty man must remain hidden for a year in the darkness of the earth. And because by his deed the blood has been drained from eleven human bodies, eleven times every year he shall be given one hundred lashes, that he may pay in accordance with the number of his victims. But his life shall not be taken from him, for life is the gift of the gods, and man must not lay his hand on divine things. May this judgment be just, this judgment which I have uttered in pursuance of no man's orders, but only for the sake of the great retribution."

When he had spoken, the plaintiffs kissed the step of his seat in token of respect. But the prisoner met his inquiring glance with a gloomy silence. Virata said:

"I exhorted you to speak, that you might give me reasons for passing a light sentence, and that you might help me against your accusers, but your lips were sealed. Should there be any error in my judgment, you must not charge me with it before the Eternal; you must lay it to the account of your own silence. I would fain have been merciful to you."

The prisoner answered:

"I seek no mercy from you. What mercy can you give to compare with the life that you take from me in the drawing of a breath?"

"I am not taking your life."

"Nay, but you are taking my life, and are taking it more cruelly than do the chiefs of my tribe whom these lowlanders term savages. Why do you not kill me? I killed, man to man; but you bury me like a corpse in the darkness of the earth, to rot as the years pass; and you do it because your craven heart fears to shed blood, and because your bowels are weak as water. Your law is caprice, and your sentence is a martyrdom. Slay me, for I have slain."

"I have given you a just measure of punishment ..."

"A just measure? But what, O Judge, is the measure by which you measure? Who has scourged you, that you may know what scourging is? How is it that you can tick off the years upon your fingers, as if a year passed in the light of day were the same thing as a year prisoned in the darkness of the earth? Have you dwelt in prison, that you may know how many springs you are taking from my days? You are an ignorant man and no just one, for he only who feels the blow knows what a blow is, not he who delivers it; and none but the sufferer can measure suffering. In your pride you presume to punish the offender, and are yourself the most grievous of all offenders, for when I took life it was in anger in the thralldom of my passion, whereas you rob me of my life in cold blood and mete me a measure which your hand has not weighed and whose burden you have never borne. Step down from the seat of judgment ere you fall headlong! Woe unto him who measures haphazard and woe to the ignorant man who fancies he knows what justice is. Step down from the judgment seat, O ignorant Judge, nor continue to pass sentence on living men with the death of your word!"

Pale with wrath was the prisoner as he flung forth these invectives, and once more the angry onlookers were about to fall upon him. Again Virata stayed them, and, turning his face from the prisoner, he said gently:

"It is not in my power to quash the sentence that I have spoken here. My hope is that the doom is just."

Virata moved to depart, while they seized the prisoner, who struggled in his bonds. But, halting after a few steps, the judge turned back towards the condemned man, only to encounter his resolute and angry eyes. With a shudder it was borne in upon Virata that these eyes were exactly like those of his dead brother, the brother he had slain with his own hand, and whom he had found lying dead in the tent of the would-be usurper ...

That evening, Virata spake no word to anyone. The stranger's look had pierced his soul like an arrow of fire. The folk of his household heard him hour after hour as, the livelong night, he strode sleepless to and fro on the roof of his house, until day dawned red behind the palms.

At sunrise, Virata performed his ablutions in the sacred pool of the temple. Turning eastward, he prayed, and then, having returned to the house, he donned a ceremonial robe of yellow silk. He greeted the members of his household, who were amazed at his formality but did not venture to question him, and went alone to the king's palace, where he had leave of entry at any time of the day or night. Bowing before the king, Virata touched the hem of the monarch's garment in token of petition.

The king looked at him cordially, saying: "Your wish has touched my vesture. It is granted before it is spoken."

Virata continued to stand with bowed head.

"You have made me the chief among your judges. For six years I have passed judgment in your name, and know not whether I have judged justly. Grant me a month of rest and quiet that I may find the road to truth; and permit me, in this matter to keep my own counsel from you and all others. I wish to do a deed free from injustice and to live without sin."

The king was astonished.

"Poor will be my realm in justice from this moon to the next. Nevertheless, I will not ask you what path you wish to follow. May it lead you to the truth."

Kissing the foot of the throne as a sign of his gratitude, and having made a final obeisance, Virata left the presence.

He entered his house and summoned his wife and children.

"For a month you will see me no more. Bid me farewell, and ask no questions. Go to your rooms and shut yourselves in there that none of you may watch whither I go when I leave the house. Make no inquiries for me until the month has passed."

Silently, they did as was commanded.

Virata clad himself in dark attire, prayed before the divine image, and wrote a long letter upon palm leaves which he rolled into a missive. At nightfall he left the silent house and went to the great rock where the mines were and the prisons. He knocked until the sleeping jailer rose from his mat to as who was without.

"I am Virata, the chief of the judges. I have come to see the prisoner who was brought here yesterday."

"His cell is in the depths, Lord, in the lowest darkness of the prison. Shall I lead you thither?"

"I know the place. Give me the key, and return to your slumbers. Tomorrow you will find the key outside your door. Let no one know that you have seen me tonight."

The jailer fetched the key and also a torch. At a sign from Virata he withdrew, and threw himself on his mat. Virata opened the bronze door which closed the archway of the rocky vault, and descended into the depths of the prison. A century earlier the kings of Rajputana had begun to confine prisoners within this rock. Day by day each of the captives had to quarry deeper into the cold stone, fashioning new cells for the inmates of the morrow.

Virata took a final glance at the quadrant of sky with its sparkling stars visible through the rocky arch. Then he closed the door, and the damp darkness rose to enwrap him, the darkness through which the unsteady light of his torch leaped like a beast of prey. He could still hear the rustling of the trees and the shrill clatter of the monkeys. At the bottom of the first flight of steps, the rustling sound came from a great distance. Lower still, the silence was as profound as if he had been in the depths of the sea, motionless and cold. From the stones there breathed nothing but dampness, without any aroma of the fresh earth, and the farther he descended the more harshly did his footsteps echo amid the silence.

The cell of the prisoned hill-man was five flights from the surface, deeper beneath the earth than the height of the tallest palm tree. Virata entered and held his torch aloft over the dark mass which hardly stirred for a while. Then a chain rattled.

Bending over the prostrate figure, Virata said: "Do you know me?"

"I know you. You are he whom they made master of my fate, and you have trodden it under your foot."

"I am no master. I am servant of the king and of justice. It is to serve justice that I have come."

The prisoner looked at the judge with a fixed and gloomy stare: "What do you want of me?"

After a long silence, Virata answered:

"I hurt you with the words of my judgment, and you have likewise hurt me with your words, I do not know if my decision was just; but there was truth in what you said, for no one ought to measure with a measure he does not know. I have been ignorant, and would gladly learn. I have sent hundreds into this abode of darkness; much have I done to many persons, without knowing what I did. Now I wish to find out, now I desire to learn, that I may grow just, and may encounter the day of transmigration free from all taint of sin."

The prisoner remained motionless, so that nothing was heard beyond a faint clanking of his chains. Virata continued:

"I wish to know what it is that I have doomed you to suffer; I wish to feel the bite of the scourge upon my own body, and to experience in my own soul what imprisonment means. For a month I shall take your place, that I may be taught how much I have exacted by way of atonement. Then I shall once again deliver sentence in the place of judgment, aware at length of the weight of my decisions. Meanwhile, you will go free. I shall give you the key by which you can open the door leading into the world of light, and shall accord you a month of liberty, provided only that you promise to return. Then from the darkness of these depths, light will enter my mind."

The prisoner stood as if carved out of stone. The clanking of his chains was no longer audible.

"Swear to me by the pitiless Goddess of Vengeance who spares no one, that you will keep silence throughout this month, and I will give you the key and my own clothing. The key you must leave outside the porter's lodge, and then you can go free. But you remain bound by your oath that as soon as the month has sped you will take this missive to the king, in order that I may be delivered from prison, and once more judge righteously. Do you swear by the most high gods to fulfill this my bidding?"

"I swear," came the answer in tremulous tones as if from the depths of the earth.

Virata unloosed the chain and stripped off his own garment.

"Wear this," he said, "and give me your clothing. Muffle your face, that the jailer may take you for me. Now clip my hair and beard, that I also may remain unknown."

Tremblingly and reluctantly, under the compelling glance of Virata, the prisoner did as he was told. Then, for a long time, he was silent. At length, throwing himself on the ground, he cried passionately:

"Lord, I cannot endure that you should suffer in my stead. I killed. My hand is red with blood. The doom was just."

"Neither you nor I can appraise the justice of that doom, but soon the light will break in upon my mind. Go forth, as you have sworn, and when the moon is again full present my letter to the king that he may set me free. When the time is ripe I shall know what are the deeds I am doing, and my decisions thenceforward will be free from injustice. Go forth."

The prisoner knelt and kissed the ground. The closing door clanged in the darkness. Once again, through a loophole, a ray from the torch flickered across the walls, and then the night engulfed the hours.

Next morning, Virata, whom no one recognized, was publicly scourged. At the first stroke of the scourge upon his bared back, he uttered a cry; but thenceforward was silent, with clenched teeth. At the seventieth stroke, his senses grew dim, and he was carried away like a dead beast.

When he recovered consciousness he was lying in his cell, and it seemed to him as if he were stretched upon a bed of glowing charcoal. But his brow was cool, and he breathed the odour of wild herbs. Half-opening his eyes he saw that the jailer's wife was beside him, gently bathing his forehead. As he looked at her more attentively he perceived that the star of compassion shone down upon him in her glance. Amid his bodily torments he realized that the meaning of sorrow dwelt in the grace of kindness. He smiled up at her and forgot his pain.

Next day he was able to rise to his feet and to grope his way round the cell. At each step a new world seemed to fashion itself beneath his feet. On the third day his wounds were easier and strength was returning to body and mind. Henceforward he sat without moving, and noted the passage of time only by the falling of the water drops from the rocky roof. The great silence was subdivided into many little spaces, which were pieced together to form day and night as out of thousands of days our life grows to manhood and old age. None came to speak with him, and the darkness entered into his very soul. Yet within, the manifold springs of memory were opened. Flowing gently, they filled a quiet pool of contemplation wherein his whole life was mirrored. What he had experienced bit by bit, coalesced now into a unity. Never had his mind been so limpid as during this motionless insight into a reflected world.

Day by day Virata's vision grew clearer; things shaped themselves in the darkness, displaying their forms to his gaze. In like manner everything grew clearer to the eye of inward vision. The gentle delight of contemplation, spreading unsolicited beyond the illusive appearances of memory, played amid the forms of changing thought as the prisoner's hand played with irregularities in the walls of his rocky cell. Withdrawn from self, and in the darkness and solitude unaware of the intimacies of his own nature, he grew ever more conscious of the might of the multiform divinity, and was able to wander freely amid these constructions of the imagination, in perfect independence, liberated from servitude to the will, dead in life and living in death. All the anxieties of the passing hour were dissipated in the serene joy of deliverance from the body. It seemed to him as if hour by hour he was sinking deeper into the darkness, down towards the stony and black roots of the earth, but as if he were none the less pregnant with a new germinal life. Perhaps it was the life of a worm, blindly burrowing in the clods; or perhaps that of a plant, striving upwards with its stem; or perhaps only that of a rock, cool, quiet, and blissfully unconscious of its own being.

For eighteen nights Virata enjoyed the divine mystery of devout contemplation, detached from his individual will and freed from the goading of life. What he had undertaken as atonement seemed to him blessedness, and he was already beginning to feel that sin and retribution were no more than dream images as contrasted with the eternal wakefulness of knowledge. But during the nineteenth night he was startled out of sleep by the prick of an earthly thought, boring into his brain like a red-hot needle. His body was shaken with terror, and his fingers trembled as leaves tremble in the wind. The terrifying thought was that the prisoner might be faithless and foresworn, might forget him, might leave him to spend a thousand and yet a thousand and yet another thousand days in prison, until the flesh dropped from his bones and his tongue grew stiff from perpetual silence. The will-to-live sprang up like a panther in his body, tearing at the wrappings in which it was enclosed. The current of time resumed its flow in his soul, and therewith came fears and hopes, and all the turmoil of earthly existence. No longer could he concentrate upon the thought of the multiform and everlasting deity. He could think only of himself. His eyes craved for the daylight; his limbs, recoiling from the hard stone, longed for wide expanses, for the power to leap and to run. His mind was filled with thoughts of his wife and his sons, of his house and his possessions, of the ardent allurements of the world, which must be enjoyed with full awareness and must be felt with the waking warmth of the blood.

From now onwards, time, which had hitherto lain silent at his feet like the black waters of a quiet pool passively mirroring events, was magnified in his thoughts, and took on the movement of a stream against which he had unceasingly to struggle. His longing was that it should overpower him, should carry him away like a floating tree to the predestined moment of liberation. But the flow was directed against him; panting for breath he swam desperately up-stream hour after hour. He felt as if the interval between the falling of the water drops from the roof was being indefinitely prolonged. He could not lie patiently in his lair. The thought that the hill-man would forget him and that he would be doomed to rot in this crypt of silence, made him prowl round and round his narrow cell like a beast in a cage. The stillness choked him; he volleyed words of abuse and complaint at the walls; he cursed himself and the gods and the king. With bleeding fingers he tore at the obdurate rock, and ran with lowered head against the door until he fell insensible. On recovering consciousness he would spring to his feet once more, only to repeat the ceaseless round.

During these days from the eighteenth of his confinement until the moon was full, Virata lived through leons of horror. He loathed food and drink, for his body was racked with anxiety. Thought had become impossible, though with his lips he continued to count the drops of water as they fell, that he might punctuate the interminable time from one day to another. Meanwhile, though he did not know it, the hair on his throbbing temples turned grey.

But on the thirtieth day there was a noise without, followed by silence. Then came the sound of footsteps on the stair; the door was flung open, a light broke in, and the king stood before the man entombed in darkness. With a loving embrace the monarch greeted him and said:

"I have learned of your deed, which is greater than any recorded in the chronicles of our fathers. It will shine like a star above the dead levels of our life. Come forth that the fire of God may light you with its glow, and that the happy people may behold a righteous man."

Virata shaded his eyes with his hand, for the unaccustomed glare was painful. He rose to his feet unsteadily, like a drunkard, and the servants had to support him. Before going to the door he said:

"O King, you have called me a righteous man, but now I know full well that he who passes judgment on another does injustice and grievous wrong. In these depths there still languish human beings who are here

by my decision. Now, for the first time, do I know what they suffer. Now at length I know that the law of retaliation is itself unjust. Set the prisoners free, and tell the people to be gone, for their acclamations fill me with shame."

The king gave a sign, and his servitors dispersed the throng. Once again all was quiet. Then the king said:

"Until now your seat of justice has been at the summit of the stairway leading to my palace. But through your knowledge of suffering you have become wiser than any judge has ever been before you, and henceforward you shall sit beside me that I may hearken to your words and may myself drink in wisdom from your justice."

Virata embraced the king's knee in token of petition. "Discharge me from my office. No longer can I give true decisions, now that I realize that no one can judge another. Punishment is in God's hands, not in man's, for whoever interferes with the working of destiny commits a crime. I wish to live out my life free from sin."

"So be it " answered the king. "Instead of the chief of my judges, you shall be my chief counsellor, deciding for me the issues of peace and war, and advising me in matters of taxation, that all my undertakings may be guided by your wisdom."

Again Virata clasped the king's knee.

"Do not give me power, O King, for power urges to action; and what action can be just, or what action can fail to counteract that which has been decreed by fate? If I counsel war I am sowing the seeds of death. What I say, grows into actions; and every act of mine has a significance which I cannot foresee. He only can be Just and righteous, who refrains from all activities, and who lives alone. Never have I been nearer Wisdom, and never have I been freer from sin than here in solitude, exchanging words with no man. Let me live tranquilly in my own dwelling, doing no other service than that of making sacrifice to the gods, that thus I may remain free from sin."

"I am loath to relinquish your services," replied the king, "But who can venture to argue with a sage, or to constrain the will of a righteous man? Live as you think best. It will be an honour to my kingdom that within its bounds there should be one living without sin."

They parted at the gate of the prison. Virata walked homeward alone, drinking in the fragrance of the sunlit air. Never before had he felt so light of heart as now when freed from all service. Behind him sounded the soft tread of naked feet, and when he turned he saw the condemned man whose punishment he had taken upon himself. The hill-man kissed the ground where the sometime Judge had trodden, made a timid obeisance and vanished. Virata smiled for the first time since he had looked upon the staring eyes of his dead brother, and he entered the house glad at heart.

After returning home, Virata lived through a time that was full of happiness. His awakening was a prayer of thanksgiving that he could look upon the light of heaven instead of upon darkness, that he could see the colours and inhale the aroma of the lovely earth, and that he could listen to the sweet music with which the morning is alive. Each day he accepted as a new and splendid gift the wonder of breath and the charm of free movement. With pious affection he would pass his hands over his own body, over the soft frame of his wife and over the sturdy limbs of his sons, rapturously aware of the imminence of the multiform God in one and all of them. His soul was winged with gentle pride that he never had occasion to pass beyond

the boundaries of his own life to interfere with a stranger's destiny that he never made a hostile onslaught upon any of the numberless embodiments of the invisible God. From morn till eve he read the books of wisdom and practised the different varieties of devotion; the silence of meditation; loving absorption into the spirit; benefaction to the poor; and sacrificial prayer. He had grown cheerful. His speech was gracious even to the humblest of his servants, and all the members of his household were more devoted to him than ever they had been before. He brought help to the needy and consolation to the unfortunate. The prayers of the multitude hovered over his sleep, and no longer did men call him as of old the Flashing of the Sword or the Wellspring of Justice, for now he had become the Field of Good Counsel. Not only did his neighbours ask his advice. Though he was no longer a judge in the land, strangers sought him out from afar that he might settle their disputes, and complied unhesitatingly with his words. Virata rejoiced thereat, feeling that counsel was better than command, and mediation better than judgment. It seemed to him that his life was blameless, now that he no longer held forcible sway over anyone's destiny and could none the less adjust the fates of many. Thus he delighted in this high noon of his life.

Three years passed by, and yet another three, and the speeding of them all was like that of one bright day. Gentler and ever gentler grew the disposition of Virata. When a quarrel was brought to him for adjustment, he found it hard to understand why there was so much bickering upon earth, and why men pressed hard on one another with the petty jealousies of ownership when the expanses of life were open to them and the sweet aroma of existence. He envied none and none envied him. His house stood, an island of peace in the level sea of life, untouched by the torrents of passion or by the stream of sensual appetite.

One evening, in the sixth year of this period of calm, Virata had already retired to bed when he heard harsh cries and the thud of blows. He sprang from his couch and saw that his sons were chastising one of the slaves. They had forced the man to his knees, and were lashing him with a leathern thong until the blood gushed forth. The eyes of the victim stared Virata in the face, and once again he seemed to see the eyes of the brother he had slain. Hastening forth, he arrested the arm of the son wielding the whip and asked what was afoot.

From a medley of answers he gathered that this slave, whose duty it was to draw water from the rocky spring and bring it to the house in wooden buckets, had on several occasions during the noontide heat, pleading exhaustion, arrived too late with his burden. Each time he had been punished; and yesterday, after a severer chastisement than usual, he had absconded. Virata's sons had pursued him on horseback, and had not overtaken him until he had crossed the river. They had tied him with a rope to the saddle of one of the horses, so that, half-dragged and half-running, he had reached home with lacerated feet. Now they were giving him an exemplary punishment, for his own good and for that of the other slaves, who looked on trembling. This was the explanation of the scene which their father had interrupted. Virata glanced down at the slave. His eyes were widely opened like those of an animal awaiting its deathblow from the slaughterer, and behind their dark stare Virata sensed the horror that he had himself once lived through.

"Loose the man," he said to his sons. "The transgression is atoned."

The slave kissed the dust in front of the master's feet. For the first time the sons parted from their father in dudgeon. Virata returned to his room. Unwittingly he began to lave forehead and hands. At the touch of the cold water he suddenly grew aware of what he was doing, and realized that for the first time since leaving the rocky prison-house he had become a judge and had interfered in another's destiny. For the first time, too, during these six years, sleep forsook his pillow. As he lay awake in the darkness, he saw in fancy the terrified eyes of slave (or were they the eyes of his own slain brother?); and he saw the angry eyes of his sons; and again and again he asked himself whether his children had not wreaked an injustice

upon this servant. On account of a trifling neglect of duty, blood had moistened the sandy precincts of his house. For a petty act of omission, the lash had been laid upon living flesh, and this wrong doing seared him more deeply than had the strokes of the scourge which aforetime had tortured his own back like scorpions. True, the chastisement he had witnessed that evening had befallen, not a nobleman, but a slave, whose body by the king's law belonged to the master from the very day of birth. But was the king's law right in the eyes of the multiform God? Could it be right in the eyes of God that the body of one human being should pass into the absolute power of another; and could that other be held guiltless before God if he injured or destroyed the life of the slave?

Virata rose from his bed and kindled a light, that he might seek instruction in the books of the sages. He found, indeed, distinctions between man and man established in the ordering of the castes and the estates; but nowhere amid the manifestations of the multiform being was there warrant for any difference in fulfilling the demands of love. More and more eagerly did he drink in wisdom, for never had his soul been more tensely alive to a problem. But now the flame leaped for a moment in the socket of the torch, and then the light went out.

As darkness fell between him and the walls, Virata became strangely aware that the enclosed space his eyes were blindly searching was no longer that of his familiar room, but that of his erstwhile dungeon, where, awestricken, he had acquired the certainty that freedom is the most intimate right of human beings, and that no one is entitled to imprison another, be it for a lifelong term or only for a single year. Yet he, Virata, had prisoned this slave within the invisible confines of his own will. He had chained this slave to the chances of his own decisions so that the underling could no longer take a single foot-step in freedom. Clearness came to him as he sat and pondered, feeling how thought was enlarging his comprehension, until from some invisible altitude the light entered into him. Now he became aware that he had still been blameworthy in this, that he had allowed his fellows to be subject to his will, and to be named his slaves in accordance with a law which was but a fragile human construction and not one of the eternal degrees of the multiform God. He bowed himself in prayer:

"I thank thee, O God of a thousand shapes, for that thou sendest me messengers from all thy shapes, to hunt me out of my sins and draw me ever nearer to thee upon the invisible path of thy will. Grant me power to recognize them in the ever-accusing eyes of the undying brother, who encounters me everywhere, who sees with my vision, and whose sufferings I suffer, that I may purify my life and may breathe without sin."

Virata's countenance was again cheerful. Clear-eyed he went forth into the night, to enjoy the white greeting of the stars, and to inhale the breath of the breeze that freshens before dawn. Passing through the garden, he went down to the river. When the sun appeared in the east, he plunged into the sacred stream, and then returned homewards to join the members of his household, who were assembled for morning prayer.

He greeted them with a kindly smile, signed to the women to withdraw, and then said to his sons:

"You know that for years I have had but one care, to be a just and righteous man, and to live my life on earth without sin. Yesterday blood flowed upon the ground within the precincts of my dwelling, the blood of a living man, and I wish to be innocent of this blood and to atone for the wrong that has been done under the shadow of my roof. The slave who was punished unduly for a trifling fault shall be free from this hour, free to go whither he lists, so that at the Last Judgment he may not bear testimony against you and me."

His sons remained silent, and Virata felt that their silence was hostile.

"You make no answer. I do not wish to act against your will without hearing what you have to say."

"You propose to bestow freedom upon an offender, to reward him instead of punishing him," said the eldest. "We have many servants in the house, so one will not be missed. But a deed works beyond its own confines, and is no more than a link in a chain. If you set this man free, how can you keep the others in bondage should they also wish to depart?"

"Should they wish to depart from out my life, I must let them go. I will not fashion anyone's destiny, for whosoever fashions another's destiny is a wrongdoer."

"You are loosening the sanctions of the law," the second son broke in. "These slaves are our own, as our land is our own, and the trees that grow thereon, and the fruit of the trees. Inasmuch as they serve you, they are bound to you, and you are bound to them. That which you are touching is part of a traditional ordinance which dates back many thousands of years. The slave is not lord of his own life, but servant of his master."

"We have but one right from God, and it is the right to live which is breathed into all of us with the divine breath: You did well to exhort me, for I was still in blindness when I thought I was cleansing myself of sin. All these years I have been taking away the lives of others. Now at length I see clearly, and I know that a righteous man may not turn men into beasts. I shall free them all, that I may free myself of sin towards them."

The brows of his sons grew dark with defiance. The eldest returned a stubborn answer:

"Who will irrigate our fields to keep the rice from withering? Who will drive forth the cattle? Are we to become serving men because of your whims? You yourself have never done a hand's turn of work throughout your life, nor have you ever troubled because that life was sustained by the labour of others. Nevertheless there was others' sweat in the plaited straw on which you were lying, and a slave had to fan you while you slept. Now, of a sudden, you would dismiss them all that none may labour except your sons, the men of your own blood. Would you have us unyoke the oxen and pull the ploughs ourselves, that the beasts may be free from the goad? Into these dumb beasts, likewise, the multiform God has breathed the breath of life. Touch not that which is ordained, for it also comes from God. Earth yields her fruits unwillingly, yields them only at the spell of force. The law of the world is force, and we cannot evade it."

"But I will evade it, for might is seldom right, and I wish to live out my life in righteousness."

"Might underlies all possession, be it the ownership of man or of beast or of the patient earth. Where you are master, you must be conqueror as well; he who owns is bound to the destiny of men."

"But I will loose myself from everything which binds me to sin. I command you, therefore, to set the slaves free, and yourself to do the labour that is needful."

The sons' eyes flashed, and they could hardly control their anger. The eldest answered:

"You told us that you wished to constrain no man's will. You would not give orders to your slaves lest thereby you should fall into sin; but you command us to do this and that, and meddle with our lives. In which respect are you doing right before God and man?"

Long time Virata was silent. When he raised his eyes he saw the flame of greed in theirs, and his soul was heavy within him. He said gently:

"You have taught me a lesson. It is not for me to constrain you in any way. Take the house and the other possessions. Divide them among you as you think fit. No longer shall I have part or lot in these things, or in the sin that goes with them. You have said sooth: He who rules deprives others of their liberty; but worst of all, he enslaves his own soul. Whoever wishes to live without sin must be free from the ownership of a house and from the management of another's fate. He must not be fed by others' labour, and must not get the wherewithal to drink because others have sweated to supply his need. The joys of carnal intercourse with women and the inertia of satiety must be far from him. He only who lives alone, lives with God; only the active worker feels God; nought but poverty knows God to the full. It is more to me to be near the Invisible One than to be near my own land, for I desire to live without sin. Take the house and share it among you peacefully."

Virata turned and left them. His sons stood amazed. Satisfied greed was sweet to them in the flesh, but in spirit they were ashamed.

At nightfall Virata made ready for the road, taking a staff, a begging bowl, an axe for work, a little fruit for provender, and palm leaves, inscribed with the writings of the sages. Kiltering his raiment above the knee, he silently left the house, without taking leave of wife, children, or any others of his household. Afoot all night, he came to the river into which he had once flung his sword in the terrible hour of his awakening, made his way through the ford, and turned up stream along the farther bank, where there were no habitations and where the earth had never yet been broken by the plough.

At dawn he reached a place where the lightning had struck an ancient mango tree, and where the consequent fire had made a clearing in the jungle. The stream flowed softly past the spot in a wide curve, and numerous birds were drinking fearlessly from its waters. Thus the river offered a clear prospect in front, while the trees gave shade behind. Scattered over the ground was wood which had been split off by the lightning blast, together with fragments of the undergrowth. Virata contemplated this lonely clearing in the jungle, and resolved to build a hut there. He would devote the rest of his life to meditation, far from his fellows and free from sin.

It took him five days to build his hut, for his hands were unaccustomed to labour. Even when it was finished, his days were full of toil. He had to seek fruit for food. Hard work was needed to keep back the jungle, which continually tended to encroach. A palisade had to be built as a protection from the hungry tigers, prowling in the jungle at night. But no noise of human beings intruded into his life or disturbed his serenity. The days flowed peacefully like the waters of the river, ever gently renewed from an unfailing spring.

The birds found nothing to alarm them in the quiet doings of the newcomer, and ere long they built their nests on the roof of his hut. He strewed seed from the great flowers, and set out fruits for their repast. Growing more friendly by degrees, they would fly down from the palm trees at his call. He played with them, and they were not afraid to let him handle them. In the forest, one day, he found a young monkey, lying on the ground with a broken leg and crying like a child. Picking the creature up, he brought it to his

hut, and trained it as soon as it was better. The monkey was docile, sportively imitated him, and served him faithfully. Thus he was surrounded by gentle living creatures, but he never forgot that in the animal, no less than in the human kind, force and evil slumber. He saw how the alligators would bite one another and hunt one another in their wrath, how the birds would snatch fish from the river, and how the snakes would encircle and crush the birds. The dreadful enchainment of destruction with which the hostile goddess of destruction had fettered the world became manifest to him as a law whose truth knowledge was forced to admit. Still, it was good to be merely an observer of these struggles, to be blameless amid the enlarging circle of destruction and of liberation.

For a year and many months he had not seen a human face. And then it happened one day that a hunter following the spoor of an elephant, came to the place where the beast had drunk on the opposite bank. A marvellous sight met his gaze. In the yellow glimmer of evening, a white-bearded man was seated in front of a little hut; birds were perching on his head; a monkey at his feet was breaking nuts for him with a stone. But the man was looking up at the tree tops where the multicolored parrots were sporting, and when he beckoned to them they fluttered down in a golden cloud and alighted on his hands. The hunter fancied that he was looking at the saint of whom it is written: "The beasts will talk to him with the voice of man, and the flowers grow under his footsteps; he can pluck the stars with his lips, and can blow away the moon with his breath." Forgetting his quest, the elephant-hunter hastened to the city to relate what he had beheld.

The very next day quidnuncs arrived to glimpse the wonder from the other side of the stream. More, and ever more, flocked to contemplate the marvel, until at length there arrived one who recognized Virata. Spreading far and wide, the tidings at length reached the king, who had grievously missed his loyal servant. The monarch ordered a boat to be made ready with four times seven rowers. Lustily they plied the oars upstream until the vessel reached the site of Virata's hut. A carpet was spread for the king, who landed and approached the sage. For eighteen months, now, Virata had not listened to human speech. He greeted his guest timidly and with diffident mien, forgot the obeisance due from a subject to a ruler, and said simply:

"A blessing on your coming, O King."

The king embraced him.

"For years I have marked your progress towards perfection, and I have come to look upon the rare miracle of righteousness, that I myself may learn how a righteous man lives."

Virata bowed.

"All my knowledge is but this, that I have unlearned how to live with men, in order that I may remain free from all sin. The solitary can teach none but himself. I do not know if what I am doing is Wisdom; I do not know if what I am feeling is happiness. I have no counsel to give and nothing to teach. The wisdom of the solitary is different from the wisdom of the world; the law of contemplation is another law than the law of action."

"But merely to see how a righteous man lives is to learn something," answered the king. "Since I have looked upon your face, I am filled with innocent joy. I ask nothing more."

"Can I fulfill any wish of yours in my kingdom, or carry any tidings to your own folk?"

"Nothing is mine any more, Lord King - or everything on this earth is mine. I have forgotten that I ever had a house among other houses, or children among other children. He who is homeless has the world for home; he who has cut loose from the ties of life has all life for his portion; he who is innocent has peace. My only wish is that my life on earth may be free from sin."

"Farewell, then, and think of me in your devotions."

"I think of God, and thus I think of you and of all on this earth, who are part of him and who breathe with his breath."

The king's boat passed away down the stream, and many months were to go by before the recluse was again to hear the voice of man.

Once more Virata's fame took wings unto itself and flew like a white falcon over the land. To the remotest villages and to the huts by the seashore came the news of the sage who had left house and lands that he might live the life of devout contemplation, and it was now that he was given the fourth name of virtue, becoming known as the Star of Solitude. In the temples, the priests extolled his renunciation; the king spoke of it to his servants; and when any judge uttered his decision, he added, "May my words be as just as those of Virata, who now lives wholly for God and knows all wisdom."

It often happened, and more frequently as the years sped by, that a man who came to realize the unrighteousness of his actions and to feel the vanity of his life, would leave house and home, give away his possessions, and wander off into the jungle, to build a hut like Virata and devote himself to God's service. Example is the strongest bond on earth; every deed arouses in others the will to righteousness, the will that now awakens from dreams and turns to vigorous action. Those who were thus awakened grew aware of the futility of their lives. They saw the blood that stained their hands and the sin that flecked their souls. They rose up and went forth to solitude, satisfied with enough for the barest needs of the body, plunged in perpetual meditation. If they chanced to encounter one another on their walks abroad to gather fruit, they uttered no word of greeting lest they should form new bonds thereby, but they smiled cordially at one another, and their souls exchanged greetings of peace. The common folk spoke of this forest as the Abode of the Pious. No hunter ranged its paths, fearing to defile the sanctuary by slaughter.

One morning, when Virata was walking in the jungle, he found an anchorite stretched motionless on the ground. Stooping to lift the fallen man, he perceived that the body was lifeless. Virata closed the eyes of the dead, murmured a prayer, and endeavoured to carry the corpse out of the thicket, intending to build a funeral pyre that the body of this brother might pass duly purified into the transmigration. But his meagre diet of fruits had weakened him, and the burden was beyond his strength. In search of help, he crossed the river by the ford and made his way to the nearest village.

When the villagers saw the sublime figure of him they had named the Star of Solitude, they came in all humility desiring to know his will, and, on being informed, they hastened to make ready for the task. Whithersoever Virata went, the women prostrated themselves before him. The children remained standing, and regarded his silent progress with astonishment. The men came out of their houses to kiss the raiment of their august visitor and to invoke the blessing of the saint. Virata passed through this gentle wave of humanity with a smile of contentment, feeling how pure and ardent was his love for his fellows now that he was no longer bound to them by any tie.

But when he reached the last of the humble cottages, having everywhere cordially returned the kindly salutations of those who accosted him, he saw that in this hut a woman was seated, and that her eyes as she looked at him were full of hatred. He shrank back in horror, for it seemed to him that he had again encountered the eyes which for so long he had forgotten, the rigid, accusing eyes of his slain brother. During these years of solitude, his spirit had grown unused to enmity, and he tried to persuade himself that he had mistaken the meaning of the stare. But when he looked again, the eyes were still gazing forth upon him with the same fixed malevolence. When, having recovered his self-command, he stepped forward towards the cottage, the woman withdrew into the passage, but from its dark recesses her eyes continued to glare at him with the ferocity of the burning eyes of a tiger in the jungle.

Virata plucked up heart, saying to himself:

"How can I have injured this woman whom I have never seen? Why should her hatred stir against me? There must be some mistake, and I will search out the error."

Moving forward, he knocked at the door. There was no sound in answer to his knock, and yet he could feel the malevolent proximity of the stranger woman. Patiently he knocked once more, waited awhile, and knocked again like a beggar. At length, with hesitating step, the woman came to the door, and her face as she looked at him was still dark and hostile.

"What more do you want of me?" she fiercely inquired.

He saw that she had to grip the door posts to steady herself, so shaken was she by anger.

Nevertheless, when Virata glanced at her face his heart grew light, for he was sure that he had never seen her before. She was young, and he was far on the road through life; their paths had never crossed, and he could never have done her an injury.

"I wished to give you the greeting of peace, stranger woman," answered Virata; "and I wished to ask you why you look at me so fiercely. Am I your enemy? Have I done you any harm?"

"What harm have you done me?" She smiled maliciously. "What harm have you done me? A trifle only, a mere trifle. My house was full, and you have made it empty; you have robbed me of my beloved; you have changed my life to death. Go, that I may see you no more, or I shall be unable to contain my wrath."

Virata looked at her again. So frenzied were her eyes that it seemed to him she must be beside herself. He turned to depart, saying only:

"I am not the person you suppose. I live far from the haunts of men, and have no part in anyone's destiny. You mistake me for another."

But she screamed after him in her hatred:

"Full well do I know you, as all know you! You are Virata, whom they call the Star of Solitude, whom they extol with the four names of virtue. But I will not extol you. My mouth will cry loud against you until my plaint reaches the last judge of the living. Come, since you have asked me; come and see what you have done."

Grasping the sleeve of the amazed Virata, she dragged him into the house and opened the door leading into a dark low-ceilinged chamber. She drew him towards the corner where a motionless form was lying upon a mat. Virata stooped over the form, and then drew back shuddering, for a boy lay there dead, a boy whose eyes stared up at him like the accusing eyes of the undying brother. Close beside him stood the woman racked with pain, and she moaned:

"He was the third, the last fruit of my womb; and you have murdered him as well as the others, you whom they call saint, and servant of the gods."

When Virata wished to open his mouth in protest, she broke out once more:

"Look at this loom, look at the empty stool. Here sat Paratika, my husband, day after day, weaving white linen, for there was no more skilful weaver in the land. People came from afar to give him orders, and his work was our life. Our days were joyful, for Paratika was a kindly man, and ever industrious. He shunned bad company and kept away from the loafers in the street. By him I bore three children, and we reared them in the hope that they would become men like their father, kindly and upright. Then came a hunter - would to God he had never set foot in the village - from whom Paratika learned of one who had left house and possessions to devote himself, while still leading this earthly life, wholly to the service of God. With his own hands, said the hunter, he had built himself a hut. Paratika grew more and more reserved. He meditated much in the evenings, and rarely spoke. One night I awakened to find that he had left my side and had gone to the forest in which you dwell that you may meditate on God, the forest men call the Abode of the Pious. But while he thus thought of himself, he forgot us, and forgot that we lived by his labour. Poverty visited us; the children lacked bread; one died after another; to-day the last of the three has died, and through your act. You led Paratika astray. That you might come nearer to the true essence of God, the three children of my body have gone down to dust. How will you atone, O Arrogant One, when I charge you before the judge of the quick and the dead with the pangs their little bodies suffered, while you were feeding the birds and were living far from all suffering? How will you atone for having lured an honest man from the work which fed him and his innocent boys, for having deluded him with the mad thought that in solitude he would be nearer to God than in active life among his fellows?"

Virata blanched, and his lips quivered.

"I did not know that my example would be an incitement to others. The course I took I meant to take alone."

"Where is your wisdom, O Sage, if you do not know what every boy knows, that all acts are the acts of God, and that no one can by his own will escape from action or evade responsibility? Your mind was swelled with pride when you fancied that you could be lord of your own actions and could teach others. What was sweet to you has become gall to me, and your life has occasioned the death of this child."

Virata reflected for a while, and then bowed his head in assent.

"What you say is true, and I see that there is more knowledge of the truth in a single throb of pain than in all the aloofness of the sages. What I know I have learned from the unfortunate; and what I have seen has been made visible to me by the glance of those who suffer, by the eyes of the undying brother. Indeed, I have not been humble before God, as I fancied, but proud; this is borne in on me by the sorrow I now feel. It is true that he who remains inactive none the less does a deed for which he is responsible on earth; and even the solitary lives in all his brethren. Again, I beseech you to forgive me. I shall return from the forest, in the hope that Paratika will likewise return to implant new life in your womb."

He bent forward once more and touched the hem of her garment with his lips. All sense of anger faded from her mind as, bewildered, she followed with her eyes the retreating figure.

Virata spent one more night in his hut. Once again he looked at the stars, watching at sunset the appearance of their white flames in the depths of heaven, and watching them pale at dawn. Once more he summoned his birds to their feast, and caressed them. Then, taking the staff and the bowl he had brought with him years before, he made his way back to the town.

Hardly had the tidings spread that the holy man had left his lonely hermitage and was once more within the gates of the city, when the people flocked to see the rare and wondrous spectacle, although many were filled with a secret dread lest the return of this man from the divine presence might bode disaster. As if between living walls of veneration, Virata made his progress, and he endeavored to greet the onlookers with the serene smile that usually graced his lips. But for the first time he found it impossible to smile; his eyes remained grave and his lips were closed.

At length he reached the palace. The hour of the council was over, and the king was alone. Virata entered, and the monarch stood up to embrace his visitor. But Virata prostrated himself to the earth, and touched the hem of the king's mantle in token of petition.

"Your request is granted," said the king, "before you form it in words on your lips. It is an honour to me that I am empowered to serve a pious man and to help a sage."

"Call me not a sage," answered Virata, "for I have not followed the right path. I have been wandering in a circle, and now stand as a petitioner before your throne. I wished to be free from sin, and I shunned all action; but none the less I was entangled in the net which the gods spread for mortals."

"Far be it from me to believe your words," replied the king. "How could you do wrong to the human beings whose presence you shunned; and how did you fall into sin when your life was devoted to God's service?"

"Not wittingly did I do wrong, for I fled from sin; but our feet are chained to earth, and our deeds are in bondage to the eternal laws. Inaction is itself an action. I could not elude the eyes of the undying brother on whom our actions for ever bear, be they good or be they evil, and in defiance of our own will. But I am seven times guilty, for I fled from God and refused to serve life; I was useless, for I nourished my own life merely, and did no service to any other. Now I wish to serve again."

"Your words are strange to me, Virata, and beyond my understanding. But tell me your wish that I may fulfill it."

"No longer do I desire to be free in my will. The free man is not free, and he who is inactive does not escape sin. Only he who serves is free, he who gives his will to another, who devotes his energies to a work, and who acts without questioning. Only the middle of the deed is our work; its beginning and its end, its cause and its effect, are on the knees of the gods. Make me free from my own will, for all willing is confusion, and all service is wisdom."

"I cannot understand you. You ask me to make you free, and at one and at the same time you ask me to give you service. Then he only is free who enters the service of another, whereas that other who takes the first into his service is not free? This passes my comprehension."

"It is just as well, O King, that you cannot understand this in your heart. How could you remain a king and issue commands if you understood?"

The king's face darkened with anger.

"Is it your meaning that the ruler is a lesser thing in the sight of God than the servant?"

"No one is less than another in the sight of God, and no one is greater. He who serves, and unquestioningly surrenders his own will, has relieved himself of responsibility, and has given it back to God. But he who wills, and who fancies that wisdom can enable him to avoid what is hostile, falls into temptation and falls into sin."

The king's countenance was still darkened.

"Then one service is the same as another, and there is neither greater service nor lesser service in the eyes of God and man?"

"It may well happen that one service seems greater than another in the eyes of man, but all service is equal in the eyes of God."

The king gazed at Virata long and sombrely. Pride stirred fiercely in his soul. When he looked once more at the worn face, and the white hair surmounting the wrinkled forehead, it seemed to him that the old man must be in his dotage. To test the matter, he said mockingly: "Would you like to be keeper of the hounds in my palace?"

Virata bowed, and kissed the step of the throne in sign of gratitude.

From that day forward the old man whom the country had once extolled with the four names of virtue was keeper of the hounds in the kennels adjoining the palace, and he dwelt with the servitors in the menial quarters. His sons were ashamed of him. They made a wide circuit when they had to pass his abode, for they wished to avoid the sight of him and would fain escape having to acknowledge kinship in the presence of others. The priests turned their backs upon him as unworthy. For a few days the common people would stand and stare when the old man who had once been the first of the king's subjects came by habited as a servant and leading the hounds in leash. But he paid no heed to these onlookers, so they soon went their ways and ceased to think of him.

Virata did faithful service from dawn to sunset. He washed the hounds' muzzles and cleansed their coats; he brought their food and made up their litter; he cleared away their droppings. Soon the beasts came to love him more than any other inmate of the palace, and this did his heart good. His old and shrivelled mouth, with which he rarely spoke, smiled as of yore at his charges' pleasure. He took delight in the passing of the years, which were many and uneventful. The king died. A new king came who knew not Virata, and who struck him once with a stick because one of the hounds growled when his majesty went by. A day came when he was forgotten of all his fellow-men.

When the tale of his years was told, when at length he died, and his body was consigned to the common burial ground of the slaves, there was no one among the folk to remember him who had once been famous throughout the land where he had been known by the four names of virtue. His sons kept out of sight, and no priest sang the song of death over his remains. The dogs, indeed, howled for two days and two nights; but then they, too, forgot Virata, whose name is not inscribed in the chronicles of the conquerors and is not to be found in the books of the sages.